

## ***‘Queer exile, gender invisibility and public art’***

By Elena García-Oliveros

**ABSTRACT:** Women from Sub-Saharan Africa, lesbian or otherwise, including asylum seekers, migrants or European nationals, women who love other women in African countries, where you give your life, face circumcision or rape for love; advocacy organisations working with these groups, on a European or national level; female, queer, feminist and black artists; these were the stakeholders sought out by Toxic Lesbian during the artist’s residence in El Ranchito, Matadero, Madrid to develop this project in a public and process art format between 2011 and 2012. It received support from general human rights organisations, refugees and migrants, gender-specific ones or LGBTQ associations. The aim of the research project is to present the findings on the reasons why queer Africans and, more specifically, women, emigrate. It will look at existing forms of discrimination during the queer diasporas, who left due to their sexual orientation and gender, as well as those within international institutions which are supposed to ensure the enforcement of right to asylum legislation. Similarly, it will be shown images of the creative processes implemented in this respect through public art, with cooperation from partner institutions and members of the population featured in the project overseen by the artist.

**KEYWORDS:** Public Art; Queer Diasporas; Black lesbians; Communitarian Art; Cyberfeminism

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## Introduction

‘Queer exile, gender invisibility and public art’ within the framework of a research project titled ‘On feminist uprising in public art and cyberspace. The Far West of opportunity’ directed by the author, the public art project *When You Pay With Your Life for Loving in Africa* - <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en->, produced in the context of the stay in El Ranchito by the artist, Matadero, Madrid (Plate1).



Plate 1- Toxic Lesbian, *When you pay with your life for loving in Africa*, 2011.  
Video-creation in collaboration with lesbians who demand asylum from African countries.

Sub-saharan women, lesbians or not, some requesting asylum, others are migrants or have European nationalities, women who love other women in African countries, where one pays with one's life for loving, with ablation or rape; intermediation organizations with these collectives, on a European level or national level; female artists, queer, feminists and black, creators, were the agents searched for by Toxic Lesbian to create, with a public and procedure format, this project between 2010 and 2012 I Madrid –Spain-, Paris –France- and Brussels –Belgium. The project had collaboration from general organizations for human rights such as Amnesty International –Belgium, QueerAmnesty –Switzerland, for refugees and migrants like Merhaba –Belgium- or CEAR –Spain-, gender specific such as Women's Link Worldwide –Spain- or LGBTQ such as ILGA World –Belgium- RQTR –Spain, and institutions such as the Complutense University of Madrid or the center for contemporary art, Matadero, of Madrid, as well as artists such as queer photographer from South Africa Zanele Muholi or the urban art group Keller of La Tabacalera, Madrid.

The goal pursued by the research by ‘Queer exile, gender invisibility and public art’ is to present conclusions drawn from the artistic project and described insofar as findings related to the causes of migration by African queer populations and in a more specific way, women. Discrimination among women pertaining to queer diasporas due to sexual orientation and gender, as well as those researched later from the point of view of both perspectives in the heart of international organizations that should guarantee application of the law for the right of asylum. In the same manner, a description is offered of the creation processes carried out in this framework of public art, by means of collaboration with the artist and collaborating institutions and the civilian population that is a feature of the project.

At the time it started, in 2010, the figures about queer migration from Africa and more specifically that of women, were very few. The persons themselves who because of their sexual orientation or gender identity would start their diaspora without knowing the channels and even the countries in which they could receive best welcome, as they declare themselves. Therefore, the interest of this study built from the public art project of Toxic Lesbian, is based on obtaining first hand testimony of the persons of these exodus as well as the situation of vulnerability that the organizations fighting for their rights will find in Europe, offering a live portrait of the situation at that historic moment both in Spain as well as other countries mentioned in the research –United States, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Morocco, Cameroun or South Africa-.

At that time, the organizations dealing specifically with the rights of these social groups will manage to arouse interest from general human rights structures such as Human Rights Watch, which in 2017, started publishing the first official data describing the situation of abuse that LGBTI people suffer in Northern Africa. These enclaves, as they describe them, become dead end alleys for harassment and abuse of those persecuted, who are forced to flee to other African countries because of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Retained in those territories, final stage of their frequently long diasporas, they await the moment to enter illegally into Spain and request asylum. Precisely this organization denounces the Spanish government for blocking transfer of these requestors and demands their immediate transfer to continental territory. In the same way, even the United Nations, through ACNUR also in 2017 echoes the increase in asylum requests due to persecution because of sexual orientation by citizens of Gambia, Cameroun, Morocco or Algeria.

The project will need to find at the time of its production, committed sources with the facts, such as a detailed description by those in the organizations enabling us to access privileged documents, such as asylum requests. The information gathered offers a panorama of patriarchal severity with European legislations and their protocols that punish these citizens fleeing and covering great distances and whose fundamental rights are being violated.

