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Die Boerseun in die Volkspele Rok / The Boer's Son in the Volkspele Dress  
(Mis)performing masculinity in the Afrikaner Nation  
sntale001 Alexander V. Santillanes

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signed by candidate  
Signature:  signature removed Date: 16/2/07

# *Die Boerseun in die Volkspele Rok \**

*\*The Boer's Son in the Volkspele Dress*  
(Mis)performing masculinity in the Afrikaner Nation

Alexander Santillanes

University of Cape Town

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## *Prologue*

### Wedding-Wedding

“This is a little strange,” Bordeaux observed, looking at the table. He had just come in from the kitchen, carrying a coffee plunger and two mugs on a wooden tray. I had set up the table to work while he had been making coffee, but I could see now that, yes, the arrangement was a little strange. I had organized the table so that we were sitting directly across from one another, my laptop squarely in front of me, dividing the space between us.

“It looks a little like I’m an inquisitor,” I admitted. He agreed, and started to pour the coffee. I moved my laptop to the side, attempting to open up the flow of the table.

It was the middle of September, and the first time that Bordeaux and I were to sit down formally and work on writing his life story together. Over the previous several months I had been collecting fragmentary pieces of information, dense outlines of stories, and brief scraps of description in my field-notes. I now needed to go over those jottings with Bordeaux, so that he would know what I planned to include in the ethnography, and so that he could enhance or correct the stories I had collected. We were house sitting in Fish Hoek, a town to the south of Cape Town. The house was set right on False Bay, with only the tracks for the Metrorail dividing the backyard from the green waters beyond. Aside from the intermittent rumbling of a passing train, it was a quiet setting in which to work.

As he poured milk into the coffee, I looked down at my computer screen, and reviewed my notes. “I was thinking about starting with the wedding of Princess Diana. Is that fine?” He nodded, shrugging a little. “Tell me about that again. How old were you?” I set my hands on the keyboard, preparing to type as he talked.

“I was 4 or 5.” He stirred sugar into his coffee, and sat down. “It was 1981, so I would have been 5. That was when I was living in Paarl.”

“And what do you remember about the wedding?”

“Well, my mom was watching the wedding on television. I came into the room and asked what it was, and she told me that it was the royal wedding. So I sat down with

her and watched. Eventually she got up and left, and did other things. But I didn't move from the TV for hours. I just sat and *stared*."

"Your mom wasn't interested?"

"No, she was. She followed the royal family. She just had other things to do. She wasn't as taken with the wedding as I was. I was totally engrossed."

"What about the wedding fascinated you?"

"I remember all the pomp. I was really taken by the spectacle of it all. And I was absolutely fascinated by Princess Diana. She was smiling all the time, and looking very pretty. And the gown. Diana wore this beautiful gown, with this *long* train. I remember the designer of the dress came in and pulled on the train, straightening it. Prince Charles was there, but he was very dull. He wasn't nearly as interesting as Diana. I don't remember much of the ceremony. That was dull too. But I remember the kiss. After the wedding, Princess Diana and Prince Charles went out onto the balcony of the palace, and they kissed. That went into the game."

"The game?"

"Well, that weekend Beulah and René came over. Are you going to put their names into it?"

"Well, no, I don't have to. I can change their names. What do you think?"

"Sure. So Beulah had seen the wedding too, and we convinced everyone to play wedding-wedding. I think René was Charles, and everyone else was either a bridesmaid, the queen, or guests. Beulah was a bridesmaid I think, so she got to wear a pretty dress. She and I had the closest affinity. We were both into the wedding, and I think we really convinced everyone else to play, and we both got to wear pretty dresses."

"I feel bad for the kid who had to be the queen. Who were you in the game?"

"I was Princess Diana."

"And what was your dress?"

"We made a long train out of beach towels, by pinning them together. For the wedding gown, I wore an old blue nightdress of my mother's. I think it might have been something she wore on her honeymoon. I think maybe it was supposed to be sexy," he noted, grimacing slightly.

"Ooo, Afrikaner lingerie. What would that be?"

“Oh, I don’t know. A padlock. Anyway, after Beulah and René left, I wanted to continue playing. I tried to enlist my sister to play Charles, but she didn’t fall for it. She never liked to play dress up, especially wedding-wedding, since I would always make her kiss me at the end, which she didn’t like. My mom didn’t fall for it either. ‘Maybe you should be Charles,’ she suggested, but I wasn’t interested. Charles was boring. So I played by myself. I would put on the little blue nightdress, and traipse around the yard and house in it. Seeing this, my mother called me in to the house, and made a new outfit for me to wear when playing dress up. She cut up an old dress of hers, and made it into pants for me.”

“That was kind of clever. In a way, you still got to wear a dress.”

“Oh, I don’t think that was the intention,” he answered, thinking the idea over. “If so, I’m not giving my mom enough credit. I think it was just material she had. It was a really ugly dress. They made really ugly pants, too. They were printed in this awful design and they were kind of silver-gray in color. I always felt they kind of looked odd on me. And there was also a shirt, and a clip-on-tie that I could also wear. I got to play wedding-wedding, but now I had to be the groom.”

## *Introduction*

### Interpreting the space between

This ethnography is the result of a year spent in South Africa, during which I grew to know Bordeaux. I came to South Africa in February 2006, enrolling in the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town. In my application for admission to UCT, I had stated that I planned to study ethnographies written about African women. I was interested on ethnographic life stories: ethnographies written solely about one subject. I had been introduced to the topic in an undergraduate class devoted entirely to studying ethnographies written about single subjects. I wanted to study the anthropology of gender, and the way that the singular subject could be used in an ethnographic life story to understand a larger culture. I had planned, however, to explore these issues in a paper *about* ethnographies, completed through library research.

I met Bordeaux only a little over a month after I arrived in Cape Town, and we began dating soon after. At the time of our meeting, I was intensely focused on developing my dissertation topic, but as said, I was attempting to develop a topic based on ethnographies of African women. I had no plans to write an ethnography of my own, or to study homosexuality among Afrikaners. However, getting to know Bordeaux helped to reawaken an interest that I had developed several years earlier. I first visited South Africa in 2004, and had lived in Cape Town for several months while completing a research project on museum displays. During my brief stay I had learned a little about homosexual identity through meeting and speaking with different gay South African men. I had heard that coming out was more difficult for gay men from Afrikaner backgrounds than gay men from English backgrounds. When asked why, the answers were generally shallow, implying simply that Afrikaners were more conservative and religious, and thus less accepting of homosexuality. Some had also told me that masculinity was more important in Afrikaner culture, a point that I found interesting. The topic intrigued me, and I briefly considered doing a comparative study. But I had gone to South Africa to study another topic, and time would not have allowed for any comprehensive ethnographic research. I abandoned the topic, and nearly forgot about it entirely.



My interest in the topic didn't resurface until I met Bordeaux. From our first days of getting to know one another, Bordeaux would entertain me with stories of his youth and childhood. He is gifted with an excellent memory, and often enhances his stories with peculiar details and brilliantly re-enacted facial expressions and gestures. During an average conversation, he was often prone to paging through a copy of *Huisgenoot*, imitating an Afrikaner *huisvrou*,<sup>1</sup> or to leap up onto a chair and sing the old South African anthem with mock pride. It is fairly cliché to say that your ethnographic informant is a great storyteller, but to be fair I cannot imagine doing extensive research with someone who is not.

Bordeaux has the ability to comment on his culture with critical insight and distance, gained no doubt from the years he has spent abroad. His stories of his childhood in Paarl and his adolescence in Hoedspruit were often meant to be amusing, but they conveyed a deeper history and meaning than first suggested. In talking about childhood games, Afrikaans storybooks, his parents' chastisements, and his exclusion throughout high school, Bordeaux revealed a tremendous amount about the meaning and performance of masculinity within Afrikaner culture, and of the possible consequences of refusing to perform that role properly. His stories conveyed a remarkable history and experience, truly unique, yet telling of the larger setting and time in which he grew up.

I quickly (re)developed my interest in the role of masculinity and heterosexuality in the ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism, and I considered shifting my research to study masculinity and homosexuality within ethnography. Though these issues interested me greatly, I at first worried that the necessary research materials were not available. I came across a few novels and general interest books on Afrikaner homosexuals, but found almost no academic writing on the meaning of homosexuality in Afrikaner culture. Similarly, I knew of few ethnographies written about masculinity. In part, the male voice within anthropology is so naturalized that there appears to be a relative lack of reflection on the part of anthropologists on the nature of masculinity. It simply seemed easier to do research on ethnographies written by and about women, since feminist anthropologists have more often used the ethnographic format to comment directly on gender.

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<sup>1</sup> Afrikaans: *housewife*.

My interest in Afrikaner masculinity continued, however, and I was unable to garner the same passion for my research on ethnographies of African women. I came to realize that Bordeaux's stories were at the heart of my interest in Afrikaner culture, and not merely complementary to it. I had only known Bordeaux for a little over a month when I asked him to participate in this research project with me. He agreed, and this ethnography is the result.

The decision to write this as an ethnographic life history was necessitated primarily by my desire to make Bordeaux's stories central to my exploration of Afrikaner nationalism. However, it also stemmed from my interest in the critical potential of ethnographies written about single subjects. As I stated earlier, I had studied ethnographic life stories during my undergraduate years, and had been intrigued by the challenge they presented to traditional ethnographies. Some of the most compelling ethnographies of recent decades have been ethnographic life stories of individual subjects, such as Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa*, Vincent Crapanzano's *Tuhami*, Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola*, and Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman*.<sup>2</sup> Not only are these works among the most widely read ethnographies both within and outside of the discipline, but they also provide a means for challenging the conventions of traditional ethnography. The format has in particular been taken up by feminist ethnographers, who saw the generalizing within traditional ethnographies as a means for ignoring the experiences of women. Ethnographers have long claimed to represent whole cultures, while in truth only describing the experience of men within a society.

In her essay "Writing Against Culture", Lila Abu-Lughod argues for "ethnographies of the particular" as a strategy of challenging that process of generalization.<sup>3</sup> Ethnographies of the particular should work to explore the tension between people's everyday experience and the larger structures through which they are meant to make meaning of their lives. The goal of this research should be to gain a sense of interiority into people's lives, and to look at how people order their worlds. I feel that

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<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981; Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985; Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991; Ruth Behar, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture", in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. by R.G. Fox, School of American Research Press, 1991, pages 157-8.

this ethnography of Bordeaux, and ethnographic life stories in general, can work as a response to that appeal. Ethnographies of single subjects may work particularly well as a form of ethnography of the particular, as they can serve as a way to explore the lives of society's marginalized subjects, for whom the meaning of the self may contradict the larger meaning of their culture. Through examining Bordeaux stories, I hope that my ethnography will provide a unique perspective on Afrikaner nationalism during the height of apartheid.

This ethnography tells several stories. Primarily, it is Bordeaux's story of coming of age and coming out in a homophobic community during the height of apartheid. It is hopefully suggestive of the era and culture in which he grew up, and of the construction and performance of gender within the Afrikaner nation. It is an attempt at exploring how homosexuality is understood within his culture, and how Afrikaner nationalism and identity are understood from one who is positioned at the culture's margins.

Secondly, this ethnography is a story set in the present, of my desire to understand Bordeaux's experience, and of Bordeaux's own attempt at coming to terms with his sometimes-painful history. It is the story of a very particular 'field-work' relationship, and an exploration of how that shaped the research that I conducted. While I in no way wish to suggest that our work together was typical or representative of most anthropological relationships (there are certainly ways in which it was rather *atypical*), I hope that it may provide some general points of consideration for any type of research that arises out of the relationship between two individuals.

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I have chosen to present this ethnography in two parts. The first part is written in narrative form, and tells my experience of learning Bordeaux's history. This section is written in the first person from my perspective. While I could have written in the third person, presenting Bordeaux's story through the voice of an objective narrator, I did not want to feign an omniscient perspective that I do not have access to, or to lose the sense of how Bordeaux's past is formed and told in the present. And though I could have written in the first person from Bordeaux's perspective, I have some reservations about

performing what Faye Harrison has termed “ethnographic ventriloquism”,<sup>4</sup> erasing all traces of the relationship under which this ethnography was produced, and giving a false sense of complete interiority. The decision to write reflexively comes out of my desire to make the fieldwork relationship within the anthropological encounter visible.

Reflexive writing situated within the anthropologist-informant relationship may also open up the possibility for a different type of knowledge to be produced. In the introduction to *Mama Lola*, Karen McCarthy Brown states that her decision to write herself into her ethnography “was an acknowledgement that ethnographic research, whatever else it is, is a form of human relationship.”<sup>5</sup> She reflects on what effects this may have for the ethnography, noting: “When the lines long drawn in anthropology between participant-observer and informant break down, then the only truth is the one in between; and anthropology becomes closer to a social art form, open to both aesthetic and moral judgment.”<sup>6</sup> This ethnography does not make a claim for objectivity or impartiality. Instead, it is the product of research founded upon a relationship between two people, and has necessarily been aided and hindered accordingly. In fact, I would argue that it is from my position of subjectivity that this ethnography draws its strength.

The second part of this dissertation is a series of essays I have written commenting on Bordeaux’s history, and more generally, on Afrikaner culture and the performance of masculinity. In the first essay, “The Afrikaanse moffie and the queer ethnographer,” I explain my use of queer theory, and how it has shaped my anthropological methodology. By comparing my relationship with anthropology to Bordeaux’s relationship with Afrikaner culture, I explore the critical potential of forging an identity out of exclusion. Each of the following three essays analyzes Bordeaux’s experiences in relation to one particular thread of queer theory. The first, “The boy in his sister’s volkspele dress,” explores the issue of gender performativity as it was realized in Bordeaux’s life. Focusing on the writings of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, I attempt to read Bordeaux’s experience for signs of a disruption in the gender system. The third essay, “The knights of Bastion,” looks at the interplay between homosocial organizations

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<sup>4</sup> Faye Harrison, “Writing Against the Grain”, *Critique of Anthropology*, Vol. 13 No. 4, London: SAGE, 1993, pages 401-402.

<sup>5</sup> Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in New York*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, page 12.

<sup>6</sup> McCarthy Brown, page 12.

and homophobic exclusion. By analyzing moments when Bordeaux was excluded from men's groups and activities, I attempt to understand how hegemonic masculinity maintains its power. The last essay, "Racheltjie de Beer and the homosexual menace," looks at the threat of homosexuality in South Africa under Apartheid. I analyze the political situation of homosexuals in the 1980s in relation to two stories of Afrikaner children heroes, in an effort to explain how sexuality was understood within nationalistic Afrikaner mythology.

