

## **GEOGRAPHIES OF SEXUALITY: CONSTRUCTIONS OF SPACE AND BELONGING**

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On-going research for my MPhil in sociology describes, documents and analyses self-identified non-heterosexual women (bisexual, lesbian, pan-sexual) from various parts of Trinidad, and how they construct an image of “Home”, “Work”, physical place and virtual space. This paper interrogates the cultural geographies of space and place. In particular how material cultures and social histories get grafted onto spaces to create a physical geography of place, as it relates to lesbian identity and citizenship. My ongoing aim is to illustrate the subjectivities created for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) women within certain places and spaces. Through the women’s experiences, addressing the intersections of gender, identity and ethnicity with space, I examine the sexing of spaces and the pervasive nature of heteronormativity<sup>1</sup> in Trinidadian society.

**Keywords:** Lesbian, Trinidad, Identity, Space, Imagined Community

### **Introduction**

N’Dare and I were sitting on a couch at Rituals, cosily nudged into the cushions, sipping on chai. We leaned in towards each other to reduce the likelihood of others overhearing our intimate conversation. As N’Dare is not out and open about her sexual orientation, N’Dare was cautious of eavesdroppers. As we quietly chatted and giggled over experiences that she had had, a voice interrupted us. “Excuse me, are you two on a date? Cuz you look like you checkin’ each other.”

Stunned, I said, “Pardon me”, unsure if I had heard her accurately. One of the two girls sitting across from us was leaning over the table with an inquisitive smirk on her lips. From their familiarity with N’Dare when they came in, I assumed the girls knew her enough to attempt to tease her.

“Yes, I checking her. You have a problem with that?!” said N’Dare.

“No, I doh have a problem”, the girl said.

N’Dare’s nonchalance put me at ease, and I jokingly asked, “Well how we lookin’? We look good together?”

“Yea man, y’all lookin’ like chocolate and vanilla,” she replied. Her friend added, “To me, it look like one girl trackin’ the next one, but she talkin’ too much (referring to N’Dare) and the next girl [meaning me] just thinkin’, ‘when this girl goin’ an’ shut up, boy?’”.

“Well as long as we looking good it doesn’t matter what people think we doing here,” I said, bringing their interruption to a close and returning my attention to the chocolate girl beside me.

Never having been approached like that in public, the girls’ comments made me feel quite aware of how I was being viewed and interpreted by others. This brief interaction highlights some of the themes within my research: space and place, gender expressions and sexuality, subjectivity and identity. It seemed the girls read our body language to be that of lovers. The couches at Rituals, the on-campus café, are also the most likely place to find cuddling heterosexual couples, and perhaps our behaviour seemed to mimic that in its intimacy.

The ascription of meaning to space can be what transforms it from a ‘space’ to a ‘place’. ‘Place’ has a social identity that is conferred by the elements of the space, such as its configuration, furnishings, lighting, as well as its occupants (Agnew 2011). The race, class, status, actions, interactions and social relations of its occupants give meaning to the space. Rituals for instance, in its use of couches convey that it is a space to lounge and relax (Gaudio 2003). Soft lighting encourages intimacy and closeness. The type and price of the items, to a certain extent also determines the client demographic, although you do not need to make purchases in order to lounge on the couches.

## **Methodology**

This ongoing research involves the use of mapping, one-on-one interviews and collecting life histories. The participants are all women who have had or were in sexual relationships with other women. They are between the ages 18-35, live and work in various parts of Trinidad, have various relationship statuses, and are of different ethnic groups, religions, occupations, and socio-economic classes. They all used Facebook and were members of one or more LGBT groups on the site, from where they were sourced for participation in this study. Thus far, twenty-one (21) persons have agreed to be part of the project and preliminary interviews were conducted with them all, but the mapping exercises (described below) have only been done with 6 participants. While drawing from interviews with all the women, those highlighted in this paper are Jean (34), Raven (26), N’Dare (28) and Emma (19). All names have been altered for privacy.

Conducting one-on-one interviews and collecting life histories with the women produced documentation of how their experiences of spaces shift and develop.

To facilitate this research, contacts were made with lesbian and bisexual women over the course of the last year, some relationships building into friendships. Data was collected through participant observation conducted on the University of the West Indies, St Augustine campus, in lounges and at parties. Building friendships with these women made it easier to collect life histories, although this was usually carried out over a number of meetings and conversations. The informal meetings fostered openness, and receptivity to their perspectives and desires. The

bulk of data collection is yet to take place but already the diversity of experiences can be seen in the information that is being gathered.

### **Mapping**

In my project the use of ‘mapping’, a social science technique where the participants illustrate how they see and traverse spaces was inspired by William Leap (2009). Leap used the technique to map the geography of Washington, D.C. as a gay city (2009). As our daily activities in Trinidad can often lead many to traverse wide distances, from home to work or play this project maps the entire country.