The project concludes with the alarming situation of ignorance of the persecution parameters due to sexual orientation seen from gender perspectives, not only in openly homophobic countries but also in those host countries in Europe which hinders real application of the right of asylum in the case of queer demanders and women, with practically all dossiers presented with these profiles being rejected. In this sense, it should be noted that some studies already at that time start appearing and which denounce this reality. So, for example, Kobelinsky, based on peer data to that done in this public art project, details several aspects that explain the origin of part of the problems described and homophobic treatment from European institutions. The first data is the fact that the Geneva convention which regulates the right to asylum, does not mention homosexuality. This legal setting has not been updated since 1951, even when the French government (to mention the example that Kobelinsky analyzes) since the start of the '90ies, the growing number of people demanding asylum for this reason. The anthropologist details the difficulties that the elaboration of this convention has in view of the reality of homosexual persons. The legal setting of Geneva justifies the right to asylum because of belonging to a social group threatened both because of being a member as well as protesting as a member of the collective. This second option is very vague and in the criteria of judges, as Kobelinsky goes on to say. The defendant not only needs to prove the persecutions he or she has been object of but also if the person is “gay enough or lesbian enough”. In order to answer to this the judges subject the defendants to questions about their origins as well as reducing their criteria to external appearances, with the subsequent set up of stereotypes of masculinity or femininity in relation to homosexuality. Resembling a “effeminate man” or a “butch woman” could be key in a positive solution to their asylum requests. In this same article, the author describes how most of the favorable requests are limited to men and hardly any to

those of lesbians or transgender. She also denounces the lack of official data about the decision taking in asylum demands dealing with the reason for the request.

As in many areas, and not only justice, we can appreciate that the reality from which criteria is applied by the institutions is that which concerns males, leaving in the shadow, in the limbo of non-acknowledgement, the life experiences and circumstances that involve the narration of the cases for women.

In this same vein, the study done in 2011 is very illustrative to us and done by the University of Amsterdam in collaboration with the European Council, in which they conclude about the great differences with which analysis is done of asylum demands because of LGBTI issues in Europe. The study underlines the diversity of the gender stereotypes that exist in each country as well as the lack of training of judges, who even declare not knowing what type of questions they should ask to identify homosexuality in the person demanding asylum. Simplifications such as stating that gay men from Irak are effeminate or that all the lesbians of Sierra Leone should know that homosexual relations are punished by law, or that if a supposedly gay Egyptian man does not know the most popular gay bar in Dublin, this means that he is not a true homosexual or lastly that a woman with children cannot be a lesbian, are some of the data extracted from real cases of processes of asylum demands and that reveal the size of the barriers that exist. The study concludes that given that homosexuality is not a medical or psychiatric category (suppositions that rest in a good amount of the judges) needing support from professionals in these fields is neither legitimate nor appropriate for resolving these requests.

## **Methodology**

Research methodology is qualitative and is based on interviews recorded in videos with the different speakers listed, privileged witnesses of events shown and which represent individual persons or the civil organizations that denounce the situations that these people describe. Also there were debate panels and encounters all in the setting of the residence of the artist in El Ranchito, Matadero, Madrid. This research material was the foundation of the artistic production that Toxic Lesbian carried out by means of live performances and in streaming (Plate 2) with interactive screenings on the façades of public buildings in Madrid (Figs. 3, 4) and in Vj sessions, presentations in various areas, concerts and online community generation about the proposal.

The performances were transmitted through the channel Toxic TV of internet and symbolically done by means of actions the exclusion and discrimination that the participants gave testimony of. The staging of the sessions on urban façades was done with the collaboration of pieces by Muholi, a South African queer artist who is committed to cases of murder and rape of lesbians in her country. The images which are integrated with compositions of pieces by Toxic Lesbian, show portraits of South African queer women belonging to her series called *Faces*. Screenings were done in very busy streets of Madrid and alternated with short emblematic texts of the project. At the same time images of passersby were collected, forming part of the screening on the façade, thus the public could view themselves as part of the reality described. In these urban sessions there were also scenes of the debates that took place in Matadero and of interviews and encounters with the women demanding asylum that participated.

Formalized from a point of view of research-action methodology, the project is carried out from guidelines that determine Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) in terms of participation the groups involved with the aim of improving their own situation of those of the subjects themselves that could suffer from these violations of their rights later; the development follows an introspective spiral that involves planning cycles, action, observation and thought that give way to the creative process; also generating criticism from critical

communities, especially online, a fact that we illustrate with the data of massive following of the project in the social networks of Toxic Lesbian, especially in Youtube where several of the videos forming the work became viral (almost 60.000 views in a 3 day period above all in Senegal and Cameroun), is also a systematic process of mutual learning oriented to committed praxis (some of the works were requested for several LGBT festivals such as the Cineffable in Paris of 2012 with a sizeable audience, where it received unanimous acclaim from the audience); in the same way that *When One Pays with One's Life When Loving in Africa* induces theorization as of observation of the facts; is also a political process as its type of activism pursues achieving changes that affect, in this case, LGBTI persons. In this last sense, it could be analyzed that as of the time the project was done until today, achievement has been reached of following of the events by international organizations as well as a slight increase in training on the subject by representatives of court who must judge idealness of those demanding asylum based on their orientation. Circumstances of homophobia and social exclusion in the countries of origin denounced, however have changed little or nothing.