I had at first thought of writing this ethnography in five large essays, integrating Bordeaux's stories and my analysis in sections divided according to the different eras within Bordeaux's life. In the end, I chose instead to separate Bordeaux's stories and my analysis into two separate sections. In part, I realized that integrating the material in essays framed around periods in his life would limit the extent to which I could comment on themes that occurred throughout his entire life. Furthermore, I made this decision in deference to the integrity of Bordeaux's stories. I felt uncomfortable subsuming his experience within my analysis, using his life merely as an example for the points I wished to further. I asked Bordeaux once how he would organize his life; the order of the ethnographic narrative largely follows the framework he proposed. I would also like to emphasize that although my essays follow his life narrative in this ethnography, they are not meant to be the more authoritative text. The primary focus of this ethnography is Bordeaux's encounters with the values of his nation; my essays are merely an attempt to understand his experience, and to place it within a larger cultural-historical perspective.

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When anthropology first developed as a discipline, it was primarily concerned with documenting the lives of illiterate peoples who would likely never see or be able to read the finished ethnography itself. As time has passed, many of these peoples have become literate in the work of anthropology, and ethnographers can now be held accountable to the people whom they claim to represent.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, many former 'natives' have taken up careers in anthropology, and simultaneously the discipline has expanded to study a broader spectrum of the human population, including the urban, the

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<sup>7</sup> Abu-Lughod, page 158.

cosmopolitan, and the literate. In her ethnography on American drag queens, Esther Newton describes the experience of working with an unconventional ethnographic subject. "...I approached a female impersonator between shows in the bar in which he was working. I explained that I was an anthropologist at the University of Chicago and that I would like to interview him. [...] To my amazement, he replied that he had majored in anthropology in college and that he would willingly talk to me."<sup>8</sup> The ethnographer can no longer easily claim an unquestioned authority over the people whom he represents. In response, anthropologists have needed to develop a more sensitive methodology.

I will admit that I initially worked on the strange assumption that my ethnographic work should be carried out privately, almost clandestinely. Though Bordeaux had agreed to take part in the research, I did most of my writing when I was alone in my apartment, and I rarely discussed the actual work with him. Perhaps I thought that the best results would be achieved by keeping him unaware of the writing, as though the information I would receive from him would be more "honest" if I took it without his knowing. This method was highly ineffective, and my writing languished in its hiding place. Simultaneously, I sensed an anxiety in Bordeaux about what the effects of the work would be. In the end, making the writing of the ethnography more transparent to Bordeaux made the research far more successful. He was able to read what I had written, partly relieving his uneasiness. He was also able to comment on what I had written, not just to correct errors, but to promote new threads of exploration, and to engage critically with the ideas I was discussing. Rather than simply collecting his stories, I worked through the writing with him, asking him what he felt should be included, and what he would rather keep out. He even contributed small pieces of writing, which I have included in the essays "The boy in his sister's volkspele dress," and "Protecting the Bastion." Bordeaux was sensitive to the performativity of masculinity within Afrikaner culture long before I proposed this research topic to him, and his involvement in the writing of this ethnography has gone far beyond simply being the subject of my inquiry.

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<sup>8</sup> Esther Newton, "From the Appendix to *Mother Camp: Field Methods*", *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, page 12.

Bordeaux's name has not been changed in the writing of this ethnography. Initially he expressed reservation about being openly identified. In part, I came to recognize that this was due to the secretive way in which I was writing the ethnography. As I included him more fully in the research process, he seemed to begin to feel more comfortable with the project as a whole. When he needed to decide whether or not to adopt a pseudonym, I explained the pros and cons of changing his name. I told him that names are routinely changed in ethnographies in order to protect the identity of the informants. I also told him that since it was his life, and he had worked with me in the writing of it, I felt as though changing his name might alienate him from the finished ethnography, and perhaps from his own experience. In the end he decided to keep his real name. Though I write this ethnography in my voice and from my perspective, it is Bordeaux's story, and these are his experiences. This is our ethnography, and though I do not wish to write myself out of the process, I hope I have managed to replicate to a certain extent the way that he views and orders his world.

In attempting to define Bordeaux, I struggle with the terminology. Is he an informant, my ethnographic subject, an interlocutor? Using the term informant seems to suggest that he acts as a double agent, and betrays his culture by revealing its secrets to me, which may to an extent be true. He may also be a subject, in that he is the focus of my research, but I feel uneasy with the guinea pig connotations of the phrase 'research subject,' and the degree to which the term may deny him his agency. Lastly, to say that he is an interlocutor would suggest that he exists in a space between his culture and me, and that his job is to give me access to that culture. While this may in some ways be an apt description of ethnographic fieldwork, I see the nature of our specific relationship differently. In this ethnography, Bordeaux does not exist in the space between his culture and me. Rather, it is as though his culture, his history, and his experiences form an uneasy distance and space between him and me. This ethnography is the attempt to work through that space between us, two gay men who now share a common identity, but who came to terms with our sexualities and identities through greatly dissimilar experiences, and in vastly different climates.

## *1. Afrikaner fetish*

As I leaned over the bar to order two Windhoek Lagers, my friend Mark tapped me on the shoulder. I signaled him to wait, and traded cash to the shirtless bartender in exchange for two cold green bottles. I turned back to hand Mark his drink, and he introduced me to someone he had just met. In the loud music and noisy conversation of the club, I wasn't sure that I had heard his name correctly.

"It's Bordeaux," the stranger repeated, leaning in toward my ear to be heard.

The three of us moved away from the bar and continued to talk. Quickly downing his beer, Mark announced that he felt liking dancing, and asked if we wanted to join him. I shook my head, and Mark left me with Bordeaux. Our brief conversation touched only on superficial topics and casual observations; we critiqued the topless bartenders and mocked the unsightly floral arrangements installed around the room. He asked me if I worked, and I told him that I was a student at UCT, undertaking my Masters in African Studies. I asked him in return, and he told me that he was studying at a fashion school in Cape Town. Though we talked for several minutes, I never looked at Bordeaux directly. Instead, I made a brief sketch of him out of my peripheral vision: young, handsome, with dark hair and shadowy eyes. After several minutes of polite but stilted conversation, he excused himself to go dance, and I returned to the bar to continue drinking.

As we left the club later that night, Mark asked me about Bordeaux.

"I don't know, we didn't really talk much," I answered noncommittally. "He seemed cool."

"He's an Afrikaner," Mark told me, a strange grin appearing on his face.

"Yeah, I guess so. I couldn't place his accent."

"That's very hot."

"What? His accent?"

"No, that he's an Afrikaner. Afrikaner men are a big turn on."

"Really?" Until then, the only time I had ever heard an English South African talk about Afrikaners was to generalize them as being crude or ignorant. "Is that like a fetish here?"

"Yeah, totally. Afrikaner men are very rough, very masculine."



“I see,” I responded, thinking this over. “He is in fashion school, though.”

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I was out with Mark the following week when we ran into Bordeaux again. Looking past me, Mark noticed him coming into the bar with a friend. Catching Bordeaux’s eye, Mark signaled for them to come to our table. They acknowledged us politely, and joined us on the patio after ordering their drinks. Bordeaux introduced us to his friend Pierre, who had just returned from a week of working in Johannesburg. Mark also traveled to Johannesburg regularly for work, and they compared notes on guesthouses, airlines and commutes. On the other side of the table, Bordeaux asked me about classes.

“What are you doing your MA on?”

“Oh,” I hesitated, “I’m not sure yet.” I had actually spent most of the week in the library struggling to develop a topic, but didn’t feel much like talking about it. “I applied to the program saying I was going to study gender and ethnography, but... I guess I’m not sure where to go with that.” He nodded politely, looking fascinated at what I’m sure was a dull topic for flirtation. “Like, I wanted to write about a few ethnographies written about African women, and use them to look at gendered strategies of ethnographic writing,” I mumbled, slipping into vaguely academic language in order to kill the topic. “I guess I’m just not passionate about it.”

By the end of the evening Mark had found his own Afrikaner: a tall, broad-shouldered man who had been watching him from the bar. As they left to go dancing at another club, Bordeaux offered to give me a ride home. Despite the lack of conversation skills I had demonstrated throughout the evening, he asked me for my number when he dropped me off outside my apartment, and we agreed to get together again soon.

I got a text message from Bordeaux several days later, and we went out later that night. We stood over a small table at the quiet end of the patio, drinking beers and searching out topics of conversation.

“Where in the States are you from?” Bordeaux asked.

I told him that I had grown up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, but had lived in Los Angeles for the past four years. “I went to college in LA, stayed for a few months after I

graduated, then headed down here last month for grad school. Are you from Cape Town?”

“No, no. I’m from Hoedspruit. Well, I was born in Pretoria, and I spent my childhood in Paarl, but I mainly grew up in Hoedspruit,” he explained. Noticing my blank expression, he could tell that I’d never heard of the town. “It’s in the Northern province... well, in what’s now the Limpopo province. Kind of up by Kruger Park.”

“What’s Hoedspruit like?”

“It’s just a small Afrikaner farming town, with a few stores, a Standard Bank, a Spar supermarket. It’s pretty dull; lots of churches and lots of bottle stores. Oh, and there’s one coffee shop in town. It’s called *Le Café*.” He paused to see my expression. “Yeah, exactly. It even has a little French flag on the sign. It’s pretty tacky, but that’s about as cultured as Hoedspruit gets. Before it was *Le Café*, it was owned by this liberal English woman, Gwen. It’s kind of sad, but for a long time that was one of the few places in Hoedspruit where I could feel accepted. Which I guess just says something about the town.” He swallowed a swig of beer. “It’s in a very pretty area of South Africa though, in the Lowveld. It’s mainly a farming town. It has game farms, fruit and vegetable farms, and livestock farms. Very rural... well, rural sounds African, which it isn’t. The town itself is very *white*.”

“How so?”

“It’s just a conservative Afrikaner town.” He paused for a moment, blushing slightly as he thought of an example. “Like, a few years ago an Indian woman moved to town,” he started to explain.

“Oh, how cosmopolitan.”

“Yeah, not quite. So I guess some time after she moved there she went to this hair salon, and the lady at the hair salon told her, ‘*We don’t do your kind of hair here*,’” he mimicked the woman’s uptight expression and sour voice.

“What? She actually told her that?”

“Yeah. I think the poor Indian woman moved away within in a year. Yeah, that’s Hoedspruit...” he smiled weakly, looking embarrassed on behalf of his town.

“Wow. Sounds...” I tapered off, unable to find a polite word. “Do you go back often?”

“No, not really. Actually, I’ve been living in Taiwan for the past few years, teaching English. I’d go back maybe once every year to visit family.”

“So they still live there?”

“Well, my sister doesn’t, but my parents and my younger brother all still live there.” He smiled to himself, suddenly thinking of something. “I actually just talked to my family the other day, and my brother told me this story. In one of the churches in town, the dominee gave a sermon on forgiveness. ‘In order for God to grant us his mercy, we must first ask for his forgiveness’. At the end of his sermon, the dominee said, ‘If anyone would now like to ask for forgiveness, please come forward.’ So at first, no one does anything. Then this man stands up, turns to his wife, and says, ‘Honey, I have to confess something. I’m very sorry, but I’ve been having an affair. It’s over, but I now need to ask for your forgiveness.’ He says this in front of *everyone*, and they’re all shocked. Then his wife gets up and says to him, ‘I have a confession to make as well. I too have been having an affair. Will you forgive *me*?’ And they embraced, and just like that they forgave each other right there!”

“That didn’t really happen.”

“It did! My brother told me. Apparently this couple is fairly new in town.”

“I’m sure that helped to build their reputation. Is it a very religious town?”

“*Very*. It’s very conservative, and very religious. But they still all talk about each other. I have a friend who loves coming to visit just to hear the way everyone there gossips about one another.”

“I guess it’s a small town... people talk,” I stated, as if I had some authority on the subject.

“Yeah,” he answered softly, looking down to his beer. He lifted the bottle to his mouth, and paused before taking a drink. “Like you have no idea.”

## *2. Fairy tracks*

Bordeaux picked me up from campus on an afternoon during the following week, and together we drove down along the edge of the Cape Peninsula. We stopped at a teahouse in Simon's Town, and drank coffee while staring out over the water. The fashion school Bordeaux attended was currently on a month long break, he informed me, so most of his days were pretty empty. I had just found out that my school break was coming up, and told him that I was considering taking a trip. We paid our bill after talking for an hour, and headed down the hill to Boulder's Beach. We walked among the tourists and families, and watched African penguins nesting under the canopy of bushes.

"Are you doing anything tomorrow night?" Bordeaux asked casually as we wandered along the boardwalk.

"No, I don't think so."

"I'm having a dinner tomorrow. It's for my birthday. I'm turning thirty," he explained. "It'll just be a few friends, mostly people I knew in Paarl when I was growing up. My housemate Will is going to be there, along with my friend Tanja, who I met in Taiwan. Pierre might come, if his flight from Joburg gets in early enough. A lot of these people don't know each other either, so you won't be the only outsider," he assured me. "We're going to eat at an Indian restaurant in Muizenburg. I could pick you up, if you want to come."

"Yeah, sure." We stopped to watch one of the miniature penguins ambling over the smooth surface of a rock. "Maybe I can find out what you were like as a kid," I added in my most threatening voice.

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Bordeaux and I arrived at Gaylord's Indian Restaurant just as the sun was lowering over Muizenburg. We parked in front of a neighboring antique store ("Oo, Country Katy!" Bordeaux laughed, reading the sign), and nodded to the car-guard as we locked our doors. The owner of the restaurant met us at the front door, and showed us to the private room that Bordeaux had reserved for dinner. Bordeaux's friend Megan sat leaning over a sheet of white paper, the lone guest at the long table.

“You’re not allowed to look,” she warned Bordeaux in Afrikaans, blocking the paper with one arm. “I’m writing your birthday note.”

Beulah and René arrived several minutes later, greeting Bordeaux sweetly and sitting together at the far end of the table. Tanja came in soon after, kissing Bordeaux on the cheek, and making a hurried but warm hello to everyone at the table. She sat down next to Megan, introduced herself, and quickly began a rather in-depth discussion. Bordeaux’s housemate Will entered next, greeting Bordeaux in Afrikaans, and taking the chair on the other side of Megan. More guests filtered in throughout the evening, and more and more bottles of wine were ordered.

“So how do you know everyone here?” Tanja asked Bordeaux once a number of people had settled at the table.

Bordeaux pointed out each guest at the table, giving a brief history of their friendship. With a few exceptions, most were childhood friends from Paarl. Bordeaux pointed out which friends he had grown up with, which friends he had gone to school with, and which friends he had taken baths with as a child.