Cities are often viewed as microcosms of the larger space, but looking at the country as a whole offered more versatility for my study, especially given the relative size of Trinidad. This method and wide scope yields a range of experiences of place, as some concentrate more on one town or area than another person. One of the strengths of using mapping techniques is that it allows respondents a means to articulate these spaces and raise the factors which producing a sense of belonging (or not). At the start of interviews, participants were informed that the interview would entail a mapping exercise. Many asked “What’s that? What am I supposed to do?”

After talking about their lives and experiences, they were presented with sheets of paper, lead pencils, coloured pencils, and coloured pens and asked to represent in whatever way they chose the following questions: Where do you feel safe? Where do you “lime” (hang out)? Where are you comfortable? Why is a place comfortable to you?

They then created a map to reflect their ideas and explain it to me. In this way, the maps are used as interview aids, to expand the conversation and bring aspects to it that were not explicitly asked or that the respondent did not initially think to elaborate on. By being asked to do this activity they were already beginning to think about space in certain ways, grouping places into categories, connecting stories of their experiences to how they perceive certain places, and how they themselves were perceived in certain places.

The maps generated in Leap’s study (2009) frequently included “where I go to play” and excluded places of work and residence, which the women in my study often indicated in order to articulate its role in their perceptions of spaces.

The mapping exercise proved to be quite informative even if the maps created were not geographical but rather abstract and symbolic. The construction and articulation of these maps relate to each individual’s social history and life experiences. While some might question this technique and its ability to represent everyday complexities in static, formalised representations, the process of mapping provided rich narratives that were not bound by the fixity of the image. The creation of the maps proved to be discursive, with revisions and changes or additions as the respondent elaborated on her past or her current habits and activities. .

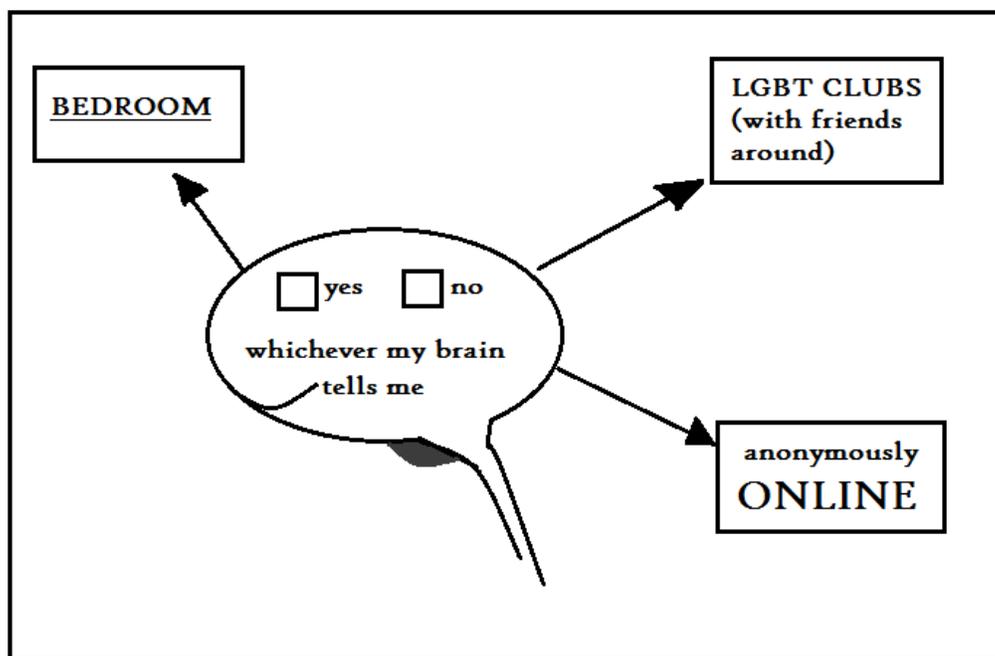
### **Subjectivities of space and sexualities**

The normative regime which works to consolidate existing power relations, constructs heterosexuality and homosexuality as opposing, different and unequal (Kleinhuber 2000; Kulick 2000). Terms such as “lesbian” and what it means within this context (subjectivity) might not be

what the women participating in this study would use to describe themselves (identity). They have claimed “lesbian”, “bisexual”, “pansexual”, even “fluid”, as the terms that best describe them<sup>2</sup>. N’Dare, for instance, claimed she was “pansexual”, attracted to individuals who identify as male or female, but also to people who do not fall into the gender binary, such as intersex, third-gender, androgynous, transsexual, or the many other sexual and gender identities. Jean, Raven and Emma, all identify themselves as “lesbian”, claiming that they always had exclusive attraction to women

*N’Dare: Safety as subjective and along a continuum*

N’Dare’s map (Figure 1, below) is an illustration of how she relates to the spaces around her. Her anxiety, even in “private” spaces, like her bedroom, is reflected in the map. For example, lying in bed on the phone with a girlfriend, totally comfortable and relaxed, but her mom unexpectedly opens the door and walks in, pausing to look at her and immediately walks back out. N’Dare suggests this made her afraid: what did she hear? Does mom know it’s this girl? How would she feel about it? How will she react? For most people, their bedroom represents a haven, a personal and intimate space. But for N’Dare, the very public consequences of what happens in her bedroom, makes it a space where she feels uncomfortable to be herself.