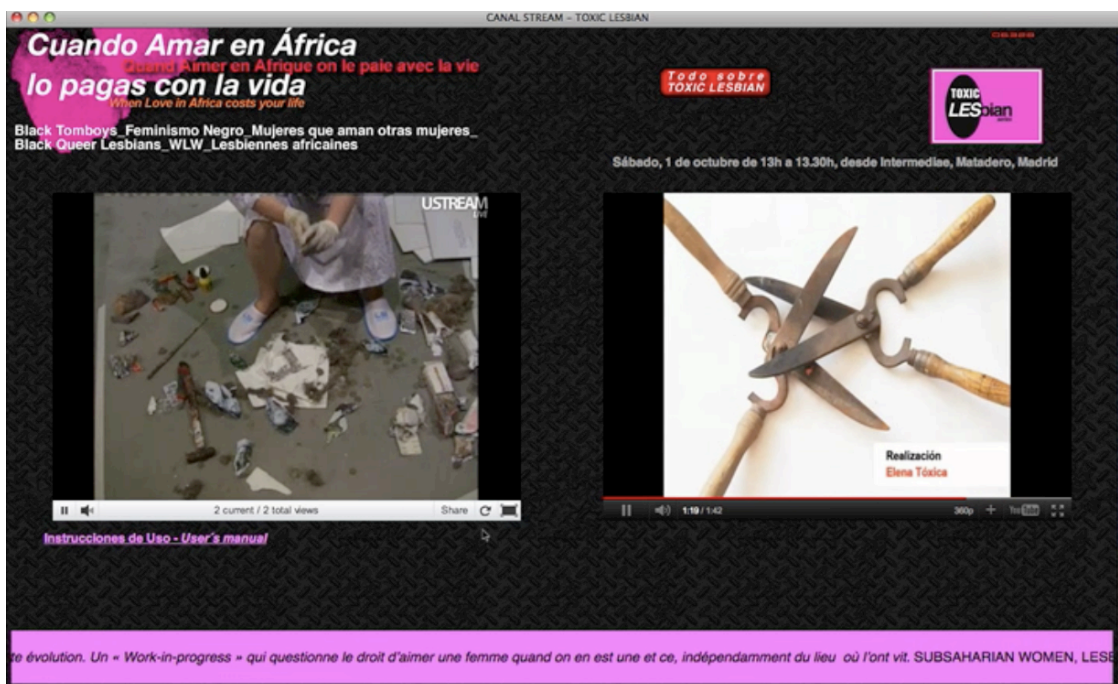


Plate 2- Toxic Lesbian, *When you pay with your life for loving in Africa*, 2011.  
Performance transmitted through Canal Toxic TV.





Plate 3- Toxic Lesbian, *When you pay with your life for loving in Africa*, 2011.  
Urban screenings in Madrid on the façades of buildings.



Plate 4- Toxic Lesbian, *When you pay with your life for loving in Africa*, 2011.  
Urban screenings in Madrid on the façades of buildings.

In a more specific way three cases of demands of asylum are presented that are interviewed by Toxic Lesbian throughout the process: that of Rachel, lesbian, coming from Cameroun and Marianna of Senegal, both seeking asylum in Belgium; and that of Eric, gay, also from Cameroun, requestor of the same status in Spain. The complete interviews in video form part of this article. In the same manner, other cases such as those of Anitta, Jeanne, Irène and Laine, lesbians waiting for asylum in Belgium and coming from Senegal, Cameroun and Ruanda, participated with their image and voices in various pieces that were used by Toxic

Lesbian in their public presentations (Plate 5) . For their production they were filmed and interviewed in Brussels beforehand.

The vj sessions proposed during live concerts in Matadero, Madrid, the presentatin on screen of images (photographs, video or texts) composed live while queer groups intervened.

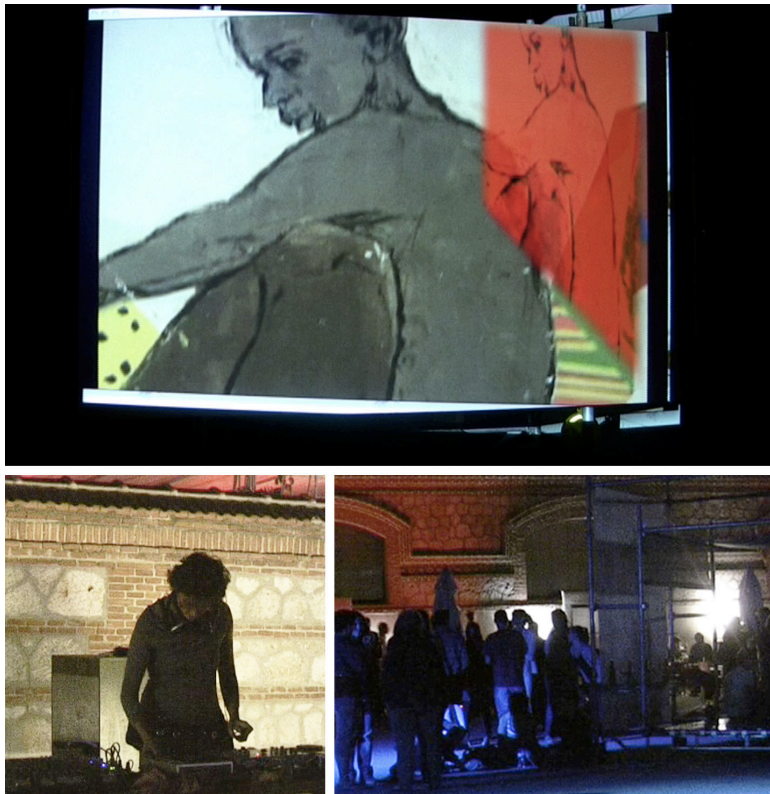


Plate 5- Toxic Lesbian, *Cuando amar en África lo pagas con la vida*, 2011.  
Sesiones Vj durante conciertos en Matadero, Madrid.

