July 2014

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On June 17th, 2011, history was made at the United Nations Human Rights Council in

Geneva, Switzerland when a resolution defining the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and

Transgendered (LGBT) persons as "Human Rights" passed with a 23:19 majority. Aside from the

fact that this was the first of its kind specifically recognizing the rights of LGBT persons

internationally, this novel measure was also surprisingly introduced by a Sub-Saharan African

nation- South Africa. As a country with its own sordid history of human rights violations, and as

a member of a continent notorious for its intolerance of homosexuality, South Africa has quickly

become a heralded and instrumental poster-child for gay rights in the transnational arena.

Yet, some still discount the notion that South Africa both as a contemporary state and

what former Archbishop Desmond Tutu terms a 'Rainbow Nation' of possibility, prosperity, and

inherent respect has overcome its sordid affair with Apartheid; particularly in how it relates to its

LGBT constituency (Habib, 1997). In effect, examinations of South Africa's queer community

tend to exist along a duopoly between this more internationally-sound narrative of a 'free LGBT

life' and that which, as a recent and potentially watershed article in the Johannesburg City Press

argues, 'has been hijacked' from them in the name of a more idyllic commercial for equality

(Johannesburg City Press, 2012). Having spent the past two summers living and working in

South Africa, I had the opportunity to observe its Queer culture and advertisement for sexual

equality while at the forefront of human rights NGO *Black Sash*. When I first returned to

Lexington in 2011, I did so with a new-found affinity for this aspect of the region's vibrant

complexion and began working on a far-reaching approach to its record of same-sex relations

through the University of Kentucky's Department of Gender & Women's Studies. Through archival research, conversations, and autoethnography I, too, began to see these conceptualizations of freedom and equality as problematic; specifically in how expected ascriptions to the 'Rainbow Nation' promise both critically affects the queer individual's freedom of expression while serving as a mechanism for extant hierarchies.

This curiosity informed my most recent return to South Africa, and motivated an exploration in to how social class, race, and locality as previously valued by Apartheid still mediates identification and performance of sexual orientation in the country's gendered landscape. Because this is a distillation from a much larger project, I will only focus on how these concepts underscore South African Queer culture through membership, space, and stylistics. These relational constructs intersect in an illustration of how this environment directs a field of sexual politics that conspicuously masks racial hierarchies with finance, and sets LGBT South Africans in perpetual movement between venues in which they must compete against or compromise for their heritage in order to 'pass.' In these contexts, I argue that Apartheid oppression is reframed rather than absolved, and continues to prevent a universal extension of the 'Rainbow Nation' promise.

Methodology

The field research presented in this paper was conducted in South Africa during August 2012. Those who were informally interviewed include four men and seven women; 36% Caucasian, 45% Colored (Mixed-Race), 9% Black, 9% Asian (N=11). These respondents came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, and demonstrated perspectives which highlighted the significance of their careers, relationship status, or role in NGO activity. While no personally

identifiable information was collected, the content of their reflections were preserved for analysis. This subsection of a larger and more diverse sample contributes to a comprehensive enquiry of South African same-sex relations.

Archival research was also completed at numerous sites, including the *National Libraries & Archives of South Africa* in both Cape Town and Pretoria, and the *Gay & Lesbian Memory in Action* Library in Johannesburg. Observations were recorded in public spaces at the *University of Cape Town* and the City Centres of Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Cape Town; with particular interest to the nightclubs of *Stargazers*, *Crew*, and *169 on Long*. NGO offices dedicated to LGBT rights, counseling, and consciousness-raising were also surveyed.

The Exclusivity of Inclusion

Marching through the streets of Johannesburg in traditional *Zulu* dress, a group of women carrying a banner reading 'Breaking the Silence of Lesbians in Africa' at the city's 1997 Pride Parade became one of the most memorable images from the celebration (Morgan & Reid, 2003). In exposing the limited accounts of female homosex in the records that escaped Christian-colonialist censorship, the collective claimed that there was profound history of homosexuality, both as a practice and an identity, on the continent which until recently had not been explored.