**Figure 1: N’Dare’s Map**

Her map illustrated the subjectivity of safety and its existence along a continuum, rather than a binary of safe versus unsafe. While her drawing shows safe and unsafe through “Whichever my brain tells me”, what she describes points to every space having equal potential to be threatening to varying degrees: such as those which present an immediate threat; situations where one should be cautious; or an all-clear where one feels comfortable to be themselves.

N'Dare suggests she is perceived a particular way in these contexts and so is treated in a particular way. How she feels in that context, in that instance, depends on a number of different factors: people present, act/event happening, interactions occurring, the setting itself, who she is with, how she is dressed, how she is being perceived and how others are reacting to her. The places highlighted in the map are meant to illustrate this. For instance, she is only comfortable going to LGBT clubs with groups of friends, so that she is not there alone and is not pinpointed as LGBT.

N'Dare lives in a predominantly Afro-Trinidad, semi-urban, working-class area along the East-West Corridor. The area has a high military enrollment. The military is hypermasculinised (Lutz 2002; Armitage 2003; Das 2001) which when coupled with working class ideas about sexuality produces intolerance and hostility towards non-hetero-sexualities (Chevannes 2002; Hope 2010; Dunphy 2000). The social deprivation and lack of power and resources of black working-class men inhibits their ability to assert their masculinity, so their "sexuality and ability to sexually conquer and dominate women" is used instead (Hope 2001:5 in Kempadoo 2003:76, Hope 2010). Within the Afro-Trinidadian working-class culture, notions of heterosexuality and a man's control of his woman are upheld.

The reactions N'Dare received while in her last relationship with a soldier from the same neighbourhood reflect the caution and discomfort they felt being in a military area:

Before [ex-girlfriend] and I started limin', already rumours started in the area. People used to ask if we were together because she used to spend a lot of time at my house. Even the downstairs neighbour start askin my friends them if I gay and they deny it, cuz at that time, no one knew anything, but plenty people know her and know me. I didn't even know at that time that I was attracted to women. When we started really dating each other, we didn't come out. Is not like we could have, because [ex-girlfriend] is in the military and they very strict about that kind of thing. We went to a few get-togethers that the military had, with two male friends, as though we going as two straight couples. But as the night continue and the alcohol start getting to yuh head it was harder to control ourselves. So we were dancing together and hugging up and getting really close to each other and people came and asked us to stop it. It was obvious that we were more than friends.

N'dare indicated that, although the couple kept their relationship hidden and private, rumours of its occurrence were enough to breach the accepted societal norms, resulting in their rejection and ridicule. As this relationship became more visible, people in the neighborhood became more openly rude to her. For example, a taxi driver, while passing in front of her house, told passengers, "Oh, this girl who live here... she gay", creating a spectacle of her sexuality and private life. Strangers began to recognise her as the rumours of her became more rampant in the village. The couple struggled with privacy and often felt as though they were being scrutinised.

For N'Dare, the reaction of men to finding out about her was as appalling as it was uncomfortable.

...it become a kind of validation for why I wasn't interested in them (the men), but others get angry with me that I was gay, like that was an insult to them and their manliness.

This other guy was turned on by the idea of me and other women and wanted to watch. He asked if I would let him come and watch us.

According to Chevannes (2002), within Afro-Caribbean culture, there is a symbolic understanding of male and female, represented by sun and moon respectively, ruler of day and night, seen and unseen, public and private, which renders one sex as public and one as private. Public spaces are deemed man's space (sex) and embody hegemonic masculinity (gender). This often means that subordinated sexes and gender groups, including non-heterosexuals, "feel like outsiders to the space itself and to heterosexual culture" (Roscoe 1996:204 in Kleinhuber 2000). The proper place for expressions of desire some suggest, particularly homosexual desire, is in the feminised "private" sphere (Brown 2001; Chevannes 2002). Chevannes (2002) points to the need for non-heterosexuals to suppress public displays of sexuality in order to live peacefully among heterosexual communities. This is also tied up with notions of respectability and reputation which play a huge role in Caribbean societies.

As can be seen from the map, N'Dare prefers to use Facebook anonymously especially to post gay themed ideas or images.

"I used to put up profile pics and cover pics that had homosexual couples or somewhat erotic same sex scenes, like couples in embraces or kissing or in suggestive positions, without anyone saying anything at first. But then people start asking me to take it off and change it. The only way I will post anything like that now is in a group with closed privacy settings. There are many groups I want to join but it will come up on my feed and on my profile and I don't want people to see it, so that I don't have to hear anything 'bout it."

She was surprised that the people she worked with were irked by her posts. Being an actress and dancer, she is popular among Arts circles. She once posed for a picture at the Photobooth Exhibit at Erotic Art Week in 2011, where she was squatting in only her underwear over another half dressed girl lying flat on her back. The picture was posted on Facebook and N'Dare was tagged in it.