Narratives obtained of the cases interviewed exemplify the different models of diaspora from the African continent: by plane, with mediation of small mafias that at the time were starting up; and by land, crossing the entire continent to finally cross the Straits of Gibraltar and enter through the Spanish coast to the continent. They reconstruct in detail how these exile processes are produced from violent leaving of the place of birth until disoriented arrival to our continent, offering us a complete description that personalizes empty data and figures that surround information that we receive daily about the so called “illegal immigrants”.

Besides these life stories, the study process focused on two debate panels and a public presentation in the university. This last took place in the Complutense Univeristy of Madrid on the 1st of December of 2010 organized by Toxic Lesbian and the LGBT, RQTR association. The participants were those of the life stories, Rachel with the support from Belgian organization Merhaba and Eric with support from QueerAmnesity Switzerland, as well as staff representing the university and moderator was queer author and activist Lucas Platero. Also intersectional researcher Carmen Romero Bachiller participated. In the same manner, in October of 2011, during the residence of the artist of Toxic Lesbian in El Ranchito, Matadero, Madrid, the two debate panels were organized. The first with Catherine Gouffrau, Merhaba’s coordinator, Bruselas; Glenys de Jesús, Women’s Link Worldwide’s lawyer, Madrid; and Pietro C., CEAR’s lawyer, Madrid. These speakers, front line testimonials of mediation among those demanding asylum and the institutions, explained in their interventions precise data of situations, cases, dates as well as treatments and answers received from European administrations. These organizations are very relevant for this research because of their high specialization in the subjects they deal with and the solvency of their information that

can be verified. On the other hand, the second debate panel in this same context described earlier, took place one month later, in November of 2011. In it participated Pascale Navarra from Amnesty International, Switzerland; Selly Thiam by None on Record, United States and Leticia Rojas, Esther Esther M., Carmen Romero Bachiller and Loreto Ares. Since 1998 Navarra works with women migrants and is an activist in QueerAmnesty, founded in 19978 as part of the Amnesty International organization and works in that setting with LGBTQ persons who are refugees from Africa and the Middle East. Thiam lives in New York, she is a journalist and founder of the project “None On Record” in 2006 about LGBTQ migrants from Africa in the world. She is a racialized person and declares herself to be queer. Ares is a researcher of the LGBTQ fact from the Islam religious variable. Carmen Romero Bachiller is a sociologist, researcher of the Complutense University of Madrid, specialist in migrations, diasporas, feminisms and queer theory. Esther M. is an activist, researcher and university professor of gender, race and sexuality. Rojas is an activist, trans-feminist, trans-national of Ecuatorian origins. In the debate as we will see, they illustrate very diverse cases dealt with by their organizations about queer African diasporas, offering us the chance to unveil identical discriminatory behaviors in very diverse countries.

An interview is also done of the queer South African artist and photographer Zanele Muholi (Plate 6) who presents her work *Isilumo siyaluma*, a Zulu expression that means in which way menstrual pain accompanies women who experience complex situation both in South Africa as well as the rest of the continent. Muholi’s work is done with menstrual blood on paper and canvass done between 2006-2011 and as she declares, was created as a response to the violent hate crimes towards the queer population in her country.

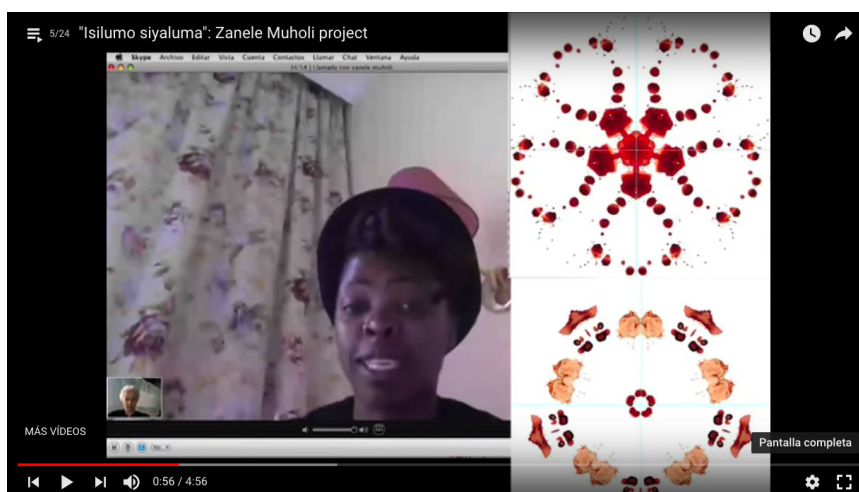


Plate 6- Toxic Lesbian, *When you pay with your life for loving in Africa*, 2011.  
Interview with Zanele Muholi about her project titled ‘Isilumo Siyaluma’.