Jumping back half a century, through the struggle against Apartheid, this argument attesting to diverse, indigenous, and same-sex practices in Africa was cornerstone to a growing pan-African network of LGBT associations (Epprecht, 2006). These burgeoning advocacy organizations offered a counterargument to the 'white leadership thesis,' or the idea that the organized LGBT identity was only attributed to white, colonial, Afrikaner government's connections to global culture (Epprecht, 2001). Instead, these groups claimed that African

homosexuality pre-dated both colonialism and Apartheid. Reacting to centuries of legal and moral discrimination, the men and women of South Africa who enjoyed, desired to, and had committed a criminal offense by engaging in homosex, attempted to actualize under a shared theme of equality.

From the 1960's well in to the 1980's, a vibrant Gay-identified subculture with a politicized edge blossomed in the Western Cape; including a prominent publication, EXIT newspaper, which catered to those same-sex desiring South Africans attempting to both meet others and raise consciousness (Croucher, 2002). Like EXIT, other publications from subversive Gay organizations also perpetuated conversations of equality both within and outside of their communities. The Gay Association of South Africa (GASA), for one, became known for its commitment to inclusion and recognition of all community members. Their newsletters became some of the most widely published and available LGBT materials in the country, and served as catalysts for what became known as a 'Sundowner Culture' in which GASA members opened their homes for other Queer persons to meet, socialize, and discuss politics outside of the cruising-nightlife scene that remained vulnerable to police raids (GASA Rand Newsletter, 1986).

From 'Sundowners' geared towards Jewish and Christian Gays to Women or those seeking employment, GASA attempted to maintain an all-encompassing response to the needs and desires of what they termed as 'the whole' LGBT South African community. In their July 1985 issue, Gordon Issac's talk at the University of Cape Town entitled *South African Gays and Oppression: Some Psychological and Social Considerations* detailing a call for the community to 'actualize as a whole,' not to assimilate, and to eradicate former systems of oppression, was highlighted as a primary focus of the collective (GASA Rand Newsletter, 1985).

This core policy was put to the test in 1982 when one of their few black members was

jailed and put on trial for his involvement in the anti-Apartheid movement. Referring to its dedication to a non-militant approach to solving inequality, GASA refused to offer their support. The organization's indignant response and incapability of answering to the higher socio-political needs of their members brought more in to question than its future on the forefront of Gay rights activism (Croucher 318). The ways in which GASA recruited and catered to its members not only seemed to be reserved to a 'Sundowner Culture' of parties localized to privileged urban homes, but its conceptualization of a LGBT community as a whole was only seminal to those who could afford its opportunities. In other words, a person could only enjoy the benefits of such progressive and inclusive community if they lived within reasonable distance of an urban 'Sundowner' while in the same vein reproduced its exclusivity through a blind adherence to appropriate behavior, performance, and resistance guidelines.

These ideas become particularly relevant when examining how such an exclusive-inclusive dynamic continues to define the relationship between social organizations and contemporary LGBT South Africans. Following the drafting of the country's first democratic constitution explicitly protecting sexual orientation rights, in 1999 Cape Town began welcoming LGBT tourists from around the world by marketing the city as 'The Gay Capital of Africa' (Croucher 316). The Cape Town Pride Committee organized just two years later, and began planning a large-scale event to celebrate their 'wonderful diversity' and to create 'awareness of issues in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Intersexed communities locally and throughout Africa' ("History of cape," 2012).

Typically held in February to coincide with the city's tourism season, Cape Town Pride has become a series of festivals, parades, and after-parties aimed at bringing the community together under a stated, shared theme of activism and consciousness raising; biodiversity/Rhino

poaching and the 'corrective rape' of Lesbians in townships have been the two most recent. This, however, has been a point of contention for Thomas, a former Cape Town Pride Committee member who spoke to me about his concerns about the organization. With a great deal of passion, and slight uneasiness if I may add, he lamented on the idea of 'themes,' and how the committee had become less interested in their effectiveness and even existence. Instead, becoming what he refers to as just 'a party,' Cape Town Pride 2012 was the only celebration organized by the committee to not have 'a theme.'

According to Thomas, this absence of political pretense speaks volumes to the future course of 'Pride,' and also begins to hint at other underlying socio-economic issues inhibiting the celebration's inclusion and representation of the community. Instead of 'taking Pride where it is needed,' as he suggests, it is perpetually staged in the streets, cafes, and nightclubs of Sea Point, one of Cape Town's most affluent and predominantly White neighborhoods known for its large LGBT population. While this may not seem too out of the ordinary for Western audiences expectant of a Pride set in New York's Greenwich Village or Chicago's Boystown, in the context of a post-Apartheid society with a history of forced removals and systematic disenfranchisement, large sections of the population continue to live outside of cities and of access to the social benefits they offer; especially to same-sex desiring South Africans.