"I have rell high-class people on my account, many public figures and prominent people in the Arts, and people who would never think to be homophobic or even blink an eye at something like this, started calling and messaging me to take it off. They even asked what would possess me to take a picture like that, and to pose in such a provocative way. They said they were ashamed of it being there, ashamed for me. I really expected them to be open-minded, knowing the amount of queer people are involved in the Arts. But this, I never expected."

#### *Raven: Paranoia and trauma*

Like an interloper ducking behind the rose bush in your front yard, trying to "maco" (eavesdrop) what's happening inside your house, so too the 'Fakester' (as called by boyd and Eddison 2007) or fake profile, as it is commonly referred to, is lurking, hovering over your posts, journeying through your timeline, prowling your friend list, just awaiting the momentarily forgotten privacy setting (or indiscriminate 'tag') to let slip a salient bit of your life.

Raven's online Facebook usage is plagued by the ever persistent threat of a fake profile. It took her a year to reply to my hello, even though she did accept my friend request. A year later she messaged on Facebook to say:

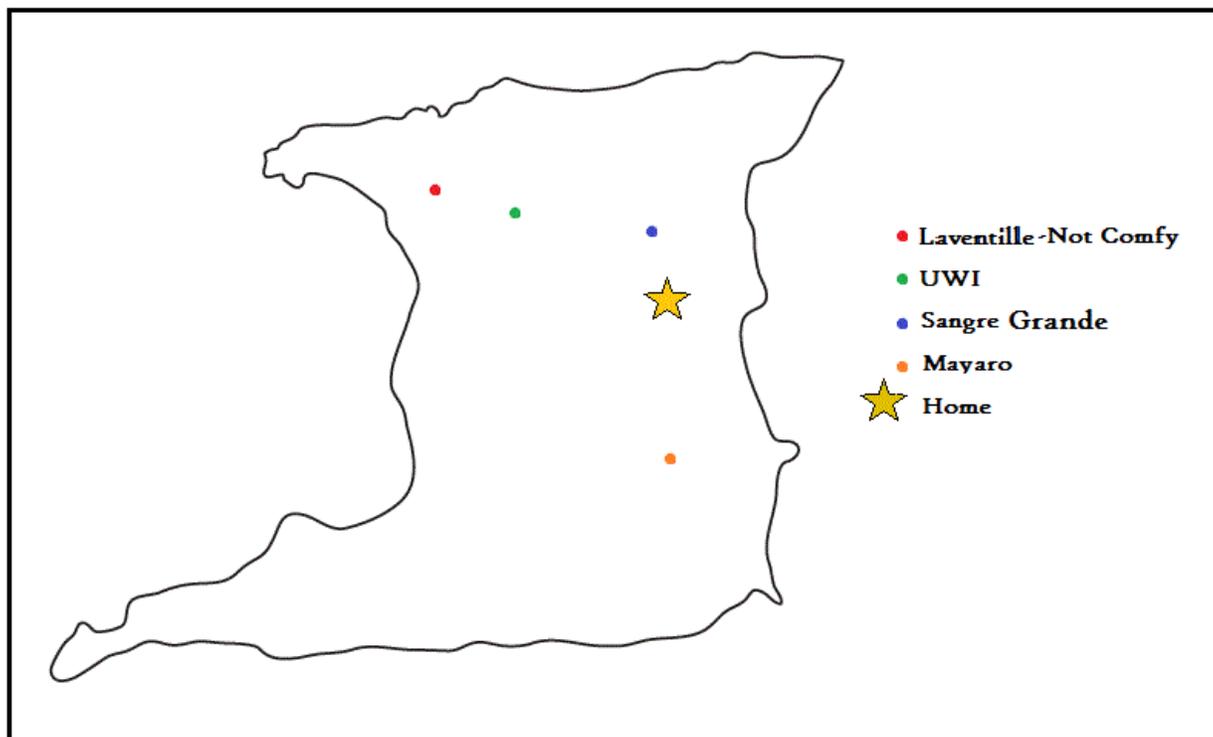
“Hey. I'm not sure if I saw you in UWI some time ago, but the person looked a whole lot like you... I kinda thought u were not real until I saw your name somewhere... I didn't think you were real because your profile pic looked surreal, and that was around the time when there were random people with fake profiles all over the place.”

She explained that she thought my profile and my request to get participants for a study were part of a ploy to get into the secret lives of lesbians. She thought I was the interloper. In creating a profile, one can type oneself into being and become whoever he or she wishes to be, and create lives and stories for themselves, even fictionalised ones.

This fear, though it might seem irrational and tedious, made sense to Raven. She had been the victim of fake profiles and slanderous comments which made her cautious of all newcomers and users that she did not know personally in the offline world. While social networking sites have allowed individuals to meet strangers, it is also used to strengthen latent ties with people who are already a part of their extended social network and with whom they share an offline relationship (boyd and Ellison 2007). Raven's friends were mainly persons who she knew from school, lecturers and colleagues, as well as family members. For this reason she was cautious about who can post to her wall and what access they had to her profile.