All of these sources are available in video and there is a document that sums up the transcription of each one of the interventions.

Lastly, other videographic sources extracted from research presented in two communications media: British daily paper The Guardian and international television Aljazeera. Both document with cases and precise facts, the so called ‘therapeutic rape’ that are equally described in the interview with Muholi. Their information will be contrasted by news taken from the organization Amnesty International. Lastly, another video is contributed with the declaration of the commissioner of Human Rights of the United Nations in which a presentation is done of a debate defending LGBT persons in 1994, as of the interposition of a lawsuit placed against this organism by an Australian activist, of the so called Toonen dossier against Australia.



## Results

As of the sources mentioned, one is identified which will be recognized as persecution parameters of lesbian women, clitoris ablation, in the story of Marianna:

In Senegal, the ablation is practiced but since now there are associations that fight against it in my country, my parents decided to not have it done to me. However, when I was 17 they found out I was a lesbian. Then my grandmother said that this was because they had not followed the tradition: that their daughter, myself, was ill and it was necessary to do it to me. They believed that doing the ablation to me would cure me, so they did it to me. They believed that the woman must belong to the man and if she is in love with another woman this is because she is ill, so it is necessary to do the ablation to her, to cure her. (Marianna, 2011:1)

In this same sense, and going in depth in this perspective, several communications media illustrate another gender repression method: the so called 'therapeutic rape'. News obtained reveal first person testimonies where these hate crimes are narrated such as that of Mohoebi, a victim in South Africa of what is also described as "corrective rape", attacked because of her condition of being a lesbian by a man who wanted to make her heterosexual. Since 1994 when this country had its first democratic elections, lesbians became more visible and requested that their rights be included in the new constitution. The community did not integrate them in the same manner. This public exposition had the opposite effect, making them more vulnerable and in danger. In this same year, Amnesty International corroborates these facts displayed in the press and which contrast with legalization of LGBT marriage in that country. So, in 2008 it denounced the group rape and knifing of Eudy Simelane and in 2011 the brutal rape and murder of the also lesbian and activist Nxolo Nogwaza. That same year, the organization continues documenting, another lesbian woman is knifed on her way home with her girlfriend. In that same vein South African queer artist Zanele Muholi who uses menstrual blood in her project *Isilumo siyaluma* to, as she declares: "... to build something beautiful, aesthetic, thinking of South Africa as a country with a very advanced constitution and establishing a parallel between this magnificent legislation on paper and the crude reality to which many of us are exposed to" (Muholi, 2011:10). The work is designed on paper by means of geometric patterns. Each design, as she explains, has the name of a new case of violation in her country of a lesbian woman. For the artist activism is indispensable in this situation in order to secure safe spaces that stop aggressions. In the interview with Toxic Lesbian she describes how even after suffering the abuse, the victims are stigmatized by society, with them bearing the brunt of the crime. Rapes are in themselves aggressions hard to narrate because of the invasion of privacy that they are produced in. In the setting of hostility also added in these circumstances, the hostility towards those suffering and surviving the attack, is harder to denounce them because of the treatment they receive in police instances and later in social media. This means that a great number of these attacks are not made visible and are left unpunished. Take into account the most common narrative of males about this type of events, which matches these examples we see in the press mentioned here: "They are lesbians because of a failed relationship in the past and then they turn into lesbians", "... if a boy tries to explain to a girl which is the right way, if he rapes her and teaches her, he is only showing her how it is done correctly", "One needs to stay far from them, they are not like us, normal people, they are not natural". These statements are the usual norm of a society that is persistently lesbophobic and justifies with these words these forms of violence against women.

Another fact to be taken into account and which arises in investigations is how the justice applied by the neighborhood itself is common in Africa for certain "crimes" considered as so by the community. This way of acting is more relevant when it comes to ways of acting for women, exposed to public censorship by

what is considered a behavior code that is necessary and to be abided by. The story of Rachel shows this circumstance in which capital punishment for breaking patriarchal sexuality rules is imposed from the street:

...it is the population that puts your life in danger, they do what they want with you. We are surrounded by social condemnation, they make us responsible for many things, they say we are abominable for society. Your own family can put you in danger...

We tried to keep it hidden, but her mother persecuted her and she found the two of us and started shouting and making a scandal in the neighborhood. We had to move to another district but she chased after us. In the last one we went to, I was absent and when I returned home I found a crowd on the street and asked a neighbor who explained they had hit the seamstress because she was a lesbian. At that moment I only had one thought in mind, I had to leave and disappear. My partner was beaten with sticks, they took her to a hospital and she died there a few days later because of a heart failure: (Rachel, 2011:2)

This same circumstance is explained by Eric: "In my country homosexuality is penalized. I had serious problems there and was beaten in my own neighborhood". (Eric, 2010:13)

Thus we observe two persecution parameters in lesbians that are not taken into account in the interviews that are followed in European asylum processes, ablation and 'therapeutic rape', and the aggravation of a lack of an articulated legal process in their countries of origin that can prove with proof that they have been persecuted because of their lesbianism. As we have seen, "social justice" is frequently applied directly by the neighborhood, with no official protocols that generate documentation. An example of the consequences that a specific case has, can be seen during the debate carried out in the Complutense University. In it more details of how Rachel must prove she is a lesbian before the Belgian justice are explained so her request can prosper and more specifically she must state with proof that she has been prosecuted for this reason. However, based on the recounting of the facts that Rachel provides, this is not possible, which provokes the denial of her request of asylum in the first case.