The Cape Town Pride Committee seems to be cognizant of this, and has orchestrated teams of busses in the past to transport those who cannot afford any other means to and from their rural homes and townships to the city. Thomas, again, argues that this is merely superficial and serves only as an empty gesture of inclusivity. For one, the busses make only one run between their departure points and destination each day, leaving less than three or four hours on the ground in Cape Town during the festival's peak. This, of course, is when media covering the

'Gay Capital of Africa's' Pride celebration will record the most diverse community involvement and will bolster the committee's claims to representation regardless of race or socio-economic class.

As those who arrived in the city that morning are preparing to be shuttled back to their respective homes, others who do not rely on the bus service for transportation have the choice of a myriad of nightclubs such as *Stargazers*, *Crew*, or *169 on Long* that have opened their doors for 'after-parties' at double or even triple normal cover price. This restricts access to these venues and the social, entertainment, and sexual opportunities they provide to the privileged, or those who can afford to stay in the city and pay the cover fee; which, in society with a history of Apartheid legislation, consequently yields a Pride nightlife culture mediated by race and subsequent economic facility.

'Flyover Country' and the 'Emerald City'

'Taking Pride where it is needed,' in this frame, not only speaks to the restriction of locality and its privilege, but also begins to further emphasize the fallibility of South Africa's claim to an inclusive 'rainbow nation.' For one, the idea of location as an indicator of status seems to permeate through many aspects of South African society and, whether such is inherently tied to Apartheid politics or not, continues to define perceptions of 'the other' in relation to an urban norm. This said status can be articulated through a number of avenues, but each intersect the idea that the rural is both undeveloped and lacks the capacity for the complex social networks their urban counterparts boast.

City Sightseeing Cape Town, a quite recognizable addition to the Cape's tourism industry with its vibrant, red double-decker busses, attempts to provide its patrons with a thorough

introduction to the city's 'thriving heritage' with select stops along two routes, a wine tour, and a canal cruise (City Sightseeing Cape Town). On one of the better afternoons the Southern-Winter permitted, I finally took the liberty after three continents to rest my battered feet and indulge in the typical tourist-repertoire known as 'the guided tour.' As the bus winded through the narrow streets of the City Centre, around the Houses of Parliament, and up Adderly Street passing the train station, the automated guide began detailing the development and expansion of rail travel in South Africa. With an enumeration of a few significant dates and names, the recording ended with: 'from then on the people of Cape Town could enjoy a reliable connection, over the desolate and deserted lands of the Karoo, to Johannesburg ("City sightseeing cape," 2012).

Having driven through the Karoo just the day prior, I found this curious given that this region of the Western and Eastern Cape seemed just as populated as those suburbs included in the Cape Town metropolitan area. In addition, enterprise and opportunity seemed to have not left the various towns scattered along the N1 highway behind with their many game reserves, oil-drilling ventures, and recent 'Square Kilometer Array' project which aims to be the largest telescope of its kind in the world ("The square kilometer," 2011). While issues of employment availability may be of interest here, I find that these existing economic structures are often devalued and even overlooked in urban discourse. When speaking to participants in Cape Town about the Karoo, its role in neither tourism nor potential as a site for economic growth or astronomical enquiry were noted. As one respondent, a partnered, white, Gay male so eloquently put: 'There's nothing out there. Why would you even go?'

The contemporary LGBT community has a similar approach to the perspectives and even existence of same-sex desiring persons in rural townships. With little recognition of the potential facilities of identity or performance, explorations of LGBT life in these contexts tend to center

on fear, persecution, and lack of safe-spaces in which one can express themselves and/or meet romantic partners. Chandra, a NGO-activist and Lesbian living in Cape Town, described the tumultuous environment townships present for their LGBT inhabitants, and how for men and women alike the fear of corrective rape to 'treat' or 'punish' such *transgressive* sexual behavior inhibits their ability to seek assistance and 'get out.' With few opposing narratives and lack of initiative to explore functional identities in this frame, townships have become synonymous with ignorance and 'the closet.'