Her anxieties and distrust were not just limited to virtual space, but are a part of her everyday life. She fears that knowledge of her sexual orientation would result in ridicule, taunts, and discomfoting glares, to be pointed out and singled out as different, and to be treated differently. She manages her wall to ensure that the posts there do not reveal too much about her personal life. She “doesn't want to draw attention to herself” at least not for this reason, as she fears the potential backlash from colleagues, peers and faculty.

MAP ON NEXT PAGE



**Figure 2: Raven's Map**

Raven felt the mapping exercise to be challenging for her to produce saying that she doesn't know what to put in because she, like N'Dare, "doesn't feel safe anywhere". The map above is what she produced. It reflects the fears she has about her surroundings: each space represented on the map had the potential for betrayal, rejection and aggression.. She indicates Laventille as an unsafe space "for obvious reasons" referring to gang crime and the stigma attached to the area. She used to live in the Mayaro – Rio Claro area, and worked in the area. She was comfortable there despite living with an abusive girlfriend. If the need arose, they presented themselves as roommates.

While she attends and works at University of the West Indies (U.W.I.), St Augustine campus, she does not feel safe on the campus and is always cautious of an impending altercation from any backlash if peers knew about her sexuality. The only places where she feels relatively safe is in her home village and the nearby town of Sangre Grande. But the ways in which she speaks about "home", depict a very tumultuous relationship, and a distrust which she acknowledges to be the basis for her fears in social interactions.

When asked about her experiences and if she had been ridiculed or mistreated because of her sexual orientation, Raven's descriptions were all linked to her family. Raven came out to her family by age 17, and was expelled from the home and told that her choice was unnatural:

Well they talked about it being unnatural and how it's not normal. And my father once asked who was the man and who was the woman in the relationship. My brother went telling everyone I was a lesbian.

She talked about confiding in her cousin:

My cousin, I told him I was gay. And I thought since he lived Canada for a long time he would be cool with it. He was a lot older than me. He told me I needed a good dick up my nanny. I laughed it off. I honestly wasn't thinking til he asked me hypothetically, would I suck his dick for \$12,000. And I told him no. No one believed me when I said that [he] was a nasty person until he moved rell stink with other women, then everyone believed me.

After the death of her father, she was reintegrated into the home with her girlfriend who became accepted into the family:

In any event, my mother eventually accepted me because of [ex-girlfriend]. She was there when my dad died and she stayed. Mom saw her literally like another daughter despite the fact she used to beat me... ..My mom eventually stopped telling me about how much she liked [ex-girlfriend].

The ex-girlfriend has since moved out and Raven now lives with her mother and siblings, including a brother who has been verbally and physically abusive to his girlfriends and other family members. She still experiences harsh comments and treatment, particularly from him. As adolescents, he used to molest Raven and her sister, and now berates and hits them when the mood strikes him. He is quick to temper and often drunk. Her history with her brother and father was traumatising for her. She links her habits of self-harm and dishonesty to her desire for attention for her problems and the psychological trauma she believes she has undergone and still is subject to. She mentions an incident when she was 8 years old, and woke up with a pain in her vagina:

I remember it hurt when I was peeing. And seeing the blood on my underwear... But at age 8, I think I actually was raped, but then no one would believe me... I was diagnosed as being manic depressive after the rape thing, by a psychiatrist. He prescribed anti depressants and I felt ill. All of this was when I was 16. I was 16 when I put the scars on my arm. I used to cut a lot.

Her cycle of self harm did not stop there, even including abuse of insulin injections and pain killers. Being in a physically abusive relationship took its toll on her mental and physical health:

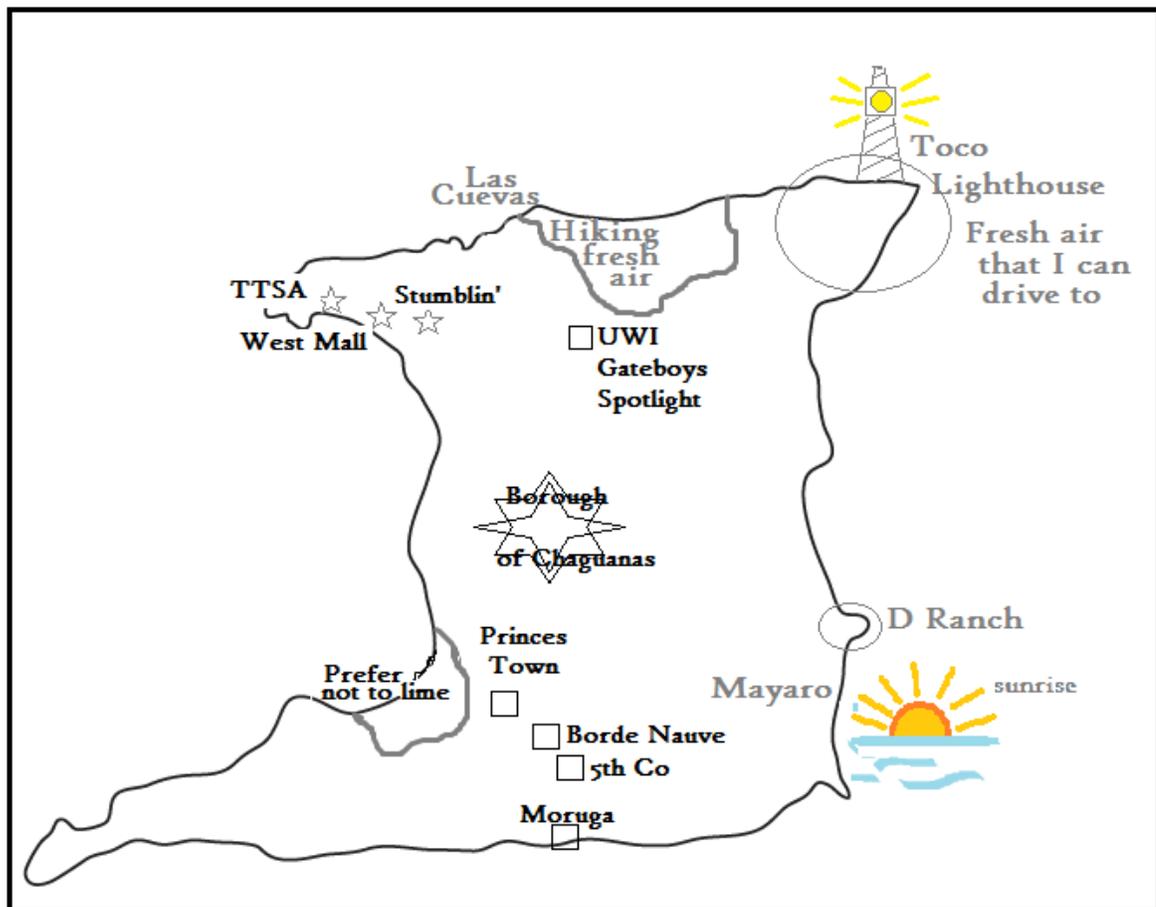
I overdosed all the time on painkillers. I wanted to die. Some days I still do, I just never admitted it to anyone til now. How many days I dream of dying in an accident, because my life is still too messed up for words... Because I still have zero faith in myself. [Ex-girlfriend] told me I was so fat and ugly that nobody would want me. I have nobody really to talk to because I found out my best friend of 6 yrs went telling people I'm a lesbian. I kind of hate that word so much.

Although hesitantly, she still referred to herself by saying, "I guess I'm a lesbian". She hates the word as it had been used to define her, as defamatory, as an insult. She is wary of how she dresses, walks, speaks, who she associates with, and is open to, both in real life and online, because she is constantly on guard against being perceived as butch, 'a dyke' or 'gay' – different,

outcast, unwanted, perverted, hypersexual, abomination, unnatural – and the resulting ways in which ‘the gay’ will be treated.

All of the above describes events which have shaken Raven’s confidence to the point where she feels as though anyone she trusts will betray her. If the persons with whom she should share a most intimate bond were not there for her, she wondered how strangers would react to her and treat her. Her everyday anxieties were reflected in the challenge she faced to delineate safe space.

*Jean: Performing gender*



**Figure 3: Jean's Map**

Jean, 34, holds a supervisory position at a large regional company and works mainly in an outskirts of Port of Spain. Jean considers herself to be ‘butch’, dressing in jeans and t-shirts, usually without make-up and a short bob haircut. She is attracted to ‘femme’ women, meaning those who usually adhere to feminine gender norms of appearance, wearing close fitting clothing, makeup and accessories<sup>3</sup>. Her most recent girlfriend worked in the same building as she and for the same company. They were publicly a couple, in spite of defamatory comments circulating about them in the office. “Town”, as Port of Spain is often referred to, became a

refuge for them. They were comfortable going to the mall together, to various eating places and night clubs, for example West Mall and Stumblin', as indicated on the map. She is aware of how her butch appearance is being read but claims that she is at that point in her life where it does not matter to her what people think so is comfortable being seen cuddling with her femme partner. She cannot deny however, that public opinion and thought often translate into unwelcome behaviours, which she reflects in her map (Figure 3) by marking certain terrain as "Prefer not to lime", designating them as unsafe.

San Fernando and the surrounding areas are clearly marked as "Prefer not to lime". She narrated a number of incidents that took place in south Trinidad which has led to her rejection of it as an accepting place. Twice, while on dates with women in the area, men attempted to "pips on" her girlfriend. In another instance, while getting food on The Cross with a girl, they were gawked at. A third experience, which she found to contradict the good Christian values that our society seemingly strives to uphold, involved going to a guest house with a woman – referring to the acceptability of adultery or 'horning' and pre-marital heterosexual intercourse in Trinidadian society. Upon checking out, her femme girlfriend walked straight past the receptionist's door to wait in the car while Jean returned the room key. The woman at the counter said "Ent is a woman who jus pass dey? Doh come back here with that shit!" [Wasn't that a woman who just passed over there? Don't come back here with that!] To which she replied, "I doh know what you talkin' 'bout" and left. All of these experiences act to delegitimise Jean's relationships by ignoring it, being blind to it or by actively denouncing her relationships.