“This is my friend Megan,” Bordeaux explained. “She’s an actress, and we’ve been friends since we were little. When I was five, she moved into a house on the same farm as my family, and my sister and I went to watch them as they moved in. My sister and I were curious to see what was going on, so we climbed up onto this fence between our houses, looking like monkeys, and watched them.”

“I just remember them hanging there and shouting, ‘Go away! Somebody else lives there!’” Megan interrupted.

“I thought we were being nice by going to see them. When I got home, my mother informed my sister and me that we were all going to take soup over to welcome our new neighbors. After that, we quickly became friends, and we’d go play with Megan so she could boss us around.”

Bordeaux turned to the other end of the table, to the two sisters. “René was the first woman other than my mother or my sister that I saw naked, and Beulah was probably the second. I’ve known them for as long as I can remember. We used to play together all the time. Especially house-house. I was always the father, and Beulah and René were my daughters.”

“And sometimes your brother was the monkey,” Beulah reminded Bordeaux.

“Who was the mother?” Tanja asked.

“The mother had tragically died from eating a bug.” Continuing around the table, Bordeaux pointed to Will. “Will was one of my first friends in primary school. He used to come over and play bizarre games with my Playmobil toys. In our games, there were always lots of grotesque deaths, and lots of kissing.

“Sometimes people would die while they were kissing,” Will added.

Tanja took a break from the party to smoke, stealing away Will and Megan to keep her company in the garden outside. They returned as the waiter was setting dinner on the table. Having come directly from the airport, Pierre arrived just as the waiter was setting down the last platter of food. He crept up behind Bordeaux to surprise him, then stopped the waiter and ordered him a birthday shot of whiskey.

Though many people at the party were only meeting for the first time, the conversation was relaxed, aided by the bottles of red wine staggered throughout the table. At times it seemed as though Bordeaux’s friends were competing to tell the most embarrassing story about him. Beulah made a successful attempt, asking him in English for my benefit, “Do you remember when we played the wedding of Princess Diana, and you were Diana?”

“What? Explain,” I demanded. Tanja and I both leaned in to hear his justification.

Bordeaux turned a little red; though perhaps it was from the shot of whiskey he had just been forced to choke down. “When I was little, I was really into Princess Diana. I thought she was very pretty, and I used to draw lots of pictures of her. I saw the royal wedding on TV, and I thought she looked just beautiful. So I made my friends play wedding-wedding with me, and I would dress up as Diana in her wedding gown.”

“What would you wear to be her?” Tanja asked.

“And who had to play Charles?” I added.

“Uh, I wore an old dress of my mother’s. Usually my sister was Charles. Her, or whoever I could force to play along.”

To follow that, Will began emphatically telling a story in Afrikaans. Tanja leaned in toward my ear and translated for me. “I know how it is being the only English speaker

at a party,” she whispered. “He says that he used to go over to Bordeaux’s, and they’d play dress up,” she explained, laughing, “in Bordeaux’s mother’s clothes.”

Noticing that I was listening, Will switched from Afrikaans to English. “So my mom drives up to the house to pick me up, and I come running down the steps with one of his mother’s dresses hanging down to my feet.” He pulls a severe face, imitating his mother. ““Get in the car,”” he mimics sternly. “Years later, my mother still blames you for making me gay.”

“And my mother would blame you. *Herre*,<sup>9</sup>” Bordeaux sighed, rolling his r thickly for emphasis, “my poor mother. She really had to put up with a lot. I once helped a teacher clean out the closet in her classroom, and saw that she was throwing out an old dress that had torn. I thought it was a really pretty dress, so I asked if I could take it home. So when I got home, I stopped on the front porch, quickly changed out of my school clothes and into this dress, and knocked on the door. My mother answered it, and there was her son, standing on the porch in this dress. My mother must have had a heart attack, but she just said, ‘Oh what a pretty dress,’ and quickly pulled me inside before the neighbors could see.”

Megan waited for Bordeaux to finish telling his story before beginning her own. “I used to get a ride to school with Bordeaux, because my mother worked. In the morning, I would have to walk over to his house, and wait in the kitchen while he and his sister had their breakfast. His mother would make them a bowl of warm pap every morning. I would see this,” Megan stated, pausing dramatically, “having just eaten my bowl of *cold* cereal at home. But not only would his mother make them warm pap every morning, she would sprinkle their pap with little fairy tracks.”

“Oh Bordeaux!” Tanja exclaimed. “Really?”

“What are fairy tracks?” I asked.

“Just what Megan said. My mom would make us bowls of warm pap, and set them out for us on the table. Then we’d have to go outside, into the garden, and call for the fairies. While we were out there, my mother would sprinkle little rows of colored sugar on top of our porridge. We’d come back in, and there they would be, the feetjie spore, little fairy tracks, on our porridge.”

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<sup>9</sup> Afrikaans: *Lord*.

“Oh Bordeaux,” Tanja said, catching her breath after laughing for a moment. “No wonder you’re gay.”

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### 3. *Child heroes, childhood fears*

After his birthday party, Bordeaux and I began spending more and more time together. After asking me if I'd come up with any plans for my school break, he suggested that he would like to come with me on my trip. We hadn't known each other for long, he pointed out, but his schedule was open, and he'd like to get out of the city for a little while. He left me with the guidebooks to plan our trip, and after scanning the *Rough Guide* I decided that we should visit Lesotho.

Our first day of travel was to be a solid day of driving. We needed to cross the entire Western Cape, briefly pass through a corner of the Northern Cape, and enter into the Free State, where we would hopefully spend a night close to the Lesotho border. After picking up two coffees to go in Cape Town, we got onto the N1 freeway and headed out of town. Through the morning we drove up the Du Toit's Kloof Pass, curving between wine farms in the shadows of the Hex River Mountains. By midday the scenery had flattened out, and we emerged onto the sunburned scrub landscape of the Karoo.

Though we had planned on driving straight through to the Free State, we ended up stopping several times, and the day quickly slipped away from us. We watched as the sunlight rapidly retreated, and as night settled over the desert. Looking out the passenger's window, Bordeaux informed me that the Karoo was one of the best places in the world to see the stars. I pulled the car into a rest stop at the side of the road, and we got out to look for ourselves. In the dark lulls between the passing flashes of cars' headlights, we were able to see a thick shelter of stars. After a few minutes out of the car, I started to shiver. "I forgot how cold it can get in the desert at night," I mentioned as we got back in the car.

"There's a story I heard when I was little that was sort of about that," Bordeaux stated as I steered the car back onto the highway. "It's the story of a girl, named Racheltjie de Beer, who lived in the Karoo with her family. One night, as she and her little brother lay in bed, they heard the bleating of a lamb that had gotten out of its kraal. It was their responsibility to tend to the sheep, so they got out of bed, and went to look for it. It was the middle of winter, and in the night it got very cold. They went walking, and tried to look for the little lamb, but they soon got lost. It started to get really cold,

and even began to snow. I heard this story on an audiotape storybook that my friend had,” Bordeaux broke from the narrative to explain. “I can still remember the way the recording sounded. It was very dramatic. You could hear the howling wind, and the far off bleating of this poor lamb, being carried by the wind. ‘Bah... bah...’ And the little brother: ‘Sister, I’m getting cold.’ As it starts snowing, Racheltjie realizes that they’re lost, and they weren’t going to be able to get back home that night. So she finds a big anthill and digs a hole in it, and has her brother lay down inside. But he’s still cold, and it’s getting colder. So she places her body over the mouth of the hole, to cover him up and keep him warm. He keeps shivering, and she knows that he’s going to freeze. So slowly, she takes off each article of her clothing, and covers him in all her clothes. Then she places her naked body on top of him to keep him warm, to keep him from freezing to death. On the tape the wind stops, and it’s morning, and everything is better. Everyone on the farm goes to look for Racheltjie and her brother. Some farm workers see them, and start calling and whistling: ‘Come over here, they’re over here! But wait... oh! Oh, *no!* Oh no!’ Poor Racheltjie had frozen to death. But by sacrificing herself, she had managed to keep her brother alive.”

“That story is.... very bizarre. Why did she have to perform that striptease?”

“That part bothered me too. The fact that the farm workers discovered her in the nude, and this is coming from my mom, was a bit unsettling. I think the nudity bothered me. I felt really bad for her. Arme<sup>10</sup> Racheltjie.”

“Was there a whole tape like this? Stories of heroic Afrikaner children?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Who else was there?”

He stared out the window for a moment, trying to remember. “There was also the story of Japie Greyling,” he said eventually. “It might have been on the other side of that tape, or on a different tape in the same set. There was a book and a tape together.”

“*Japie Greyling?*” I asked, sounding the name out. “Who was Japie Greyling?”

“Japie Greyling was a boy during the Anglo-Boer War, and he lived on the farm with his mom. His father was a soldier in the Boer commando. Japie lived with his mom, and maybe his sisters, and a maid too; I definitely remember the maid. So one day,

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<sup>10</sup> Afrikaans: *Poor*.

Japie's father and the commando came to the farm to get provisions, and then left again. A little while later, the British commando came looking for Japie's father and the other soldiers. When the British arrived, Japie came out to talk to them. The soldiers grabbed Japie, and demanded to know where his father was. I don't know why they didn't ask his mother, I'm sure she was there too. But they asked Japie. They demanded to know: 'Where is your father?' But Japie wouldn't tell them. 'If you don't tell us, we'll kill you,' they threatened, but he still wouldn't tell them. They lined up the firing squad. This tape was very dramatic too. At this part it was silent, except for the sound of the soldiers readying their guns, and the maid, who was crying and wailing in the background. 'Oh bossy! Oh no! Oh bossy!'" I laughed at his terrible imitation of the melodramatic maid. "Yeah, it was really stupid. But at the time though, it made me very upset. I even started crying when I listened. The leader of the British put Japie in front of the firing squad, and said, 'I'm going to ask you one more time, where is your father?' But though they threatened him, and lifted their guns, Japie wouldn't tell them which way his father had gone. 'You're a very brave boy,' the soldier said, 'so we're not going to kill you.' They decided that he'd been so brave that he had earned their respect, so they didn't shoot him."

"Wow, lucky Japie. He didn't have to die, or even take off his clothes, and he still got to be a hero. Did you want to be like Japie when you were little?"

"What? No. The tape made me really upset, but I thought that Japie wasn't very smart. If I had been in that situation, I would have just lied to the English, said that my father had gone this way when he'd really gone that way. And I wouldn't have undressed to save my little brother, like Racheltjie did."

Seeing a line of traffic stopped ahead, I slowed the car to a stop. The highway was pared down to one lane due to construction work, and the cars and trucks before us had settled into a row to wait for their turn to pass. The sides of the road disappeared into heavy darkness on either side of us, and the only light came from the lurid red break lights of the semi-truck glowing in front of us.

"I heard that tape when I was on a trip in Namibia," Bordeaux told me as we sat waiting. "I was five, and my family went to Namibia with some friends who had kids around my age. They had brought the audiotapes with them."

“Namibia’s a beautiful country.”

“Yeah, it is. But I was so scared on that trip. I was really terrified the whole time we were there.”

“What? Why?”

“Terrorists,” he said, reclining his seat a little. “I was terrified of terrorists. And dinosaurs.”

“Uh, dinosaurs?”

“Well, I was always scared of dinosaurs. You know how most kids go through a dinosaur phase? I never did, I didn’t like them. Anyway, on this trip we saw dinosaur footprints and fossils, and Namibia looked like the kind of place where dinosaurs could live.”

“Ok, fair enough. And terrorists?”

“I was scared of terrorists because we were in war with Angola, and when we were in Namibia that seemed very close. I had seen a drama on television called ‘Meisie van Suid-wes,’ meaning ‘The girl from South-West,’” he translated for me. “This was when Namibia was still called South-West Africa. This program was about the murder of a group of people on a farm in Namibia, and it was really scary. The program showed the terrorists coming closer and closer to the house. The family had a dog, and the dog was barking, so they shot the dog. The terrorists go into the kitchen, and the maid is there. They shoot the maid. Then they shoot the mom. There’s a little brother who’s sick, and they shoot him.”

“Geeze, innocent victims, one after another. Couldn’t the producers have wheeled out an infirm grandmother, so they could have shown her getting shot, too?”

“It was all very grisly. Then the meisie and her dad get back to the farm and find the whole gruesome scene. So in my mind, I associated Namibia with terrorists, and scary black people killing innocent white people,” he said with a vaguely uncomfortable smile. “I think that was very much a part of our lives in the ‘80s. We lived in a constant state of fear, being aware of the constant threat of attack. We had warnings all the time. We had discussions in school about terrorism. We had posters in the mall, of how to recognize bombs and mines. So being afraid of terrorists was a big part of my childhood.”

“And dinosaurs,” I reminded him.

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#### 4. *The only fashion designer in Hoedspruit*

I was scheduled to meet Bordeaux at the Vida e Caffè in Green Point at a quarter to five, but by the time I left my apartment I was already running late. Leaving my building in Sea Point, I hailed the first mini-bus taxi that sped past. Stopping outside a Checker's supermarket, the taxi assistant encouraged a few more commuters into the already overcrowded cabin, and heaved the door shut to hold us in. Cutting off a Renault, the driver turned a sharp corner, and we climbed the hill to High Level Road. I watched as we raced along the ridge above Green Point, and realized too late that I had accidentally caught the wrong mini-bus taxi, a rush hour express to the train station downtown. I got off at the first possible stop, and walked the long stretch of Somerset Road back to Green Point. I arrived just after five, and found Bordeaux waiting outside as the Vida staff stacked the stools and chairs around him.

"Sorry I'm late," I started to explain.

"It's ok, I guess they're closing now anyway," he answered, motioning to the staff. "There's a Melissa's that's still open, if you want to have coffee there."

We sat inside Melissa's Café three doors down, and traded stories about our childhoods. It had been a cloudy day, and remnants of white haze still lingered in the Eucalyptus trees along Somerset road. Two vendors worked outside, one in a green apron selling "The Big Issue" magazine, another carrying a metal tree trimmed with beaded key chains and sculpted wire animals.

"Thanks," Bordeaux paused from telling a story to acknowledge the waitress as she set our lattes on the table. "So that year there had been lots of rains. The Blyde was overflowing, so the river that runs by our farm was *massive*. So my brother and my one cousin and I took tractor's tubes, and walked way up along the river onto the neighbor's farm, up to this one spot where the river was very wide. It was less rocky there, and there weren't many rapids, so it was easy to climb in. So we got into the water on the tubes, and went down through the rapids. There were these huge rocks in the river, and just beyond them there was this big pool of calm water. Just as we came around those rocks, this massive hippo came out of the pool. My cousin was closest to the bank, so he

grabbed a branch, and pulled himself out. My brother and I clambered up on the rocks, while the hippo opened his mouth and made himself look very big and impressive.”