In this same sense, organizations offering data during this encounter that reveals the difficulties that Spanish law for foreigners interposes so those demanding asylum or migrants themselves may remain in Spanish territory. For example, the mistrustful way in which petitions are processed that tend to consider these requestors of asylum as hidden financial migrants, which provokes subsequent increase of proof of homosexuality by the administrations. To illustrate this fact we see that in the case of Eric, when he presents his request both his homosexuality and having been persecuted is questioned. As stated by the representative of Amnesty International, officially homosexuality is only recognized if the requestor can prove he has been an activist in his country or if he has been detained while maintaining a relationship with a person of the same sex and this is stated in the complaint. None of either suppositions can be applied to Eric's case, thus his petition is also initially rejected.

As we can see in the description of the lifestyles of lesbians in Africa that Rachel offers us, any of this protocol proofs by the administration to prove homosexuality are inaccessible for queer women in these contexts:

It is difficult to live a homosexual love, fear paralyzed me, I would have wanted to go towards the women before, but I was afraid. When I was older another girl ran the risk like I did. You have to hide your relationship, that you have fallen in love, it is impossible to prove you are a lesbian. You don't know what can happen the next day. It is dangerous, you are constantly exposed. (Rachel, 2011:2)

Marianna ratifies during the interview an identical story that takes place in another country, Senegal:

I was dating another girl, but hidden. When my uncle found out, he denounced us at the police but he didn't even have time to come as the people got here first. They banged on the door, we did not want to open the door but they broke it down, they dragged us out and beat us. The police took us to a hospital. Because of these wounds my girl died. When I found out, I escaped... I would like to see my parents again but I wonder if they would want to see me. If you are a lesbian they classify you, you are sick, you are not normal, you no longer have any friends. Even if you wanted to go and see a friend there, they would not let me enter their homes, the mothers would tell me that I am going to harm their children that you are not normal... You become afraid of approaching people. (Marianna, 2011:1)



**Plate 7- Toxic Lesbian, *When you pay with your life for loving in Africa*, 2011.**  
Open dialogues in Matadero, Madrid, November 2011.

Navarra exposes her experience with asylum requestors and legal court instances describing how only 20% of the cases requested in Switzerland are those of women and they do it by finally admitting they have been persecuted for reasons of sexual orientation or gender identity. Paradoxically, the first problem they have to face is that they themselves do not recognize themselves when their cases are open and the main cause for fleeing their countries was their homosexuality. They have a credibility problem as the interviews are carried out in an Eurocentric way as Navarra explains, and they are not ready for this type of questioning, behind closed doors, almost always alone before men. To this one needs to add that as most do not speak the language a translation is requested from people of their country without knowing if they are true to their own story. At times they are insulted by these translators who censure their behavior openly. All of this produces situations of ongoing humiliation during the process which generates great insecurity in their narration that does not culminate in a structured tale, thus finally many claims are rejected. Many of these people are also traumatized because they believe that they have not answered as requested and abandon the asylum request process because of their sexual orientation to not be subject to this degrading treatment again. Carmen Romero Bachiller (Plate 7) explains that from the European perspective no other modes of being homosexual are conceived that are not those experienced in a Western environment, without opening law to the casuistry of other cultures and social situations clearly different as we can see. She provides the intersectorial tool in order to analyze in its complexity these cases without which it is impossible to include them. The Ecuatorian activist Rojas denounces these procedures of asylum that state multiple neo-colonial situations, frontier situations, in which sexual violence is aggravated against men and women. She asks how to carry out a de-construction of racist practices that are established through the institution. In this vein the case presented by the attorney representing the CEAR in Spain is very paradigmatic about a lesbian in Cameroun. Pietro C. tells us how this woman is interviewed by a woman public servant, a male interpreter and a female attorney. He points out how the narrations obtained in this context are very sparse, without in them it being determined exactly what happened nor provide the data that could enable her to access her

right to asylum. In this case it was denied initially as, as stated in a later resolution, the story lacked credibility and did not coincide with the information of the country of origin. CEAR appeals this negative and within a period of time that is very short, to interview the claimant again, who must repeat her story but this time an attempt to gain her trust is done by explaining what a borderline situation she is in and the danger of being deported in 48 hours. Her request is presented anew, in the airport, at the frontier and through an express procedure. Data is crossed of the interview with information of the country extracted from sources such as Amnesty International of Human Rights Watch, where denouncement of persecution because of sexual orientation are done in Cameroun. However, denial is done a second time stating insufficient explanation although 15 pages were presented (the result of a 6 hour interview). Besides data was rejected that had been provided about the country of origin, including the civil code of Cameroun that punishes homosexuality with jail and fines. The battle against time in the frontier, as explained by CEAR, is almost impossible to win to obtain a favorable asylum response. This claimant was deported to her country of origin in a three day period after these interjections.