Dominique and Anna-Marie, students at the University of Cape Town, described much the same sentiment when speaking of Lesbian life in the townships. Expressing how fortunate they felt to be able to openly express their love for one another, they reflected on how news of corrective rape victims affected the appreciation and awareness of their privilege. What seemed the most surreal, and perhaps stirring, for them was how they noticed the lack of organized response in these areas. While they had a mutual understanding of why LGBT support groups cannot advertise their intentions to people who 'need' to conceal sexual orientation, they pointed to this tradition

Figure 1: Dominique and Anna-Marie, students at the University of Cape Town, discussed their perceptions of Lesbian life in the townships as well as their own experiences as a young, interracial couple in Cape Town.

of Cape Town Municipal Government and an assortment of NGO's paying for victims' funerals rather than actually attempting to solve what those bodies see as a 'lost cause.'

Thomas Averill, a professor of English at Washburn University, explores a similar effect in his home U.S. state of Kansas, where popular cultural references as the renown *Wizard of Oz* have inadvertently painted the commonwealth as 'obscure, desolate, and forgotten' (Averill, 1999). Relying on the breadth of academic query and economic ingenuity of the state, he

presents the idea of 'flyover country' to describe areas in public consciousness that have been written off as no-man's land in terms of culture or opportunity when compared to those of larger, more urban communities. Within this almost colonialist relationship between the urban and the 'other,' narratives, like Frank L. Baum's Dorothy, are only propagated in the service of a transmission from desolation to the ultimate terminus of an Emerald City and its array of previously inaccessible benefits.

Christina, a young woman who recently became the first in her family to return to Cape Town from being forcibly removed during Apartheid, briefly spoke to me about her experience growing up as a Lesbian in a social-environment saturated with conversations of fear, violence, and seclusion. In respect to those victims of corrective rape and hate crimes, she neither knows anyone this has happened to nor felt personally threatened because of her sexual orientation. Instead, as a 'former tomboy turned girly-girl,' she made light of the overwhelming pressure to conform to standards of appearance, behavior, and what it means to be a 'Gay woman' in order to 'fit in' with Cape Town's Lesbian scene. Her lack of performance or active engagement with other women in the township, as she puts it, was not entirely mediated by the fear of retribution but rather the idea that such were not possible or productive without first gaining the economic facility to make a move to the city. If this is the case, and performance of one's sexuality seems less fruitful simply because of the context of locality, then not only does this binary of city-township serve as a racial and class boundary but it also systematically disenfranchises those in 'flyover country' to remain in an emotional and physical state of seclusion. Coupled with their exclusion and devalued participation in LGBT culture, this again reinforces a Cape Town Gay and Lesbian scene for 'non-white,' 'previously' disadvantaged persons that hierarchically assigns access to the few who can afford its benefits.

Gelin': Former Systems of Oppression

  The pressures to conform to a pre-determined standard of Lesbian or Gay normativity, as illustrated in what Christina perceived as a necessary transition from 'tomboy' to 'girly-girl,' does not conclude with a move from 'township to city.' Rather, as one of the many expenses of membership to such an exclusive culture and its commodities, LGBT South Africans immigrating to cities in search of inclusion continue to fall ill to the same divisive racial and socio-economic rhetoric that fueled their original isolation. Herein, Christina, along with other participants who had made a pilgrimage to the city, seemed hesitant to discuss their experiences since having left their township.

  Thomas, the former Cape Town Pride committee member previously mentioned, attributes this uneasiness to discussing heritage or prior status of 'previously disadvantaged' in certain populations to its potential social implications. As a young 'Colored' man whose family, like Christina's, had been removed from the city to the 'Cape Flatts,' Thomas made a return to Cape Town through the means of higher education and later a municipal government position that served as a conduit to many of the Cape's NGO's and LGBT advocacy groups. Through his interactions with both friends and fellow activists, he notes how appearance and economic facility not only defines the social and romantic opportunities available to those new to the city but also determines the venues their presence is acceptable in. From high-end cars, the trendiest bars, and 'spending their last' on the latest fashions to even the use of skin-lightening lotions, he describes a field of sexual politics characterized by how well you can pass in a culture that has conspicuously replaced race with finance; all while sacking a well-to-do and typically White partner to affirm your credibility.