“Wow, that’s bizarre. It must have been fun living there. I would have loved to have had hippos in the neighborhood. We didn’t even have them at the zoo in Albuquerque.”

“Yeah, it wasn’t really that fun. Well, the hippos were cool, but living in Hoedspruit was not. I was *not* happy to have moved there.”

“When did you move there from Paarl?”

“I was ten, so it was right around the end of ’86. Everyone else in my family wanted to move, but I didn’t want to. My parents were very happy about it. My dad wanted to farm, and now he got to. My mom was excited because she would be living in her childhood town, near her family. My brother would get to live out of the city, and now he could play outside. And I guess my sister was just excited by the change. But I was not happy at all.”

“Why?”

“I was moving away from my friends, and I was worried I wouldn’t make new friends. Which proved correct. And I thought it was a bit of a backwater. I guess I was a little bit of a snob. I didn’t like the games people played, which didn’t help me make friends.”

“Why? What games did they play?”

“Wild games... I can’t translate the names. Brandbal: they would throw a tennis ball, and try to hit you. The last person to get hit is it. And Bok in die hok, buck in the cage. Everyone stands against the wall. One person is it again, and tries to throw the ball at everyone else. Again, the last person is it. I just didn’t like that kind of game. There was a lot of throwing things at people, which I didn’t like. I liked hide and seek, or touchers.”

“Is that like tag?”

“Yeah, tag. And everyone was really into rugby, which I also didn’t like. Even though I was on the rugby team.”

“You were on the rugby team?” I asked, not hiding my surprise. “Why? When was that?”

“In the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Right from the start I was in rugby. I did not *want* to be, I *had* to be. The school was pretty small, so everyone had to play to fill up the team. Also, I think my parents made me. I never got too far in athletics. They tried to make me play cricket, but thankfully they had enough people to play that. I was useless on the cricket field. I was pretty useless on the rugby field too, but I had to play because they didn’t have enough people. Everyone on the team blamed me when we lost. Not unfairly though. When I saw the ball coming toward me, I would run from it. I just didn’t like rugby. It was too rough, and it didn’t make any sense to me. Throwing balls and running around for sixty minutes... I kind of liked scrumming, though,” he stated, trailing off coyly. “I just wasn’t into athletics.”

“Yeah, I guess that’s understandable,” I answered. “Aside from being forced to play wild games, why didn’t you like Hoedspruit?”

“I just didn’t fit in. It was a farming town. Everyone there was a farmer, and all the kids wanted to be farmers when they grew up. When I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, we had an assignment to give a talk. We had to each get up and tell the class what we wanted to be when we grew up. Every boy in the class got up and said that he wanted to be a farmer. All the girls either wanted to be missionaries or farmer’s wives or teachers.”

“And what did you say?”

“I said I wanted to be a fashion designer. After I made my presentation, no one said anything. I think there was a very uncomfortable silence in the classroom.”

“So even back then you were into fashion? While all the other boys were playing bok in die hok, you were dreaming of being a fashion designer?”

“I think what had happened was that Beulah and René had visited from Paarl just before I got that assignment. Beulah had watched a fashion show on television, and she told me all about it, and showed me some sketches of designs she had done. So on the Monday before class, I made some sketches of dresses: evening gowns with cut out backs. Then I gave the speech, and said I wanted to be a fashion designer.”

“Did the teacher say anything?”

“Nope, nothing. I think maybe she seemed unimpressed. I can’t remember. Anyway, *she* didn’t say anything, but later my mom found out, and she was not pleased.”

“What did she say?”



“She talked to me about it at the dinner table. I think my dad wasn’t home, and that’s why she decided to talk to me then, because she didn’t want him to know. We were sitting around the table, having dinner. She said she had heard I had given a speech in class on what I wanted to be when I grew up. She asked me what I had said, and I told her. Then she freaked out. Her voice was strained, and she was very angry. She told me, ‘Men that are fashion designers like other men, and sleep with other men.’ She said that if I said I wanted to be a fashion designer, people would think that I was gay. ‘I don’t want to hear anything about this again,’ she said. She had similar attitudes about a lot of things.” His jaw tightened slightly as he thought something over, and he drank from his coffee. “I mean, she’s great now, and extremely supportive. She always says that if she could do it over again, she would let me play with dolls and design dresses, and do what I wanted. But I wonder sometimes: if my mom had encouraged my interest, would it have helped me in my development? If she had just encouraged me, without thinking about my sexuality, what would have happened? But obviously she was, and that’s why she wanted to stop it. Because she knew before I did that I was not going to be into girls.”

“But how did she even find out about the presentation?”

“She found out, I’m assuming, through other parents. Thinking about that makes me really angry. What gave them the right? I consciously decided not to tell my mom. I felt uncomfortable giving the speech, because I knew people would frown on it. I was aware of that, but I gave the speech anyway.”

“That’s pretty brave, considering how young you were.”

“That’s why I say, I wonder what would have happened if my mom had reacted differently. I had always been a very shy, insecure child. And that day, I was being very brave. And my mom totally freaked out. And when she talked to me about it, I realized people in the town were speaking about me behind my back. So my mom discouraged me from wanting to be a fashion designer, because people were talking. That carried on throughout my high school career. If I wanted to be in drama club or something, my parents would discourage it, telling me to think about what everyone else would think. ‘Are the other boys doing that?’ I was constantly told to compare myself to the other boys.”

He ended his story bluntly, and we sat quietly for a moment. I looked around, wondering what time Melissa's closed. There were only two other people in the café, a pair of older women sharing a piece of cake. It was starting to get dark outside, and the two vendors had left the street corner. I took the last drink of my coffee, swallowing the dregs of brown sugar and milk.

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Leaving Melissa's, Bordeaux offered to drop me off at my flat. Through the drive home I silently considered the stories he'd told me over the afternoon. "Maybe I should study you for my dissertation," I proposed half jokingly. "Like write it on Afrikaner masculinity, and the way your mother attempted to normalize your behavior." Bordeaux raised his brow in a skeptical look, but kept his eyes to the road. "Or maybe I should do it like a style guide," I offered, sensing his hesitation. "*Afrikaner Style*. How do Afrikaner men dress?"

"Bland," he replied flatly. "Khaki shirts tucked into khaki shorts, socks pulled up to their knees." He settled the car into a space in front of my apartment. "Or when they want to dress up, maybe they wear a denim shirt."

That evening I sat on the couch in my apartment, tracing my eyes over the sentences of an assigned reading. I looked back over the pages once I had finished it; I couldn't remember a single thing that I'd read. I reached into my backpack, pulled out my phone, and typed a short text message to Bordeaux.

"How would you feel being the subject of anthropological enquiry?"

### 5. *Veld school, open showers, and high school homophobia*

“A week after I started high school, a kid came up to me and called me a moffie<sup>11</sup>,” Bordeaux stated one night as we prepared dinner at my apartment. “I didn’t know this kid, so I had no idea where he got this idea.”

After asking Bordeaux if I could write about him, I began to notice a shift in his stories. In part, and rather understandably, he seemed to have become more conscious of his role as a storyteller. His stories seemed to occur less within the flow of normal conversation, and were told more simply on their own. More subtly, the tone of his stories had also seemed to change.

The two of us barely fit in the tiny kitchenette of my apartment, but we managed to maneuver around one another while cooking. I reached up into the cabinet, pulling down the package of chili powder and a grinder of salt. “Did you ever find out how he knew?”

“No, not really.” He considered it for a moment, taking a bite of a chopped mushroom, and chewing it thoughtfully. “I’m not sure how he knew, but I was pretty freaked out. I don’t know. Maybe kids just pick up on stuff. I was very different. But I kind of figured out later that some of the other kids might have formed some opinions of me in veld school, and that’s how he knew.” He picked up the cutting board, and pushed the rest of the mushrooms into the sizzling pan.

I stepped up to the stove beside him, adding some more olive oil and turning down the heat. “What is veld school?”

“It was an interscholastic thing that I had to go to at the end of Standard 5, just before the end of the school year.” He lifted himself back onto the counter, and sat dangling his feet. “All the different schools from the area went, and we all camped out in the veld. There were a lot of physical activities, like tracks, where you had to run and climb through things, and swimming, which we had to do in dirty water. We would sit around the campfire, tell stories. There was one activity where we had to get naked and go down a slide. I thought it was pretty pervy, especially based on the looks of some of the leaders. It was just a big male bonding exercise, basically. There were a bunch of

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<sup>11</sup> Afrikaans: *faggot*.

schoolteachers who went with us, and we had to call them the camp *ooms*<sup>12</sup>. They gave a lot of lectures, where they would discuss the environment, or give talks on religion, or tell us about our sexuality and our changing bodies. We had talks on the country, on nationalism; not that we called it nationalism.”

“What did it seem like at the time?”

“Just being faithful to our country, and having pride in South Africa. I spent most of the time there feeling uncomfortable. Veld school was the first time I was away from my family for very long, and I was with all of these people I didn’t know. I spent the first day feeling like I wanted to cry. I think most people felt pretty uncomfortable at first.”

“Was everyone white?”

“Yeah!” He laughed at my question. “Definitely, very exclusively white. Very Afrikaans, specifically. This was in the late ‘80s, at the end of apartheid, and at night we had to stand guard in order to make sure that we weren’t going to be attacked by terrorists.

“I think if you went and talked to anyone else, like someone else I went to school with, they’d have a very different memory of it than I do. Like, ‘Gee! That was fun! Man, those kids from Phalaborwa were crimmy! We had camp fires, and went tracking, and went skinny dipping and sliding, and gee, that food was shit!’ They’d have a very different, more positive perspective on it than I do. They might also think that it was a necessary stage in the development of a young man, whereas I thought it was a big waste of time and money. To me it just felt like being in the army. I think that’s probably part of what it was, actually. Toughening us up, and getting us ready to be in the army. At that time, there was still required military service in South Africa.”

I pulled the package of Woolworth’s tortillas out of the mini-fridge, and ripped the plastic open. “But you didn’t do military service.”

“No, thankfully it ended while I was in high school. I think required military service was scratched when I was in grade eleven.”

I turned on the grill, and set the tortillas inside the oven to warm. “But anyway... how did they figure out at veld school that you were gay?”

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<sup>12</sup> Afrikaans: *Uncle*.

"I'm not sure. I was uncharacteristically outspoken at veld school; I often answered questions and I was fairly self confident." He looked around the counter, locating the bottle of cheap red wine behind him. "Even so, I really didn't think I made an impression. I guess when I answered questions kids picked up on something about me that was different. In general, I was pretty gentle and soft-spoken, so maybe I didn't fit with the rougher kids. Most of these boys had been groomed to be rough and manly, so maybe they noticed that I didn't fit with that. Whatever it was, I guess it was in veld school that some of the kids decided I was gay. Later I asked a friend who had been at veld school, and he didn't seem to think I made an impression. I asked a few other kids, and they all said the same."

He reached to the first drawer below the counter, and pulled out the corkscrew. He continued talking as he popped the bottle open. "So at veld school, we were divided into different groups so that kids from different schools would mix. Every member of the team was assigned a position. One was a leader, another was in charge of health, whatever." He poured wine into two glasses, and handed one to me. "Anyway, I was in charge of spirituality."

"Really?" I asked, coughing on the first sip of wine. "How did that happen?"

"I used to be very Christian," he explained, getting the dinnerware down from the cabinet behind his head. "I don't remember if they asked what I wanted to be leader of and I said spirituality, or if it was chosen for me. It was better than the other options at least. Health? Sport? Ha." He stepped down from his seat, and set the plates out on the counter. "At the beginning of every day, I had to lead the group in prayer. The *ooms* would assign us a little bit from the Bible, we'd read it in our group, then talk about it and pray. The people in my group were really rough kids, and I was this good little kid. I would give everyone a turn to say the prayer. It's weird how spiritual I was, actually," he considered, leaning back. "At the end, they had to decide who had the most leadership skills. Everyone would get a mark out of five. So I got a five, which was apparently very rare. I was very chuffed with myself. These kids were very rough, so I was surprised that they gave me a five. There was, however, one kid who tried to give me a one. I heard this from the other people in my group. From the start he hadn't liked me, and there had always been bad vibes from him. I think this kid who didn't like me went to

primary school with the kid who called me a moffie in the first week of high school. That must have been where he got it.”

“That doesn’t seem like a great way to start high school,” I noted as I piled dinner onto two plates, folding the mushrooms and onions into the tortillas.

“No, it wasn’t really.” He took the plates from the counter, and set them on the dining table. He pulled out a chair, and sat down, facing the window. He slowly drank from his wine glass, watching the light fading over the ocean. A distant ship was anchored in the distance, its bulk seemingly solid on the horizon. Several sailboats passed in the foreground, coming back from sunset cruises. “High school in general was very awkward for me. A lot of guys called me a moffie in high school, so it was a fitting start.”

I brought the silverware and wine bottle to the table, taking the seat across from him. “It was awkward because you were gay?”

“Yeah, and because I lived in the res. I went to high school in Tzaneen, which is about an hour from Hoedspruit. In the res, there was this strange mix of prepubescent, pubescent, and adolescent masculinity. The corridors were divided by grade, so I lived with and shared a bathroom with guys from my grade. The bathrooms were strange... they had three open showers in the bathrooms, without curtains. Everyone had to shower at the same time, because we only got hot water for certain hours. So during that time we had to stand in line to wait for the shower. While you were standing in line, you could see the people showering, since there weren’t any curtains. I had come from a family where there was no nudity, where your body was very private. So in the bathroom, there were lots of nude boys, which was very strange for me. Sometimes the hot water would run out in the other corridors first, and then the grade elevens would come use our showers. So there we were, with our little skinny bodies and no body hair, and showering in front of us were these big men, with lots of hair, and fairly big penises. It made me very uncomfortable, I guess because I was attracted to them.

“Sometimes we would shower together, since there was only hot water for a short time. I once took a shower with this friend of mine who was very camp. It wasn’t anything sexual; we would just take turns under the water. A little later, I found out that

one of the reasons that I was called a moffie was because of this. Not even the other guy was called a moffie though, just me. And other people would shower together, too.

“Really, that was the weird thing; all the other guys would shower together too, or even do very homoerotic things together. Later in my high school years, there were these two guys who would shower together, and play around. Like one of them would lie on the shower floor, the other one would stand over him, and the one on the floor would shout obscene things, like ‘fuck me!’ And everyone else would just laugh. Or four guys would sit in a bathtub together. Or they would pour water on the floor, and slide down the halls naked. Or they’d play games like ‘who’s going to break the kiss’. Or they’d all sit in a group and circle jerk,” he added emphatically. “It was all very, very homoerotic. And I never understood it. I never understood how I was punished for something I didn’t know, or didn’t realize I was, while everyone else did stuff that was, my god, so queer. The stuff they did was extremely homoerotic, but I was the one branded a moffie.”

