



## Triangle Project comment on the matter of Shaun Westley and *the Daily Voice*

Triangle Project is an Cape Town-based LGBTI human rights organisation that works in communities throughout the Western Cape. For over 30 years, Triangle Project has been tirelessly challenging homophobia and transphobia including instances of hate crimes and the denial of access to services for over 30 years.

We work with numerous local and national publications including the *Daily Voice* who we frequently cooperate with and contribute to. This particular submission expresses and explains our objection to the use of the word 'moffie' as used by *the Daily Voice* in a headline and article. Since many people still fail to recognise the significance and insensitivity of such a phrase, this letter serves to enlighten readers to the derogatory nature of the term and the damage that hateful language can inflict as a driver of violent actions.

### "Moffie" as a slur and hate speech

There is a long history of "moffie" being used as a slur against LGBTI people and gay men in particular. Speaking over 20 years ago at the infancy of democracy, Mail and Guardian editor-at-large, Shaun De Waal expressed that: "The word 'moffie' has had an overwhelmingly derogatory implication, based on homophobic social responses." The social context (one of overwhelming heteronormativity) that generated the term and continues to sustain it as a derogatory slur against gay men, means that, regardless of alternative understandings or definitions, we cannot carelessly use such a phrase. Whilst some may argue that the term is harmlessly used to denote gay men of a certain disposition or character, this neglects its ongoing and frequent employment to denigrate and degrade gay men of all description. A similar example of such a term is the controversial use of the N-word, that has strong cultural and historical links to racial subjugation but has to a certain extent been reclaimed by certain communities for their own internal use, whilst externally, the term is still used in a derogatory fashion.

### Links between hate speech and hate crimes

South Africa does not currently have a crime category for hate crime nor does it criminalise hate speech. Therefore, when we refer to hate speech in this context, we understand it as speech which is designed to humiliate, intimidate, insult or provoke violence against a certain group. Similarly, hate crimes would be common law crimes, the motive for which is due to the victim's real or perceived sexual orientation, national origin, religion, race or other factors like occupation.

Triangle Project has considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that hate speech is often a first step for those who later go on to commit more physically violent crimes against others. The use of hate speech, through harmful language or the use of derogatory slurs,

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can be a gateway to more serious crimes. There is a wealth of evidence to show that hate speech plays a significant role in inciting violence against certain groups. It does this through encouraging such violence directly, as well as establishing an “acceptable” discourse which, for some, makes it appropriate and even justified to target certain groups. The pervasive use of terms like “moffie” to denigrate and degrade encourages an entrenched system distinguishing between the “normal” and the “other” and thus dehumanizing the latter and all those who occupy that space.

Hate speech is often used as a tool and driver of dehumanisation of certain groups, with this dehumanisation leading to violence against these identities. This has been experienced throughout history by minority groups, with the most extreme examples including the dehumanisation of European Jewish people prior to the Holocaust and of the Rwandan Tutsis prior to the 1994 genocide. In both these examples and often in such situations, presumably “harmless” hate speech has entrenched behaviors and attitudes of oppressive “othering” which in turn dehumanizes entire communities and allows for perpetrators of later violence and even genocide to feel justified in their actions.

We contend – and there is considerable evidence to substantiate as much – that dehumanizing speech has a clear link to later acts of violence against the group. This does not mean that every time a term is used, it can be directly linked to a crime, but that rather each time a word is used it helps create a climate where such violence is acceptable and justified in the eyes of assailants and their supporters.

## Context of violence against LGBTI persons

There are few reliable statistics on the levels of violence against LGBTI people due to the lack of hate crimes legislation as well as pervasively low levels of reporting by LGBTI people who are fearful of secondary victimization by police or the judiciary. However, through Triangle’s own monitoring of such cases, we can discuss trends in the crimes we are aware of.

These trends include, among others:

- 1) the use of demeaning and derogatory language before, during or after the attack such as “moffie”, “istabane”, “we’ll show you you’re a woman”.
- 2) the use of extreme violence against victims, including the desecration of corpses and “overkill” in the methods used to inflict pain or death;

This extreme violence, coupled with high vulnerability and low levels of reporting means that LGBTI persons are some of the most at risk in the country for violent interpersonal crimes like assault, rape and murder. Triangle Project is continually monitoring these types of cases, and in the past few months have been involved in the investigations and prosecutions of several such cases. including the separate brutal murders (and subsequent insensitive reporting) of David Olyne and Pheobe Titus and numerous rapes and assaults against other LGBTI people on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Both Olyne and Titus were referred to as “moffie” prior to their murders, showing that this term, whatever its casual use, is used from a place of deep hatred and discrimination.

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## Triangle Project's position on using "moffie"

Triangle Project has previously raised the issue of the use of this word in the press as derogatory, sensationalist and dehumanising. While we understand that there is a need to depict the harsh reality of what has occurred in many of these crimes, the fact that the word is printed in full and as part of a headline shows a lack of sensitivity that would not go unnoticed if the slur was racial in nature. We believe that the use of the term in headlines – and on roadside poster boards for the paper – is not linked to the larger discussion of the article but instead serves to perpetuate the use of a word that is harmful and derogatory.

Whilst we applaud the coverage of such issues, we respectfully submit that the *Daily Voice's* use of the term "moffie" is unjustifiable and serves to further stigmatise a vulnerable group of South Africans and, although not intentionally, indirectly plays a role in creating a climate where more attacks are possibly encouraged and legitimized.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Clayton', enclosed within a thin, hand-drawn oval.

Matthew Clayton  
Research, Advocacy and Policy Manager  
Triangle Project

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