While the employment of 'skin-lightening lotions' may be an extreme case, I find the ways in which race and class serve as an intermediary to sexuality, romantic interest, and access to such the most salient when examining Cape Town's LGBT nightlife. Bobby Benedicto, Fellow at the Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, recently spoke in a Sexuality Studies plenary at The Ohio State University on what he terms a queer 'performing global diaspora' in which the international Gay nightlife circuit serves as a 'discontinuous nation' for third-world Gays and Lesbians to populate and use as a vehicle to a consistent, transnational queer culture (Benedicto, 2012). This said culture, in effect, continues to be informed through not only western ideas of queer performance but also seeks to connect LGBT-identifying persons globally through the replication of its stylistics. While Benedicto specifically cites ethnographic research conducted in metropolitan Manila, I feel a similar phenomenon exists in the perpetual liminality of LGBT Capetonians as they participate in a township-city-Queer culture hierarchy, and how certain aspects of performance intrinsically define admission to certain spaces along the way.

Christopher, a Gay, White man originally from Durban, spoke to me on the issues he and friends had noticed as patrons to some of Cape Town's LGBT hotspots, as well as the pressures to conform to a specific set of desired stylistics. While discussing the affordability of specific venues in terms of their target audience and locale, he mentioned an awareness of their racial composition and how social interaction in Gay-male establishments seemed to not be entirely defined by race, but by fashion, appearance, and the often requirement of straight, gelled-down hair.

Granted, I was not too keen on immediately subscribing to this idea of hair gel as a status symbol related to admissibility and sexual desire. As a LGBT person who had participated in the international Gay nightlife circuit both in and outside of South Africa, I had never felt that its

stereotypical images of acceptable performance and the social environments they influence

emphasized the need to gel-down my hair. Regardless, with a more attuned awareness, each

consequential patronage of the Cape's LGBT-friendly bars and nightclubs yielded dance floors

of predominantly White men donning dramatic, gelled hairstyles, with significantly fewer

Colored and even less Black men ostentatiously dressed with the latest Western 'mall brands' or

fashion designer labels.

It is with this dynamic that gel serves as a medium of expressing racial exclusivity and

begins to be used as a weapon of class warfare. The 'gelled hairstyle' is restricted to those with

straight locks of hair that can sustain such a styling. In this, hair becomes a marker of bio-genetic

superiority when social networks place value on its presentation and White-men draw upon their

privilege in such a way that compromises the recognition of those who cannot participate. This

systematic marginalization of an entire subsection of the population, again, maps itself along

lines of race and is further stratified by social class and economic facility.

In order to compete in these nightlife venues for the sexual, social, and romantic

opportunities they offer, Colored and Black LGBT South Africans must compensate for their

racial heritage through high-end fashion, the latest technology, and all-in-all, a blatant display of

their economic faculties. Those who cannot afford to make such concessions not only face

limited admission to these environments but also experience a restriction on their perceived

attractiveness and potential romantic-sexual success. This idea of passing in these spaces is not at

all dissimilar from the ways in which 'Sundowner culture' mediated its membership through

appropriate performances of sexuality and political activism. Phenomena such as this further

illustrate how inclusion and representation continue to be abbreviated rather than universally

realized in this context of the post-Apartheid, 'Rainbow' nation.

Conclusions

Since February 4th, 1997, when the country's first democratic constitution replaced Apartheid law, LGBT South Africans have celebrated and even heralded their government's distinctive inscription of their rights. Embracing this newfound collective experience of diversity, South Africa claims to have transformed the social landscape for those previously disadvantaged and has extended to each citizen the promise of possibility, prosperity, and inherent respect in what Tutu terms a 'Rainbow Nation.'

When examining this said promise at the critical intersection of sexual orientation, race, and socio-economic class, certain issues present themselves which call in to question the extent of its realization. It is here that Queer culture in these contexts has become a site of class warfare, and Apartheid politics continue to underscore economic facility with racial heritage. This, in turn, mediates both performances of and appropriate guidelines for sexual orientation in terms of membership, space, and stylistics. LGBT South Africans, in this frame, are geographically segregated from one another yet continue to move along the prescribed Township-City-Queer Culture hierarchy through spaces in which their performances can 'pass.' This is particularly salient in the case of Black and Colored LGBT persons, whose access to the city, Pride Celebrations, and nightlife venues is systematically restricted by how well they can compete against and/or compensate for their heritage through economic facility. Those who cannot afford to present themselves in a certain way, or make a move to the city, risk their representation in a Queer Culture that defies Gordon Issac's vision of an 'actualized' community and instead assimilates in to 'former systems of oppression.'

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