He thought it over quietly as he ate. “There were a lot of things about the way they acted toward me that I didn’t understand. In grade ten or eleven, we had to go get the field ready for some athletics event, and while we were working some of the guys got really badly sunburned. So one of the guys got aloe gel, and everyone was rubbing aloe gel on their sunburns. But you know, you can’t reach every spot on your back. So I was the one chosen to rub it on everyone’s backs. While I was doing it, there were jokes that I was enjoying it- ‘no, no!’- though really, I was. And no one said it, but I was chosen to do it because I had been picked as the moffie. Because I was effeminate or something, it was ok for me to rub lotion on the other guys. If another guy had been chosen, it would have been weird. It didn’t make any sense.

“There was one incident in particular I remember. We had quiet time to study, then at nine it was lights out. In every corridor there were two prefects. Ours were from grade eleven. One of them was a guy who was very tall, and the other was this squeaky-voiced guy I didn’t like. One evening in the eighth grade, the prefects caught a friend and I talking after lights out. They told us that we were in trouble, and that we had to go with them. The tall guy took us to his room, and told the other guy to go stand watch. So when we were in his room, he took off his shirt, lied down on his bed, and made me scratch his back. He had really broad shoulders, and dark skin. At the time, I felt it kind

of humiliating, though maybe also a little exciting. It was creepy, and at the same time it was kind of hot. When I think about it now, I just get mad. This happened right around the time everyone started calling me a moffie. I don't know where he got off, making a 14-year-old kid scratch his back. He was a very popular kid, he even became the head prefect the next year, and he was making me, this kid who was labeled as a moffie, scratch his back. His brother, who was in my grade, was really mean to me."

"So, maybe because they could define you as gay, it took away attention from what was a pretty homoerotic environment," I offered before taking another bite of dinner.

"Yeah, I guess so. After high school, my friend Joseph told me something. The guy who called me a moffie in the first week shared a room with this other guy, who was one of the cheerleaders for the moffie calling squad. These two guys were in their room, and Joseph was looking for something, so he barged into their room, and found them jerking each other off."

"Nice. Maybe I should have gone to boarding school."

He rolled his eyes at me slightly. "It was awful. Though later in high school I became friendly with most of the guys who called me moffies."

"How did that happen?"

"Things got pretty bad. In grade eight Joseph's mother went to the principal, and told him what was happening. She said that her son and his friend were being tormented, and being called names. The principal suggested that Joseph get involved in some sports activity, and hang out more with the popular kids. And perhaps he should maybe spend less time with me, because maybe I'm not, you know, good for him. According to the principal, *I* was the problem." He shook his head, drinking the last of his wine before continuing his story.

"The next year, it was really becoming unbearable, and I was becoming very unhappy about school, so my parents went to talk with the principal. They made an appointment to talk to him, but when they showed up, he was out. So instead, they met with the vice-principal. I think my parents were happy the principal was out, because they knew he wouldn't do anything about it. After my parents explained the situation, the vice-principal called me in to get the story from me. After I told him what had been



happening, he asked me how I would feel about calling in the other students, and I said, 'Yeah, sure.' I didn't want to, but I think I thought that was the answer I was supposed to give. And so he called in all the kids who had been tormenting me, including his own son, which was awkward. I was impressed that he did that, though. They all came in to his office, and I'm sure I was smiling uncomfortably. My parents were there, the vice-principal was there, and now all these kids who had been mean to me were there. The vice-principal talked to them, and then my parents did too. They asked, 'Why are you doing this? Would you want to be called that?' One kid cried, which might have given me a sense of power." Bordeaux paused on that image. "Twisted. Anyway, the vice-principal threatened to give them all spankings, to give them a hiding. But I said he shouldn't, that I didn't want them to have to get spankings. I think that stopped it. I don't think I was ever called a moffie during high school again, to my face at least. I think from some of the people there was even an attitude change, and they became nicer to me.

He got up from the table, and took my plate. I started to stand up, but he insisted on washing the dishes alone. He turned on the faucet, and waited for it to heat up.

"High school was just a really confusing time for me. It was the time when I was definitely physically attracted to men, very much, and harboring fantasies, but keeping it to myself, obviously. I spent those five years in the company of roughly about a thousand people who did not care for me, and whom I loathed and felt a lot of animosity towards, but still just wanted them to accept me. It was really confusing. I would go through phases where I had friends, sometimes more friends, sometimes less friends. At different times, I hung out with kids from a lot of very different groups. I became friends with the girls who were considered slutty, who I really liked, but most of them dropped out by grade ten. For a while I even hung out with the popular kids, but when I was with them I felt like I was being fake. I felt kind of at home with the awkward kids, who also didn't really fit in. But I never felt like I had anything in common with any of these people. During high school, I never felt like I had anything in common with anyone, aside from my best friend Joseph. In public, he and I would talk about how we hated high school, and how there were people we didn't like. But then when the two of us were alone, we'd talk about the things that hurt us, and made us unhappy. And then during my

last year of high school he left to study abroad, and then I was really alone. I never talked about it with an audience, because there was no one else who I could relate with. After high school, I wanted to get as far from that as I could, to go where no one knew me, to where I could start over as who I wanted to be.

“When I think about high school now, it’s like a bad taste in my mouth,” he said as he put the dishes under the faucet. He scrubbed the plates, his eyes focused on his washing. “But maybe, *maybe*- I might be wrong- I can forgive high school. Because children are idiots and they do stupid things. Everyone was going through puberty and their own messed up stuff. I can look at high school and think, they were stupid, whatever. But what happened in college, I didn’t expect. At that point, people should have been above that. But maybe some people don’t change as they get older, and maybe some people will always be fucked up. I was expecting college to be an open, liberal environment, but it wasn’t.”

I turned my seat toward the kitchen to face him. “So the homophobia continued into college?” I asked, expecting him to tell me more.

He nodded. “Yeah. Definitely. And the homophobia was much more brutal. It wasn’t just being called a moffie; it was being attacked.” He took the dishtowel from the hook, and quietly dried the dishes. He added no more information, and I got the sense that he was done talking about it.

I turned my seat back to the table, and stared out the window beyond to the ocean below. Only the distant ship remained, its rows of lights burning on the dark waters.

## 6. *Coming out*

“What time is Pierre’s flight supposed to land?” I asked as we pulled up to the airport. Bordeaux switched off the engine, and I began surveying the steady stream of people coming out of the domestic terminal.

“Not until 4:30. We’re a little early,” he answered. He reclined his seat, and stretched out.

I watched a group of tourists gather at the curb. Their khaki hats and vests suggested that either they’d just come from Kruger Park, or that they were very confused about what to expect in Cape Town.

“When did you come out?” Bordeaux asked, breaking my observation.

“Oh... well, I came out to my friends when I was pretty young,” I responded as I gathered my thoughts, a little fazed by the topic. “Maybe thirteen. I told most of my friends around then. But I didn’t come out to my parents until I was seventeen.”

“And how did you come out to them?”

“Well, I’m pretty sure they’d known for awhile. It wasn’t exactly like I was hiding it or covering it up, we just never talked about it. I kind of just assumed they knew, and left it at that. Anyway, I’d always been the only gay student at my high school, so I never dated or had gay friends. Then, when I was a senior in high school, we got a transfer student who was pretty flaming. We sort of became friends, and he started calling me, usually around midnight. And since there was a phone on the nightstand next to my parent’s bed, my mom would usually answer it before I could. I’m sure she could tell from his voice that he was gay, so I think she was kind of worried about what was going on, and about who this guy was. One day we were driving, and she asked me, and I told her.”

“She asked you?”

“Yeah... She brought it up kind of oddly. I think she said, ‘If there’s anything you want to talk about...’ I tried to get her to clarify what she meant, and she said, ‘I know that sexuality can be very confusing at your age...’ And I told her that I wasn’t confused, that I was gay.”

“Ha! And your dad?”

“She told him. When I got home later that day, he said that he was very proud of me.”

“Wow. That’s really nice that they were so supportive.”

“Yeah, it was just a bit awkward. I think my mom was a bit freaked out at first, but she got over it pretty quickly. And you? How did you come out?”

“Like yours, I think my parents knew for a long time.”

“I guess the childhood drag shows might have been a tip off.”

“Yeah. But I don’t think they wanted to deal with it. I tried to bring it up with my mom a few times. When I was in the eleventh grade, I asked my mom, ‘Is it wrong if two men love each other, and are really close?’ She seemed a little confused, and answered, ‘No, there’s nothing wrong with two men loving each other. Your father and his brother love each other very deeply, and you love your friend Joseph very much, and you’re very close.’ That wasn’t what I meant though, so I pushed the subject, and said, ‘But what if they *really* love each other?’ I think she figured out what I was steering towards, so she responded very firmly. ‘It’s fine if they love each other, but they shouldn’t act on it *physically*.’ So I asked her, ‘Why not?’ She tried to remain very firm, but without overreacting, and said, ‘Well, you see, men who love each other physically... well, they have sex. And do you know how they have sex? They have anal intercourse...’”

“Your mother did not say that!” I interjected, sitting up in my seat. “She actually brought up anal sex with you?”

“Yeah. She said it very politely though. Not like, ‘It’s disgusting and wrong’, but just like, ‘They have anal intercourse. Isn’t that just sort of gross?’ I think there was another time I asked her, and she figured out where I was going, and said, ‘What are you getting at?’ She told me that if I did decide I was gay, I shouldn’t hesitate to tell her, and that she would accept me anyway. This was something she denied later, when I did come out. ‘If I said this, I was obviously not thinking,’ she said.”

“Yikes. So when did you actually come out to her?”

“Not for a few years. The first person I came out to was one of my teachers in high school. It was during the second semester of my final year, when I was eighteen. I became close to this one teacher, and I definitely had a crush on him. He was only four

years older than me, and had just graduated from university. In the last year of high school, my best friend Joseph left to study abroad, and I was feeling completely alone. This teacher was very supportive during that time, and I would spend a lot of time hanging out in his flat. After the June vacations, I got accepted to go to the Rand Afrikaanse University, and we began talking about what university would be like for me, and what it had been like for him. When we talked about it he would always tell me, 'University will be a lot of fun, but you should watch out for people trying to take advantage of you.' He was very elusive about what he meant, but I could kind of figure out what he was getting at. By this time, I was very certain I was gay. And then one night, I was visiting him in his apartment, and I decided to tell him. We were talking, talking. And then I think I just blurted out, 'I'm gay.' And he said, 'Yeah, I kind of thought so, and that's what I meant about being careful about people taking advantage of you.' Then when we saw each other after spring break, he came out, and he told me that he had a boyfriend. I was heartbroken. He was the only person who knew until I came to the Cape that December, and I told some of my friends here."

"And your family?"

"I came out to my sister before everyone else, during my first year in University. She was in Johannesburg on a school tour, and I met up with her at the Randburg Waterfront."

"Johannesburg has a Waterfront too?"

"It used to. I'm not sure if it's there anymore. Awful place. Anyway, my sister and I were chatting, and I told her that I was gay. And she *bawled*."

"She cried?"

"Yeah. Her friends showed up, and I think they thought she was crying because she had to say goodbye to me. I think she was just frightened, and really confused."

"All through college my parents knew I had gay friends, and even met a few of them. Even so, I continually denied to them that I was gay. I guess I was scared that they would kick me out of the house. Then in my third year, I finally came out. I was twenty-one. In the middle of the year, I broke down, kind of conked out, and ended up in hospital. After that, I went home. So I was at home with my mom, my dad, and my brother; my sister was in college. We were sitting around the dining table. I think we

had just had dinner. My mom was asking me about how I was feeling. 'Well mom, I think I'm confused,' I told her. She asked me, 'Confused about what?' 'About myself, about who I am.' I could see in her eyes that she could tell where I was heading, and that she was very scared. 'Well, what about yourself is confusing you?' she asked. So I said, 'I don't know if I like men or women...' 'Well,' she told me, 'you need to decide. If you don't pick, you'll be messed up for the rest of your life.'

"I think that for a minute I thought that she was saying that as long as I picked, it would be ok. So I said, 'I think I like men.' It turned out that, actually, that wasn't ok. My brother turned white as a sheet, and went out of the room. 'I hope you're happy now,' my mom said, 'your brother is totally freaked out.' He slept that night in my parent's room. I had a long argument with my parents, and they told me that this would not work, that I could not be gay."

"You couldn't be gay because it freaked your brother out?"

"I think it freaked them out more than it did him. The next day I talked to my brother and told him that I was sorry that I had freaked him out, but that I hadn't changed, he just knew more about me now than he did before. We didn't talk about it again for years, until he graduated high school. We got drunk together one night, and he told me that he had thought about it all day after I talked to him, and by the end of the day he was fine with it.

"My parents, however, were very upset. It wasn't discussed often after that, but one day my dad came to talk to me on my mom's insistence, and said, 'The minister in our church would like to see you.' Apparently, there was a married man in town who had had gay 'inclinations', and had been cured. He had decided to go with the Lord, had talked to the minister, who advised him to ask God to help him. So they thought maybe I should talk to this minister, but I told my dad I didn't want to.

"One day my mom showed me a clipping from some Christian magazine, and told me 'I'm going to call this group.' I forget what the group's name was, but it was founded by a man who had been cured of his homosexuality. He had been gay, but he had found the Lord and become heterosexual, and was now married with two children. I think he used to be a hairdresser, and now he was a full time counselor.

“My mom put me in contact with the group, and I decided to try it. I think I was pretty messed up at the time, and I thought, ‘Maybe they’re right. Maybe I will be happier if I’m straight.’ The counseling sessions were held in the far northern suburbs of Johannesburg. I went and had a one-on-one session with this guy. He told me his story, I told him mine, and he gave me the schedule of the group sessions. I went to a couple of the meetings, which were fine. It wasn’t like we went around in a circle, said, ‘Hi, I’m Bordeaux and I’m a recovering homosexual.’ We just talked about our struggles and the difficulties we were facing.