As we can see, the questions made to women demanding asylum in order to determine their sexual orientation in the case of women does not coincide with the socialization customs or the situations these groups really live in the territory but respond to the models of gay western men. This invisibility is aggravated, as stated as Glennys de Jesús (Plate 8), lawyer of Women's, who iterates from the experience of her organization of the facts we are analyzing as they are women who have had a trajectory of great violence and do not know under what right they are requesting asylum. Besides, they are interrogated by a man who they do not know and until this moment have never spoken openly about their homosexuality and in this moment also cannot think of how to do it. The story they are going to be able to articulate will be a mixture of political problems, rapes, but they will not mention their homosexuality as the cause of it all. Of course, the person doing the interview also does not ask them from that perspective. Also consider the place the interviews are done: a police station or official building, with men in uniform in a closed room... nothing invites talking openly about their lesbianism. And if they also have a problem with their gender identity, they enter a state of panic and the stories they can tell lack coherence.



**Plate 8- Toxic Lesbian, *When you pay with your life for loving in Africa*, 2011.**  
Open dialogues in Matadero, Madrid. October, 2011.

Also the cases of Anitta, Jeanne and Aline will be rejected consecutively in first instance because in their files it is determined that they are not “true lesbians” and the persecutions “did not take place really” (as testified by the representative of Amnesty International who has enabled us to have access to official

dossiers). These resolutions are produced because of answering negatively during the asylum commissions to questions that are type when opening their files and are addressed to determine their life styles. Again the questions revolve around their frequenting nighttime gay places, activist offices or aggressions produced in public spaces (factors that are all suitable for queer identities in African males, and above all possibilities that they would arise more in Western media). The people mentioned above coincide in that lesbians do not socialize in the public area but rather keep to themselves in the private area as noted in the life stories mentioned earlier.



Plate 9- Toxic Lesbian, *When you pay with your life for loving in Africa*, 2011.  
Sessions with Anitta, Jeanne, Aline and Irène.

The members of the debate panels ask themselves how to make a deconstruction of the racist practices set up from the institution and which we see described here. In this sense, for example, the attorneys at CEAR ask why, during the first interview that is done by civil servants of the Interior in these protocols that are done with such a lack of time and applied at the frontier to requestors of asylum, it is not included at that time certain questions and the style of communication be changed if not because this way precisely avoids the situation from appearing in its totality and this would unmistakably permit access to asylum.

Another point of analysis from the narrations of Rachel, Irène, Marianna, Anitta, Jeanne and Aline is the lack of an intersectorial point that would enable evaluating exclusions suffered as women, but also because they are black, or in the case of exile, impoverished and finally, queer. We take note that the term queer for this context is applied to describe the lesbian identity of these women. LGBTQ activism in Africa rejects the term gay or lesbian because it is considered Western and with this, the definition that this culture and identity involves, ensuring the description of these identities from their own experiences.

The intersectional perspective as we can see in depth in *Intersecciones: cuerpos y sexualidades en la encrucijada* (Intersections: bodies and sexualities in the crossroads) published by Lucas Platero (2012), proposes studying the complexity of identity from multiple inequalities that cross it. This approach arises precisely as of black feminist suffragists in the United States and which include an awareness of successive discriminations suffered by black American women. Angela Davis published in 1981 “Women, Race and Class” which serves as a base for development of this essential concept for the growth of feminism in later years.

To illustrate the importance of this point of view, we value what Catherine Goffrau contributes, she directs Merhaba which has its headquarters in Brussels. This organization works with persons in the context of LGBTQI coming from the African continent or Muslim countries. It is created because when going to traditional LGBTQI organizations they suffer rejection: even if they have in common sexual orientation, the



same problems of racism or xenophobia persist that the population in general has, which means added stigma. Besides the types of problems they have in conventional associations, for example, “coming out” are unthinkable for these other queer profiles, thus they do not perceive a real consideration of their situation. Besides, since they are a growing type of migration in Europe, in 2002, the Belgian public administrations has the need to create this specific network for attending them. As we can see, Merhaba is an organization that works from an intersectional perspective as of experience with these LGBTQI populations. To coordinate itself in the new tasks at the beginning, Merhaba notices the great ignorance about this reality and the lack of professionals trained as these were situations described in this context in Europe for the first time. Asylum centers were also unprepared for the LGBTQI subjects.