A factor in creating safe space for her was the presence of friends. When she was around people she knew, or places that were familiar to them, it fostered a sense of safety. The squares all represent places that she frequents because she knows someone who lives in that area and who provides a safe place for her and her friends to lime. She also used a square to depict U.W.I. and the nearby bars where she feels safe to lime. The stars represent public places that she frequents. Nature spots like beaches and hiking are in grey. Mayaro, for instance, was not a place where she felt threatened. She mentioned particular bars in the area that are friendly and open to lesbian couples.

She felt as though her butch appearance made her visible as a lesbian, as she transgressed the societal rules for "right femininity", but claimed that with aging she has come to accept herself and her rights, and is not afraid of what people think of her. Jean is not as concerned as other respondents about presenting the socially approved image of femininity and does not feel that it makes her any less of a woman. Her androgynous body provides some space for her to be flexible with her appearance.

Jean is ambivalent about her East Indian heritage. On the one hand, she is knowledgeable of her history, finding a measure of comfort in knowing her past. But on the other hand, she finds people of East Indian descent to be hostile and intolerant. Jean observes that these East Indian communities – referred to as "coolie-villes", a derogatory reference to East Indian indentured workers who carried loads on the head and engaged in manual labour – are particularly intolerant and linked them to the cultural retention of patriarchal ideals and the emphasis placed on women being the property of her husband, or being subjugated to a man's will at all points during her

life, be it father, husband, or son. Lesbians defy this power configuration and are vulnerable to disrespect, ridicule and aggression.

It's really [ex-girlfriend] who first used said it ["coolie-ville"] to me. She heard someone use it to refer to Chaguanas. (rolls eyes) That's where I live. Anyway, it applies to places like [...]. I don't like to go there because of how people, men and women, watch us and the kind of comments they will make, especially when they drunk. Indian men take it personally that we not interested in them. And [ex-girlfriend] was a nice 'reds', so the inter-racial thing was another problem for them.

While liming there, they would receive the stares, comments, and blatant disrespect as men would make sexual comments and advances. Jean did not identify "coolie-villes" on the map but listed a few places that she considered as such and which she prefers to avoid.

*Emma: An "outsider's" view*

On the other hand, being of Scottish Caucasian descent, Emma felt that she was not being held to the standards that Trinidadian women are held to because she is not seen as being a Trinidadian woman. It is already assumed that she does not belong, so she is not expected to perform femininity like a Trinidadian woman is expected to. The features of her body – particularly the colour of her skin – marked her as different from what the "typical Trinidadian female body" is, and so what that body represents. She felt as though she was always being seen and treated as an outsider to Trini culture and hence, Trini patriarchy.

Non-normative persons and bodies are seen as outside/outcast within any given culture. And I feel as though my race and my skin colour make me less normative. People in my area tend to think that women are Indo or Afro-Trinidadian, but not typically white. My special-ness excludes me from the everyday norms and expectations that people have.

This raises questions about this typical Trini woman and how she came to be typical. What then is *atypical*? While one cannot construct an image of the typical woman, based on what Emma and the others are saying, there exists a notion of what a Trini ideal woman looks like and act like. There is an accepted norm and idea of the female body and how femininity should be enacted, but also perhaps as Emma is suggesting a kind of ethnic belonging to the Nation.

Emma's map below shows how she perceives the spaces in which she inhabits. When asked about the configuration of the map, Emma explains that she likes to be neat so drew the map in a systematic way, with each region being bounded and separated. Each enclosed block represents a certain set of behaviours, ideas, attitudes, and values, particular ways of interacting with that space. It shows her unique perception of the spaces in which she operates and the subjectivity of her experiences.