“The formerly gay counselor who ran the thing was often in the States, so he was never around. Without him, there wasn’t much leadership. There was this older guy who would run it, but he was pretty useless. At one point I started freaking out, and I needed someone to talk to, so I called him. But he wouldn’t help me, and said, ‘I’m not allowed to counsel you, I’m not strong enough yet.’ Other than myself, there was only one other Afrikaner in the group, this kind of older guy. And since we were both Afrikaners, and I needed someone to talk to, we became friends. After a few sessions, he suggested we go see a movie. Before we went to the movie we met for lunch, and during lunch I started feeling like maybe he had ulterior motives. Thankfully, we met up with some friends of mine who went with us to see the movie. While we were sitting in the theatre, he started tickling me, and trying to hold my hand, so I just turned to my friends and ignored him.

“After that, I never went to the group meetings again. I told my parents someone there had hit on me, so I think they agreed that I shouldn’t go. Instead, I suggested I go see a psychologist, and even though they were always opposed to psychologists, they reluctantly agreed to pay for it. After a couple of sessions, I found out that my psychologist was a lesbian, which really helped me. Through her, I think I dealt with a lot of my problems, and I began to accept myself. At some point though, my mom asked me how it was going, and if my psychologist was helping me with my ‘problem’. I told her that she was, and that she was helping me accept me for whom I was. My mom asked, ‘And who you are is...?’, and I said, ‘Gay?’ And my mom *freaked out*. They thought they had been paying for someone who would ‘cure’ me, not someone who would help me accept my homosexuality.”

“But your mom’s fine with it now, right?”

“Oh, God yeah. They all are. They’re practically PFLAG.<sup>13</sup> I think my dad and brother have even made some enemies in town, since they always stand up against people who make homophobic remarks. For a while though, it was pretty rough. I really wasn’t sure if they were ever going to be ok with it. It didn’t seem like it. You were very lucky, you know.”

“Lucky?”

“Yeah, that your parents were so accepting. And I think the environment and time when you came out made it much easier.”

“What do you mean?”

“When I was trying to figure out who I was, and what I was, there weren’t a lot of open homosexuals I could compare myself too. Like if there were ever any homosexual characters on TV, they were always portrayed as deviants. Being homosexual was wrong, and there was nothing more than that.”

“I hadn’t realized that before...” I replied, working through the thought.

“That you were lucky?”

“No, that coming out was maybe a different process for each of us.”

I thought about what Bordeaux had said for the next hour, as we drove Pierre to his apartment and dropped him off. I carefully considered what I wanted to say, but when I explained it I ended up speaking in fragmented academic phrases.

“There’s an anthropologist who said that in writing about third world women, early feminist ethnographers were looking for ‘ourselves undressed’. Like they were using them just as primitive versions of themselves in order to talk about their own situations, without being fully critical of the differences that divided them.”

Bordeaux nodded, listening attentively, but unsure of my meaning. “Do you feel like you’re doing that?”

“Well, I didn’t think so. I didn’t even think that I *could* do that. We’re both educated, first world, from similar economic backgrounds, right?” He nodded. “And most of all, we’re both gay men, in a relationship together. But we came to that identity in such different ways, and I hadn’t thought about how different the environments we

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<sup>13</sup> PFLAG: Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, an organization devoted to supporting homosexuals and fighting discrimination. Commonly used in gay slang to describe family members who are overly supportive.



came out in were. Like you said, compared to you, I grew up in a fairly accepting time and environment. Maybe I saw something in your stories- dressing up as Princess Diana, wanting to be a fashion designer, facing homophobia- that made your coming out experience seem more authentic than my own,” I cut off, unsure of how to explain fully what I meant. “In your stories, I may not have found myself undressed. But maybe I found myself in a dress.”

University of Cape Town

## 7. The knights of Bastion

As we drove out to Bordeaux's home in Tableview after an evening out, I noticed that Bordeaux was being far more quiet than usual. He responded shortly to my passing comments, his jaw tight and his eyes focused on the road. We settled into an uneasy silence, and I shifted in my seat to stare out the car window. I was watching the passing buildings along Somerset Road when Bordeaux finally spoke.

"Working on this project has made me think about things I hadn't wanted to think about for a long time," Bordeaux stated slowly, seemingly choosing his words carefully. "Including some things that I'd forgotten intentionally."

I turned toward him slightly, studying his hard expression, but unable to read his face.

"I already told you about high school, and what happened there. But when I went to university, things got *much* worse. I had gone to college expecting to get a new start, and to be in a more open environment. But that wasn't what happened."

Aside from mentioning friends he'd made at RAU, Bordeaux rarely spoke of college.

"When I went to RAU, I had to live in the res. Each residence hall on campus had a theme. One res had a Roman theme, one had a naval theme, one had a mining theme. My res, Bastion, had a Germanic theme."

"Bastion? Is that like a sanctuary?"

"I don't think that's what they meant. More like a strong fortress. So Bastion had a Germanic theme. Within this 'Germanic Empire', all of us who lived in the res were knights. That was a big thing in Bastion; we were knights, so we had to act like knights. You had to dress nicely, keep your hair short, not have any piercings. Be courteous to ladies. Be manly."

We stopped behind a row of cars at a red light. "The week before classes started, we were initiated into the knighthood. At first, the initiation was pretty relaxed, and they just had us do some tasks. I didn't mind it. Then one night, we heard banging on the doors. Some older guys bashed open the doors, and started shouting at us. They told us to take the cases off of our pillows, and made us wear them on our heads. They made us

walk out of our rooms, through the corridor, and down the stairs, shouting at us all the time. Pretty quickly, everyone realized it was just a ritual, but it was still pretty hectic even so. They took us to the main hall, and let us take the pillowcases off of our heads. There, they gave us our nicknames- mine was Pinotage- and we were made to learn their names. That was when initiation officially started.” The light turned green, and Bordeaux turned the car onto the highway onramp.

“After that, it wasn’t so bad. They gave us a lot of talks, told us the history of the res. They gave us a lot of rules, made us memorize things. We had a group car wash. We had lots of dances with the girls’ houses, where we had to dance every dance.

“On the last night of initiation they took all us first-years down to the fountain. They told us we were going to have a ceremony: we were all going to get knighted. In the middle of the fountain, there was this little island. So they made us all get undressed, and we had to run naked through the fountain, through freezing cold knee-deep water. When we got to the island we had to stand together in a group, place our hands on our chests, and sing the house song. And that was how we became *ridders*, knights.

“Within the knighthood, every year had a different title. The first-years were commoners, the second-years were higher up, and so on. The people in the house committee were the highest, and then the head of the house committee was the Kaiser. But apart from that, there was also an underground organization. They were called the SS, like the Nazi secret police. They weren’t part of the house committee, though I think some members of the house committee were involved. Their job was to keep everybody in check. If you did something wrong, they would straighten you out. You would get beaten up, your room would get flooded, or your room would get torched. In one of the photo albums in the res, there was a photo of a room that had gotten torched, with the heading, ‘This is what happens if you stray.’ They would show us that photo to keep us in line.

“In the past, the SS had been pretty open within the house. Then the year before I got there, there had been some sort of scandal with initiation, and the SS had been forced to disband. But I guess there were a group of seniors who felt they needed to keep people in check. So they decided to keep this tradition alive, and the SS stayed in existence, but more secretively now.

“At the res, they were trying to shake the Nazi image that they’d had for years, but it was still in everything. It was this uncomfortable feeling you could still pick up on when you walked around there. RAU was the ideal breeding ground for something like that to come up. It was a young university, but it was a very conservative Afrikaner university. There were rumors that the Broederbond had funded this school as a white, conservative university, since there wasn’t one like that in Johannesburg, and Wits University was seen as being too liberal. Conformity was very big in the university. The school was fenced off, and inside it was very homogenous.

“I came out to very few people at my res, because I knew that it wasn’t a good environment to come out in. One of the seniors told the first-years a story to let us know how the res felt about homosexuals. He said that some guy had come to the campus, and had gone to all of the men’s residences to hand out flyers for some gay club or event. These two brothers in Bastion heard about this, so they found this guy and chased him out of the res. They chased him all across the campus, until he managed to hide under a car. So they got some friends to come help them, they picked up the car, caught this guy, and beat him up. And this story was told to us with a lot of pride. They told us this to warn us, to show us that homosexuality was unmanly and wouldn’t be tolerated in Bastion. So I was quiet.

“At first, I had a lot of friends. I told most of my friends that I was gay, including some I shouldn’t have. My best friends were a group of people who didn’t live in Bastion, who my res didn’t like. I had an openly homosexual friend, Francois. He had gone to a psychology class and talked about homosexuality; after my res heard about this, they warned us not to talk like that, because that wasn’t what our res was about. Another friend of mine was an editor of the RAU newspaper. He had caused a bit of a scandal by suggesting that the paper get rid of the Christian section. When that happened, the seniors made every first year write a letter telling him our thoughts on it. Basically, they wanted us all to say, ‘I do not agree with this.’

“So these were my friends... amoral, areligious, deviant. We never got a reaction really, and I never thought that the people in my res were unhappy about me being friends with them. But then one day some friends came and visited me. We were walking down this one corridor, talking. Suddenly two third-years opened their doors,

came out into the hall, and looked at us very aggressively. We walked past them, trying to ignore them. I turned around once we were past them, and they were still there, glaring at us, and one of them spat at us. 'What's wrong with you?' I asked him. 'You guys don't fucking belong here,' he told us. We immediately got out of there. After that, things quickly went sour."

From the N-1 freeway we curved above the harbor onto the M-5, driving under the shadows of towering freight containers, and passing over the grimy factories and warehouses of Paarden Eiland.

"That Friday night, my roommate threw a party. He had long hair, so he wasn't too popular in the res either. The room was packed, with a very strange, very Bohemian crowd- some lesbians, some gay guys, some straight people- and we all got very drunk. During the party some seniors came and slammed on the door, and asked what the fuck we were doing. We told them we were just having a party, but they said they were studying, so everyone had to leave or they would call campus security. The party broke up, and everyone left. They said they were complaining because we were too noisy, but really they just didn't like that there were a bunch of freaks in their res. One of the guys who had complained that we were being noisy was in the corridor two hours later, playing rugby very loudly. So I don't think it was just that we were being too loud.

"So they didn't like me, and they didn't like my roommate, and they didn't like our friends, and they weren't hiding it. Someone wrote a note saying 'No homos,' and stuck it on the doors at the entrance to one of the corridors. Then one night, the letters SS were written on my door: the Secret Service was watching me. There were often bangs on my door in the middle of the night, just to scare me. Comments were shouted at me. I remember I was walking on campus once, and people actually threw stuff at me. It got to be very scary, and I would be nervous just walking around my own res. Then, I got threats written on my door. The SS said that my room was going to get torched.

"My roommate was out one night, at his girlfriend's. I was alone in my room, in bed. Around eleven 'o clock, I heard a knock on my door, but I didn't answer. They knocked again, but I still didn't answer. I then heard a big garbage drum knock over, and water suddenly poured into my room under the door. They were trying to flood my room. They had been hoping that I would open the door, and they could pour the water

in and flood me, but since I didn't open the door they just knocked it over anyway, to do what damage they could. They did it twice that night, at 11 and again at 2 am. I didn't sleep that night... I was up until morning trying to clean up the water.

"From then on, I was just very scared. I would walk on campus, waiting for someone to shout at me, throw something at me. Just before the July holidays, I had a nervous breakdown. I wanted to move out of res, but my parents wouldn't allow that.

"After the holidays, the situation did not get better. Things just went on. I was still getting threats. Comments were shouted, and I always felt very unsafe. So my parents decided to make an appointment with the dean and the housefather. I went with my parents to the meeting. The dean asked me if I was gay, and I said no, because my parents didn't know yet. He knew some of my friends were gay though, so his advice was that I should get new friends. His attitude was that my friends were the problem, not the people threatening me or harassing me. No one would do anything.

"I told my parents I wanted to transfer to another school, but they wouldn't let me. When it was time to start my second year, I said that I didn't want to go back to res, and I got into a big argument with them about moving out. They refused, and told me to go back and try it out again. So I moved back into the res. During the second week of the school year, two first-years came up to me and said hi. I said hi. They asked me what my name was, and I told them. They chuckled. They said that someone had told them to come up to me, and to tell me that I was a faggot. I asked them who had told them to do that, and they pointed out a second-year who was standing behind me, sniggering. I immediately walked to a pay phone, called my parents, and told them that I was moving out of the res.

"Sometime later that year I was at a student club in Randburg, and I went to use the restroom. Just after I entered, two seniors bashed in the door, so I ducked into a stall and locked the latch. They banged on the stall door, called me a faggot, and demanded that I come out. So I just stayed there, crouched in the stall, waiting for them to leave. Eventually I heard traffic coming in and out of the bathroom, and decided that they must have gone. I went to my friends, told them that I was leaving, and got out of there and drove away as quickly as I could."

Feeling the sudden chill of an abrupt silence, I quickly asked him when all of this had happened.

“I started at university in 1995. That made it so much worse. Discrimination was illegal in the constitution, and the country was supposed to be changing... but at RAU, it was just like it had always been. I had gone to university expecting it to be an open, liberal environment. But it was just like the Old South Africa, and these guys were actively making sure that it stayed that way.”

The freeway ended, leaving us in Brooklyn. We passed between rows of rundown shops, and haggard apartment clusters. As we turned onto the road toward Milnerton, a marshland spread before us, the dark shadows of birds clustered at the banks.

“During the beginning of my first year, during initiation, I was pretty popular. I had a lot of friends, and I was getting involved in the res activities. It felt like it was going to be very different from high school. I thought maybe I’d gotten the change that I had wanted.

“The day before classes started, the first-years were supposed to throw a braai for the seniors. For the week before that, I had worked on the preparations, getting everything ready, making decorations for the hall. The day of the braai, things were hectic, and we had a lot to do. While I was setting up, this one student I didn’t know came up to me. He asked me, ‘Are you Pinotage?’ I told him that I was, and he told me to go upstairs, and knock on a certain door.

“I had no idea what was going on, but I went anyway. So I go and knock on this door, and a senior guy opens the door. In the room, there are three senior guys and one girl. The guys were all very drunk, and the girl was looking really uncomfortable. I was pretty uncomfortable too; I had never really been around many drunk people before. At first I thought this girl was someone’s girlfriend, but pretty quickly I figured out that she wasn’t. She didn’t seem to be with any one of these guys. After a little while, the senior guys told me that they were going to leave, and that I had to keep her company while they were gone. So they left us alone in the room, and locked the door behind them.