To conclude the analysis of results obtained, we focus on the data that Glennys de Jesus offers us as of the reports of Women’s and which portray another form of persecution with strictly gender parameters: forced prostitution. In Almeria in 2009 they published the results of a research of cases of discrimination because of gender and race on Subsaharan migrants. A great percentage of them are in this province. The organization wishes to point out that not all are migrants with a conventional profile, in other words, their migration is not approached as owners of the process and in an autonomous way. An important number of them are victims of slave trade, for sexual exploitation or work exploitation. These are facts that are very invisible which court authorities never explain what happens to the victims when the network is dismantled or what led them to fall into it, for example. Women’s Link Worldwide again and with an inter-sectorial perspective denounces how in the slave trade a great number of fundamental rights are violated. In this same report mention is made of the great number of Sub-saharan women that are included in these statistics – Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Mali, among others. They present a situation of extreme vulnerability, lacking documentation, irregularly in the country, living in crowded conditions with deficient services, practicing prostitution lacking hygienic conditions or access to health services, without mobility. Blackmail is easy because they lack identity papers. They get pregnant several times and their children also lack papers, the children lack identity papers that prove their existence. It is all a manifestation of gender violence, like Glenys de Jesus explains. In an unbelievable way, and even being victims of all these violations of their basic rights in a flagrant way, when they request asylum the administration’s answer is always negative.

## **Conclusions**

The interviews and research panels propitiated in the setting of this project, concluded in the artist residence of Toxic Lesbian in El Ranchito, Matadero, Madrid, in its phase of construction of pieces and presentation of the works (Plate 10), explain in an evident way the discriminatory treatment that European organisms offer in the cases of dissident sexualities such as queer identity in persons coming from most African nations. For this a conclusion is drawn about the necessary specificity that should be involved in research methods, story telling or interposition of any mediation be it either judicial or other, with the cases of queer migrants that are in the female spectrum. A clear appreciation is done of the total ignorance about the practices of socialization of lesbian women and, until very recently, as stated by representatives of Amnesty International Or ILGA World, and not even human rights organizations established at the beginning of the year 2000 which were the models of persecution of queer women identities to the degree there were no cases in the census.



Plate 10- Toxic Lesbian, *Cuando amar en África lo pagas con la vida*, 2011.  
Videocreación.

In the second place as we have seen, a great amount of the attacks suffered by lesbians go by unpunished. In several countries homosexuality is punished, not lesbianism, by the existing male culture that is phallus centered. This implies that it is left to one side and is invisibilized, the same as the punishment that the social context wishes to apply to this cause. About the origin of these modes of procedure, we have to take into account that in African countries where queer identities are prosecuted we can consider they are a reflection of that society but we see that these laws and customs have their start since the European colonization, before they were inexistent. In this sense we can mention the report of 2015 by Human Rights Watch where it is stated that half 'the laws that prohibit sodomy' in the world and that are used to criminalize homosexuality, are a direct consequence of the British, French and Portuguese colonial dominance, in other words, they are found in ex colonies that are British, French and Portuguese. This is backed by the fact that when Europe started abandoning its colonies after the Second World War, most of the new independent African States decided to maintain the constitutions of their colonial times, which included these homophobic laws that have lasted until today. This reflection of Victorian morality is seen in the consensus of most part of the Africans about homosexuality being bad and being something not African, in other words, coming from abroad and introduced by the 'foreigner' in Africa, as stated by Wikipedia. American researcher Kim Yi Dionne (2013) goes in depth in these circumstances giving causality to the difficulty of changing the colonial heritage because of strong instability and the wars that have beriddled Africa. She adds the impopularity of homosexuality by colonial culture, the propaganda argument used by the new African leaders speaking against homosexuality above all during election times. This same author in research published by the University of Pennsylvania explains how the arrival of evangelical and Pentecostal preachers frequently from the United States use the homophobic discourse to reach adepts, speaking in their sermons about the supposed threat of homosexuality to African culture and their own children, in an openly populist manifestation that seeks increasing prejudices that the native population can assimilate.

Also, we have reflected how the right of asylum is almost never exerted for suffering this type of persecution but when it does and if it is because of gender or orientation, as of cases such as forced marriages, therapeutic rape, ablation or forced prostitution, we observe the incapacity of European authorities to understand these forms of violence, their complexity, the multiplicity of persecutions and the infringement of rights it implies. These abuses are denounced in a hetero-normative society, hetero-compulsive incapable of identifying this type of problem. Although it has been verified that there is an existence of civil servants that are very unprepared also the public policies destined not to guarantee certain rights are also there. Both due to omission as well as action.

Finally, we point out how all the persons participating in this study describe sexual violence although it is used against men and women, it is not neutral as far as the gender. It is used in different and symbolic ways in each case. In women to convert them to the gender pattern (they are married, they are raped), in effeminate men it is a punishment. In one, it is corrective, in the other, punitive. Both are sexual violence but the means and symbology is different. It is a form of control. The punishment applied to lesbian women in their countries of origin when they are persecuted is related more than in the case of men with breaking their sexual rights (rapes, named corrective, ablation as cure for homosexuality, forced marriages). What is on the line in the case of women is the version of femininity that is hetero-patriarchal, an aspect that is put into doubt by lesbianism. This is a case of exercising dominance of masculine things over feminine things.

The commissioner of the United Nations states that since 1994, in which favorable resolution was done of the dossier of Toonen against Australia, over 30 countries have taken measures to derogate these discriminative laws, they have even passed others that penalize those that discriminate for these reasons. However, and in the same way, homosexuality is still a cause for legal persecution in over 70 nations where the only crime committed to argument it is to love another human being.

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