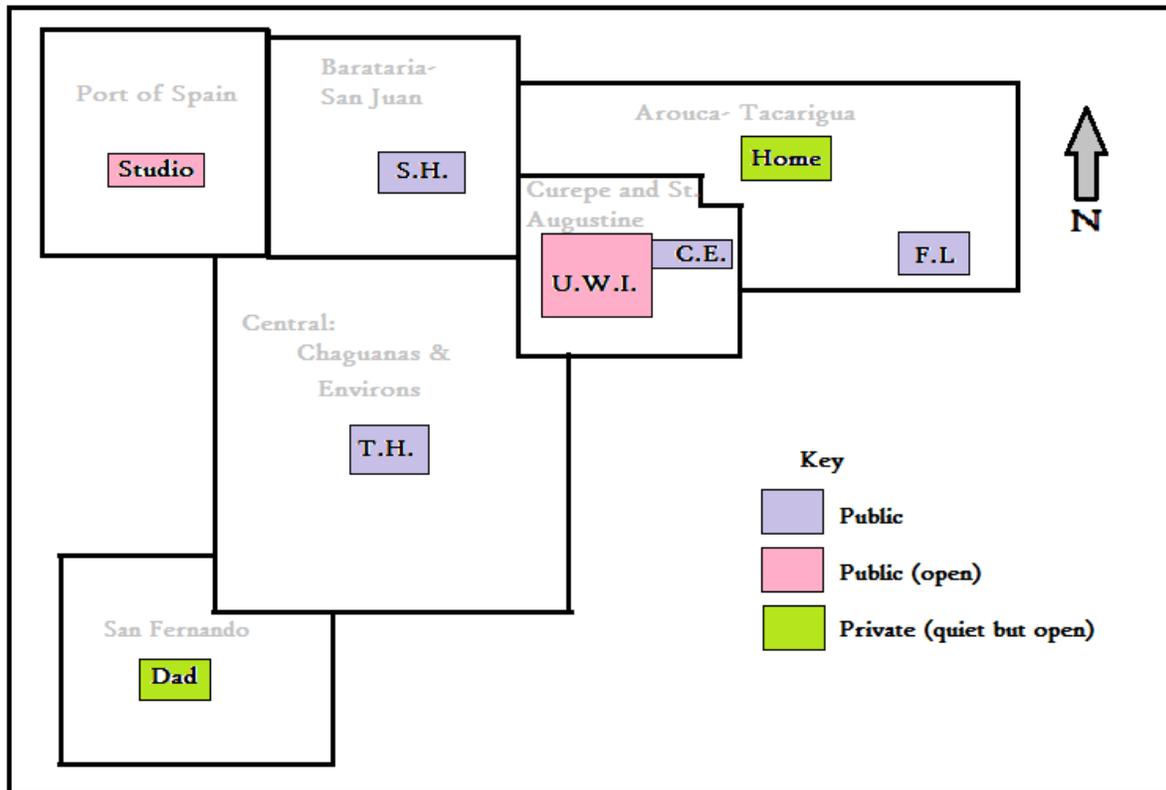


Figure 4: Emma's concept of spaces

Emma is “out” to her immediate family and some extended family and friends especially at UWI. She doesn’t like to be touched, and came out when one of her younger sisters asked, “What would happen when you get a boyfriend?” She figured the time was right. Her sisters are accepting without question, although the elder of the two believes it is a choice. She is quiet at home about her sexuality and never took a girlfriend home, especially due to the young age of her siblings (13 and 11 years old, respectively). She is unsure of how it will affect them, how they will react and if at all things might change at home. Over the July-August vacation of 2012 between academic years, Emma worked her first job as an intern. She felt very welcome there, with an openly gay supervisor as well as gay interns, describing the space as “very friendly”. Among her peer group, Emma feels understood. As most of her friends are gay, she feels as though they “get it”, referring to the experience of being different and seen as an outcast.

While she feels accepted as described in the above snippets, she does not want to flaunt her sexuality and disrespect the beliefs of her mother and others. “Private” spaces, as marked on the map – her parents’ and friends’ homes – were ones where she was more cautious and mindful of her behaviours and more attuned to how others would react to her. In “public” spaces – U.W.I. or liming spots in Town like Studio – Emma was less anxious about her gender expression and sexuality respectively, and the possible interpretations and reactions to her. She was comfortable to be herself and never felt pressure to conform to Trinidadian gender norms. This suggests that the pressure she feels is excluded from public life still has hold in these private, even intimate,

spaces. She feels as though she competes with the religious knowledge of her friends and family, saying that she “goes quietly to church” with her mother who is a Catholic, so as not to disrespect her, yet understanding that it affects her ability to fully express herself [Emma].

### **Concluding thoughts**

Using anecdotes and maps, I hoped to illustrate some of the experiences of women in my study. On account of their sexual orientation and/or their gender expression they recounted being called mannish, unnatural, abominations, and more. They highlighted the events that shaped their subjectivities and identities and how they adapt in various spaces.

We saw how power relations and knowledge can function to shape the identities of this small group of women and how those identities can be used to exclude them or to form a new community. My on-going research will continue to investigate landscapes of resistance and power lived by Trinidadian lesbians.

While there are dominant social orderings of space, and legal systems to uphold that ordering, other, less hegemonic, less dominant subaltern social productions or re-interpretations of space can emerge in tandem with dominant spaces and can be directly superimposed on the hegemonic landscape of power, even challenging notions of heteronormativity, citizenship and belonging.

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<sup>1</sup> Heteronormativity is the assumption that there are naturally two opposite and complementary gender categories, masculine and feminine, and sex categories, male and female, which naturally belong together and attract each other. Society is organised in such a way that its structures and institutions reinforce these ideas of compulsory heterosexuality.

<sup>2</sup> Sexuality versus sexual identity: these are symbolic but not necessarily empirical categories. Adrienne Rich (1983) believes that all women fall along the lesbian continuum, which includes women-identified experiences including women's choice of women as passionate comrades, life partners, co-workers, lovers, and community, looking at flexibility in interactions.

<sup>3</sup> Terms used in usage by gay and lesbians cannot simply be seen as grounded in gay and lesbian identities, but as having multitudinous meanings and codes. 'Butch' does not simply refer to particular appearance, but a number of gendered acts that are embodied to varying degrees. This comparison of 'butch' to 'femme' does not exist in a binary but along a continuum.