“After a few minutes, I realized that the guys were standing outside the door, laughing and listening. This girl still looked really uncomfortable, but she was trying to

be nice, making conversation with me. She was wearing next to nothing, and I don't know if I'm right, but I started to figure out that maybe she was a prostitute, and the guys were all waiting for me to have sex with her. Eventually the guys opened the door, and called me out into the hall. I was really freaked out. In the hall, they told me, 'You're going to go back in there, and we want to hear some action. If we don't hear any action, you're going to be in shit.' With that, they shoved me back into the room. It was awful. The girl didn't want to be there, I didn't want to be there. When they didn't hear any action, the guys in the hall started shouting, trying to get me to do it. I wanted to leave so badly, but I didn't know how to get out of the room. I don't really remember what happened next; I don't know if I banged on the door and pleaded, or if they just let me out. But the minute they opened the door, I ran out of there, and got away from the res. Once I was far enough away, I just started crying. I didn't go to the braai that night. I ran off to another res, and stayed there. I was too scared to go back.

"Eventually, some of the house committee members convinced me to go back. One of them had a long talk with me, and he took me to talk to the head of the house committee. He told me that what these guys had done was unacceptable, and asked if I was willing to testify against them. I said I was. There was a hearing, but I think the guys just got a light punishment, like a warning not to do it again or they'd get in trouble. But I think that sealed my fate within the res. Not only did I freak out when put in a room with a girl alone, but I had caused shit for some of the seniors.

"In the end, I realized that they didn't want me to be one of them. I wasn't worthy of the knighthood. After all that happened at RAU, I began to feel really weird around Afrikaner men. I guess I felt like they didn't think I was man enough to be one. I think subconsciously I came to really dislike Afrikaner men. I mean, I know my dad is an Afrikaner man, and my brother is an Afrikaner man, and I have some friends who are Afrikaner men. But I still cannot see myself as an Afrikaner man. If I talk about an Afrikaner man, I see certain faces, and bodies, and clothes, and none of that is me."

The land dropped away from us on either side, the road a thin strip of asphalt on a flat marshy plain. Reeds clustered densely, making a jagged fence between the highway and the murky wetland. I remained quiet; I hadn't been prepared for what he had told me. As I tried to come up with a response, he spoke again.



“I’m just worried. Talking about my past, or thinking about my past, is never pleasant. I’d really worked so hard to forget some of these things. What if writing about my past makes me think about things I don’t want to think about, things I’d wanted to forget? What if it makes me go to parts of my memory that I don’t want to go to?”

Taken aback, I struggled for an answer. “I’m not a psychoanalyst,” I replied weakly. “I don’t want to pry you open, or force you to face things you don’t want to...” I started to explain, to rationalize my position. My invasion. But I realized how feeble my answer was. I dropped back into my seat, retreating from his statement.

We sat silently, uneasily at either edge of the space that had opened up between us. The space that I had placed between us.

University of Cape Town

## 8. *Cleaning out*

In May, Bordeaux's housemate Will let him know that he had decided to move to Stellenbosch in order to be closer to his university. Bordeaux unexpectedly needed to find a new place to live. A friend agreed to let him stay with her, and so Bordeaux began the process of moving.

Scanning his room, Bordeaux snorted. "I never even really unpacked my stuff from Taiwan." He lifted the comforter to his bed, revealing a row of cardboard boxes lined underneath. Pulling one out, he began to look through the pile of books inside. "I need to get rid of some of this *stuff*," he sighed. "I haven't even looked at most of it in months."

We went downstairs to the kitchen, and Bordeaux made a pot of coffee. Carrying his mug with him, he returned upstairs to continue his work. I stayed downstairs, taking a book into the den.

It was an hour and several chapters before I emerged from reading, and I realized that I hadn't heard anything from Bordeaux. Setting my book down on the coffee table, I walked upstairs to check on him. Piles of CDs and books were scattered around the hallway, and the door to his room was open. Bordeaux was sitting at the edge of his bed, several photo albums at his feet and a framed photograph in his lap.

I sat next to him on the mattress. Looking into the picture frame on his lap, I saw that it was a photograph of Bordeaux and his sister as children. "What's the photo?"

"My sister and I playing wedding-wedding."

"Nice veil," I commented. His sister was wearing a large piece of frilly cloth over her head, completely obscuring her face. Her hands were dropped listlessly to her sides.

"She was probably scowling under there," Bordeaux responded.

"Why?"

"Because she didn't want to play wedding-wedding with me, but I forced her to."

My eyes moved to Bordeaux. He wore an adult's shirt over his own, and a strange pair of tailored pants. His brow was low, his mouth drawn. "And you? Why are you scowling?"

"Because," he answered dryly, "I didn't get to wear the dress."

*The Afrikaanse moffie and the queer ethnographer*  
Forging an identity and a methodology out of exclusion

*"The challenge for queer theory... is how to make theory queer rather than just having a theory about queers."*

*-John Nguyet Erni, "Eternal Excesses: Toward a Queer Mode of Articulation in Social Theory"*

*"As a queer reader, how can one (I) engage the question of identity and self representation and keep my distance?"*

*-Oscar Montero, "Notes for a Queer Reading of Latin American Literature"*

Questions of identification are often complex for men and women who live outside of the heterosexual norm. Bordeaux once explained to me that he chose to identify himself as Afrikaanse, rather than Afrikaner. The choice was in a sense made *for* him, since as a non-Christian homosexual he doesn't fit within the boundaries of Afrikaner identity. However, it is a choice that he has embraced, and it serves as a way for him to reject the exclusionist politics he sees in Afrikaner identity. In thinking about the nature of my methodology and discipline, I noticed parallels in my own academic identity. I was "raised" within the discipline of cultural anthropology, but I now define myself with a qualifier, explaining that I do queer ethnography. Though I do ethnographic research and see myself as building upon an anthropological tradition, I use queer theory as a form of analysis with which to explore my ethnographic data, and to examine my own practice. In this essay, I will attempt to explore how my methodology is informed through my background in anthropology and my interaction with queer theory, and how I conceive of the relationship between these two disparate parts of my work. Since queer theory is in part a method of deconstructing dominant power structures, I will analyze my methodology in relation to the dominant trend of humanistic Anthropology. Finally, I will return to a question of identity politics, to see how Bordeaux and I may share common characteristics and challenges as we attempt to assert queer identities against prevailing norms.

### *Using queer theory within anthropology*

Much of the queer theory I employ in my practice is taken from the humanities, particularly literary criticism, philosophy, and art theory. Put somewhat roughly, queer theory is a form of deconstructive analysis that aims to show the constructed nature of identities, primarily in terms of sexuality and gender. The aim in queer theory is to destabilize normative identities, to show that what we take as natural isn't quite as natural as it seems.

By using queer theory in my ethnographic practice, I do not feel the need to dissociate myself entirely from anthropology, and I actively pursue the common ground between anthropology and queer theory. Much like queer theory, cultural anthropology is structured upon a constructivist premise. By studying variables across cultures, anthropology has long argued that the concepts and categories we use to understand the world are more cultural than natural. For this reason, Esther Newton (herself a queer anthropologist) suggests that anthropology is potentially subversive. "Anarchism, I read once, is an ideology of permanent rebellion. Anthropology, by refuting any one culture's claims to absolute authority, offers a permanent critique."<sup>14</sup> Following this point, I feel confident that anthropology can potentially pursue the same goal as queer theory: demonstrating that "natural" categories like gender are in fact culturally constructed, and that "compulsory heterosexuality" is a cultural value, not a biological design.

To a certain degree, gender and sexuality have been topics within anthropology since at least as early as Margaret Mead wrote on Samoa in 1928.<sup>15</sup> However, despite the potential for radical critique, anthropology has only recently begun to produce truly challenging work on the constructed nature of gender and sexuality. In a 1987 review of "the cross-cultural study of human sexuality", D.L. Davis and R.G. Whiten pointed out that "(a)lthough sexuality remains an intrinsic aspect of human experience in every culture, ethnographic descriptions of sexual behavior are often limited to accounts of marriage and family", and thus not well suited to discussing homosexual practices or

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<sup>14</sup> Esther Newton, "Introduction", *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, page 1.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization*, 1928.

identity.<sup>16</sup> A truly queer ethnography would explore the construction of gender and sexuality within a culture, while never taking gender and sexual identity for granted. An example of this would be Don Kulick's recent ethnography, *Travesti*.<sup>17</sup> By examining how transgendered Brazilian prostitutes understand their bodies and sexualities, Kulick explored the way that gender and heterosexuality are constructed and defined in Brazilian culture. Importantly, his work not only spoke of 'the culture' of the transgendered prostitutes themselves, as an outsider group, but also provided him a lens through which to analyze the larger national culture. His work served to 'queer' Brazilian culture, by understanding it from its margins. Work like Kulick's, unfortunately, is rare. The scarceness of adequate theorizing on homosexuality within anthropology has lead many anthropologists to look to other disciplines when writing on homosexuality, and has influenced me to look to queer theory.

However, it shouldn't be taken as simply accidental that anthropology has neglected to theorize sexuality properly. In speaking of the relationship between queer theory and sociology, Steven Seidman suggested that the discipline of sociology has been resistant to discuss homosexuality, because heterosexuality has been so deeply naturalized within the discipline.

"Perhaps the classical sociologists' science on "sexuality" is related to their privileged gender and sexual social position. They took for granted the naturalness and validity of their own gender and sexual experience and status in just the way, as we sociologists believe, any individual unconsciously accepts as natural and good ... those aspects of one's life that confer power and privilege."<sup>18</sup>

Sociologists and anthropologists might have simply overlooked homosexuality because they weren't attuned to consider sexuality as being constructed, but the effect has been to perpetuate heterosexuality as the dominant position of power.

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<sup>16</sup> D.L. Davis and R.G. Whitten, "The Cross Cultural Study of Human Sexuality", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 16, 1987, page 70.

<sup>17</sup> Don Kulick, *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Seidman, "Queer-ing Sociology, Sociologizing Queer Theory: An Introduction", *Sociological Theory*, Vol 12, No 2, July 1994, page 167.

A related reason for anthropology's weak theorizing of sexuality may be the homophobia that gay and lesbian anthropologists experience within the academy. To write about homosexuality is always a political choice, one that may put anthropologists at personal risk. In her collection of essays *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*, Esther Newton tracked her own experience of homophobia within academic anthropology; she struggled to be allowed to do research on gay men, and was marginalized within her university for her queer politics. In an essay on lesbian ethnography, Ellen Lewin discussed the lack of writing on homosexuality in anthropology, pointing out that writing on homosexuality often calls the anthropologist's own sexuality into question. And, she adds, "being public as a lesbian or gay man in the academy rarely accelerates one's career."<sup>19</sup> Challenges to the heterosexual orthodoxy are often met with resistance, even within a discipline as 'open-minded' as anthropology.

#### *Queer ethnography as 'critical ethnography'*

Importantly, queer theory does not simply allow us to think about sexualized bodies and desires. It also seeks to reveal the ways in which gender shapes the power structures through which all knowledge is produced. Literary theorist Alan Sinfield suggests that queer theory follows the writing of feminists and intellectuals of color in positing the "death of the reader"<sup>20</sup>. In using this term, Sinfield means that literary theory can no longer rest on the assumption that there is only one "proper" vantage point from which to read a text. He argues that although the normative reading positioning of literary criticism has long asserted itself as being universal or unbiased, it has actually been that of the heterosexual, white male. By countering that position through promoting alternative ways of reading, queer theory forms a criticism of hegemonic knowledge producing structures.

Thus, in order to develop a 'queer' ethnographic practice, we must promote alternative modes of 'reading' culture. To read alternatively is to reject the normative

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<sup>19</sup> Ellen Lewin, "Writing Lesbian Ethnography", in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. by Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, page 322.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics - Queer Reading*, Second Edition, New York: Routledge, second edition published 2004, pages xii-xiv.

white heterosexual male position, so this project is in part an issue of identification. It follows similar projects based around identity politics, such as feminist ethnography and postcolonial ethnography. Queer ethnography, then, is part of the larger project of critical ethnography. Critical ethnography has arisen primarily out of identity politics, such as the civil rights movement, the feminist movement and gay activism. It has thus been largely concerned with addressing the role of academic anthropology in supporting the white male perspective as the privileged perspective, and challenging the authority structures under which anthropological knowledge is produced. "The role of radical/critical anthropologies of various persuasions- none of which are mutually exclusive- is to struggle for an authentic anthropology wherein Westerners and non-Westerners, men and women, class-privileged and class-oppressed can engage on more leveled terrain in an anthropological enterprise that no longer objectifies, appropriates or nativizes ethnographic Others."<sup>21</sup> Much like Sinfield's description of queer literary theory, critical ethnography seeks to promote new ways of reading culture. The traditional authoritative voice of the ethnographer has been white, heterosexual, and male. A queer ethnography, then, must examine the ways in which the "objective" heterosexual voice has shaped anthropology, and worked to silence the voices of sexual dissidents.

Queer ethnography is similar to gay ethnography, itself a practice that is only nebulously defined and marginally practiced. Gay ethnography is one that seeks to make the lives of gay men and women visible, and suggests a critique of normative heterosexuality. It has much in common with early feminist anthropology, which sought to record the formerly neglected lives of women in different cultures. Like queer ethnography, gay ethnography often worked to counter mainstream heteronormativity, and to correct the discipline's negligence toward homosexuality.<sup>22</sup> However, there is a danger in accepting 'gay' as an essential identity, particularly since it supports a stable hetero/homosexual binary. Following the example of early feminist anthropologists, gay and lesbian anthropologists often saw their research on same-sex practices as a matter of working on "one's own group", suggesting an easy cross-cultural identification with

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<sup>21</sup> Faye Harrison, page 402.

<sup>22</sup> Lewin, page 323.

other people who engage in homosexual activities.<sup>23</sup> This becomes highly complicated, since the idea of a homosexual identity is not a natural one, and does not exist in the same form in all cultures around the world. A queer ethnography should work to destabilize the heterosexual/homosexual binary, and any idea of a natural, essential identity based on those terms. Queer ethnography should promote instability over stability, and emphasize the *struggle* for identity over the identity itself.

### *Working against the canon*

As I build my practice of queer theory anthropology, I remain aware that recent developments within anthropology have allowed me to do so. Earlier experimental anthropologists, such as Zora Neale Hurston, or queer anthropologists, such as Esther Newton, were not as fortunate as I am in that regard. Under the guise of science and professionalism, they were either reprimanded or criticized for their work, and castigated for being too reflective. Hurston was never recognized in her lifetime as being a proper anthropologist because of her 'unscientific' work, and Newton was denied tenure and effectively terminated from a teaching position for her queer politics.<sup>24</sup>

These renegade ethnographers were excluded largely because they failed or refused to produce writing that fit the prevailing model of ethnographic work. The canon of cultural anthropology has largely been composed of ethnographers who wrote under the guise of anthropological science, creating 'objective' work. The choice to promote this 'unbiased' and 'objective' style of work, however, has itself not been an objective act.

"Erasure, peripheralization, marginality and invisibility have long been concomitants of canon formation. The core of anthropological discourse has been historically constituted as a Western, White male domain, where the language of objectivity and value neutrality has served to mark and obscure mechanisms of silencing, alienating and subjugating the voices

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<sup>23</sup> Lewin, 324.

<sup>24</sup> See: Graciela Hernandez's essay on Zora Neale Hurston in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. by Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, pages 148-165, and Esther Newton, *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.



and subjectivities of White women, and the female and male descendents of the colonially conquered people denied history and access to anthropological authority”<sup>25</sup>

Normative anthropologists articulated their voice as universal and scientific; when women, people of color, or queers spoke back, they were labeled as unscientific (not capable of producing knowledge), or if they were lucky, as specialized voices (not capable of producing universal knowledge).

My use of interdisciplinary theory has been largely permitted by the literary turn in anthropology, a shift away from seeing anthropology as a positivistic science, and toward understanding it as a critical humanities project. The turn toward humanistic anthropology means a deconstruction of ethnographic authority, a focus on the textuality of ethnographies, and a deliberate move away from positivism, all trends that I pursue in my own work. But as humanistic anthropology becomes the dominant paradigm within anthropology, I remain cautious of the new boundaries it establishes.

In other words, while the humanistic trend within anthropology has enabled me to speak, I remain cautious of the new boundaries it creates. For while it opens up the possibility of new methods and voices, it simultaneously silences others. The literary turn in anthropology is often marked by the 1986 release of the book *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*.<sup>26</sup> In a now infamous passage in the introduction to *Writing Culture*, James Clifford stated that no feminist ethnographers were included in the book because feminist ethnographers had either not experimented with ethnographic form, or had done so purely on feminist grounds.<sup>27</sup> In these several short lines, he either ignored feminists, or contradictorily, acknowledged them, but argued that the work was “feminist” (which should make sense, since they’re feminist anthropologists), and thus not universal knowledge (read: male thought). In so doing, Clifford summarily dismissed not only the work of his feminist contemporaries, but also groundbreaking intellectuals like Zora Neale Hurston and Ella Deloria who had written experimentally long before Clifford sanctioned it.

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<sup>25</sup> Faye Harrison, page 405.

<sup>26</sup> James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The poetics and politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

<sup>27</sup> James Clifford, “Introduction”, *Writing Culture: The poetics and politics of Ethnography*, ed. by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pages 19-20.

In many ways, Clifford's exclusion of feminist anthropologists closely resembles the way in which earlier anthropologists, the same anthropologists Clifford ostensibly wishes to critique through humanistic anthropology, have excluded feminists and other dissidents from the discipline. Some critics have even argued that humanistic anthropology, by relativizing all contestations over truth, may actually disable the critiques of feminists, queer theorists, and writers of color, and thus perpetuates white male privilege. "(The) view that truth and knowledge are contingent and multiple may be seen to act as a truth claim itself, a claim that undermines the ontological status of the subject at the very time when women and non-Western peoples have begun to claim themselves as subject."<sup>28</sup> This suggests that while the trend toward humanistic anthropology, promoted by figures like Clifford, might cross some old boundaries, it may also discretely re-inscribe others.

### *Conclusion*

In his younger years, Bordeaux had never critically examined his Afrikaner identity, assuming that he was Afrikaner simply because he spoke Afrikaans. In 1994, as Bordeaux began to accept his homosexual identity, and South Africa moved toward democratization, he began to notice people announcing "We are Afrikaners", identifying themselves not merely as Afrikaans speaking, but also as right-wing, Christian, heterosexual, and white. This definition excluded a number of people, and Afrikaner identity became associated in Bordeaux's mind with the segregationary politics of Apartheid. To Bordeaux, an Afrikaner identity evokes the landscape and the people of his childhood town of Hoedspruit, a place where he was excluded due to his sexuality. Around that time, Bordeaux learned that some groups were defining themselves as Afrikaanse, meaning they were Afrikaans speaking but not Afrikaner. They chose to do so due to their race, religious background, or political perspective. Bordeaux chose to adopt this identity.

It's important to note that the strength and driving force behind queer identifications often comes from painful experiences of rejection and exclusion.

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<sup>28</sup> Francis Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen. "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective", *Signs*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Autumn 1989), page 15.

Bordeaux now chooses to identify as Afrikaanse, but he does so because throughout his life he has been denied access to the claim of an Afrikaner identity. The homophobia he experienced throughout high school and university was meant to teach him that he wasn't worthy of being an Afrikaner male because of his "deviant" sexuality. While this was a form of exclusion that he struggled with, he has turned it into a source of positive identification, and taken on an Afrikaanse identification. He recognizes that he cannot fully disavow his Afrikaner identity, as he was born into and raised in an Afrikaner community. Yet through the position his sexuality placed him in, he has been able to develop a critical perspective on that culture. Recognizing that traditional Afrikaner prohibitions against homosexuality were baseless, he has been able to question its other facets, including its racist politics. An Afrikaanse identity allows for a means to renounce its politics of exclusion. An Afrikaanse identity is one of both identification and disavowal, and locates him both within and outside of Afrikaner culture. This insider/outside identification is representative of the position in which his sexuality has always placed him. By accepting that marginalized position and turning it into a strategic identification, he critically places himself outside of the exclusionary culture. To recognize that you are queer is not to exist outside of your culture; it is to exist in a particular relation to your culture.

Bordeaux's choice to define himself as Afrikaanse gave me insight into how to understand my own academic identity. While I still practice ethnography, I recognize that traditional anthropology erased or omitted queer lives and voices, and perpetuated the myth of heteronormativity. I see myself thus within anthropology, and simultaneously apart from it. I recognize the strength in its methodology, and see potential in the anthropological tradition of uprooting cultural norms. By asserting my queer identity, however, I distance myself from its history of exclusionary practices, and remain critical of how I employ its methodology. Partly due to my positioning as a gay male, I'm aware that boundaries serve not simply to define, but also to exclude. The choice for me to work inter-disciplinarily is thus not merely methodological, but political and personal.

My goal is not to argue that we should have a "queer anthropology," and the purpose of the essay has not been to lay the ground for such a future. One danger is that

queer anthropology could simply become (and perhaps already has become) a specialization within the field: queer culture could sit alongside witchcraft and ritual dance as possible specialty interests for anthropologists. This would deny the way in which queerness is not a particular aspect of culture, but a pervasive underlying element. The more insidious result could be that by absorbing queer theory into anthropology, the discipline could rob it of its very power to queer, to upset boundaries and reveal hidden structures of power and dominance. For anthropology to absorb queer theory may simply have the effect of consolidating anthropology's power or authority, and to obscure the ways in which anthropology as a discipline works to shut out queer voices. It should not be taken as a mistake or a simple omission that homosexuality has not been theorized properly in anthropology; rather, it must be addressed as a systematic censure, an obscuring silence.

In attempting to define feminist ethnography, Kamala Visweswaran argues that feminists should not simply struggle to become part of the canon from which they are excluded, but to question the very idea of the canon that has excluded them.<sup>29</sup> Following her, I choose not simply to graft queer theory onto my anthropological practice. Instead, I wish to use queer theory as a system of critique outside of anthropology, as a critical lens through which to examine my own methodology and practice. The normative voice within anthropology has long been that of the white heterosexual male anthropologist. To say that we've reached a point in which we've overcome that tradition would be to ignore the systematic way in which certain voices are allowed while others are simultaneously silenced. We cannot accept an established point as our end-goal; rather, we must remain continually critical of our practice. For there is more subversive strength in queering anthropology than there is in having a queer anthropology.

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<sup>29</sup> Kamala Visweswaran, "Defining Feminist Ethnography", *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, page 39.

*The boy in his sister's volkspele dress:*

Performing Gender in an Afrikaner Community

*"There was a photo album of my mom as a young girl in the long corridor of my grandmother's house. Whenever we were up in Hoedspruit for a holiday, I would take it down off the shelf to look at it. As a kid, I was mesmerized by these images taken of my mom over the years, from being a baby girl playing with porcelain dolls to an adolescent at the matric dance, complete with a beehive.*

*"The one I really liked was a picture of my mom in a volkspele<sup>30</sup> dress. In this picture my mother looked really feminine and girly, in a Voortrekker kind of way. The volkspele dresses are pretty conservative: biggish gowns made of a fabric that rustled when it moved; poofed sleeves with frills at the elbows; a lace piece draped over the shoulders and knotted on the breast, creating a triangle at the back. Waists are narrow and the skirts are full of volume due to the petticoats. A big, frilly cover-up of the body underneath. I loved it, and I loved how feminine my mother looked in it.*

*"And I wanted-wanted-wanted to wear one."*

Bordeaux's year in the seventh grade coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of his primary school. To mark the occasion, the school decided to put on a performance: a traditional volkspele and a mass gymnastics display culminating in the student body marching in the shape of the number '50'. The spectacle was designed to represent the school's history and heritage, while simultaneously demonstrating that they were looking toward the future. All of the school's students were recruited to perform in the ceremony, and the students in grades five through seven were required to wear Voortrekker style dress. Bordeaux did not think much of his own costume, a khaki shirt and long pants that resembled his normal school uniform, but he loved being close to the girls' dresses: elaborate old-fashioned gowns of swishing fabric and extravagant petticoats. Secretly, he longed to wear a dress as well. He imagined being on the field in front of everyone, wearing a dress and dancing with another boy.

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<sup>30</sup> Afrikaans: *folk play, folk dance*.

As a gift, every child in the school was given a t-shirt printed with the school's logo and the number fifty. His mother took a photo of Bordeaux posed with his siblings, the three of them wearing their commemorative t-shirts. He hated the ugly shirt, but he had consolation at home: two Voortrekker dresses hanging in his sister's closet. Bordeaux's sister had also performed in the volkspele, and so his grandmother and aunt had each given her old dresses, one in pink, and the other in powder blue. Bordeaux would sneak into his sister's room while she was out, creeping into the closet to look at the dresses. He would admire their texture and wonder how the fabric would feel against his body. On an afternoon when the house was empty, Bordeaux decided to try one of the dresses on. He slipped out of his clothes, and pulled on the pale blue dress. He knew that he would be in considerable trouble if he were to be caught, but he loved the sensation of the fabric against his bare skin, and the thrill of wearing the dress. He looked at himself in the mirror, admiring how delicate and refined he appeared. He was at once both feminine and masculine, a frilly girly dress over a slim boyish frame.

Many of Bordeaux's childhood stories contain similar elements: forbidden longings, fears of public shame, and the secretive enjoyment of hidden pleasures. More than the simple confessions of a boy with abnormal taste, they are a revealing testimony of the performance of gender in an Afrikaner child. In this essay, I will attempt to read Bordeaux's stories through the lens of queer theory by examining them in relation to the writing of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. What does it mean to be a boy with girly desires in an Afrikaner community? How were genders properly performed, and how were deviations punished? Furthermore, is it possible to recognize signs of a disruption of gender through his childhood drag?

### *Queer Theory and Gender Performativity*

Before I begin my analysis of Bordeaux's stories, I will need to outline what aspects of queer theory I wish to focus on. Queer theory is principally interested in detailing how gender is constructed and performed. Developed in part out of feminist scholarship, it sought to find a way to discuss gender without relying on the binaries of 'male' and 'female.' Queer theory critiques the essentialist idea of stable identities, and

shows that it is through social processes that people become defined and recognized through their gender.

Michel Foucault has written numerous volumes to demonstrate how the modern concept of sexuality has been forged and shaped by years of legislation and regulation. Foucault described the force behind this process as 'discourse,' a restrictive process through which certain statements became acceptable, and others prohibited. Through his volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, he showed how sexuality has changed from being a loose set of characteristics and activities into discursively constituted identities.<sup>31</sup> Certain bodies and desires became normal and acceptable, and others became forbidden. In the introduction to the diaries of Herculine Barbin, a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite, Foucault outlined what this means for the individual. "From the legal point of view, this obviously implied the disappearance of free choice. It was no longer up to the individual to decide which sex he wished to belong to, juridically or socially. Rather, it was up to the expert to say which sex nature had chosen for him and to which society must consequently ask him to adhere."<sup>32</sup> Though Foucault made this statement to describe the process of sex assignment in hermaphrodites, it applies more generally to the ways that all individuals are gendered. Once genders had been socially codified as inherent identities, there was no longer room allowed for choice or deviance. Individuals could only have the proper male or female body, and they could only have the correct attendant desires.

Though medical experts and court officials were implicated in the development of the sexual discourse, they alone could not account for the degree to which the gender system permeates all aspects of society. To explain how the binary-gender system was regulated and enforced, Foucault developed a theory of power that did not rest purely on the juridical model. Foucault describes this as the focus of his writings on the history of sexuality: to "conceive of sex without the law, and power without the king."<sup>33</sup> He defines this form of power as *discursive power*. Once a discourse has been set in motion, it can

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<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, "Introduction", *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, translated by Richard McDougall, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, page ix.

<sup>33</sup> Foucault, 1990, page 91.

then regulate all aspects within its reach, determining what can be considered valid and what will be marked as illicit. Unlike the centralized power of the state, discursive power is diffuse. “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.”<sup>34</sup> And unlike the public rule and law of the monarch, discursive power gains its strength from operating discreetly, even ‘secretively.’ “For (power), secrecy is not in the nature of its abuse; it is indispensable to its operation.”<sup>35</sup> Discursive power is present in every part of our lives, yet we are rarely aware of it. We accept its rules as natural, and are even willing to defend them as such. It is only when one challenges that discourse, as I shall elaborate later, that we can begin to see how discursive power operates.

Discursive power is effective not only because it works invisibly through dispersed sources, but also because it is generated from within the very bodies that it governs. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault described the ideal prison, the Panopticon.<sup>36</sup> A series of cells encircle a central tower; from the tower, it is possible for the guards to observe all of the cells. The inmates, however, cannot see the guards from their cells. They cannot tell whether they are being watched, or even if there really is a guard in the tower. The inmates are forced to monitor their own behavior out of fear of being caught misbehaving. “Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, individuals in a society learn to see themselves through the eyes of others within their community, and are thus forced to monitor themselves for signs of abnormality. They scrutinize their own behavior, keeping themselves in check. This is the gaze: not simply the mere act of looking, but the omnipresent regulatory force that compels individuals to control themselves.

Following Foucault, Judith Butler has also worked to explain the cultural processes through which gender is regulated. She argues that gender is not simply ‘constructed’, a term that would imply a certain amount of agency. Rather, Butler argues that gender is a ‘citational’ process, an idea drawn from the work of J.L. Austen and

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<sup>34</sup> Foucault, 1990, page 93.

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, 1990, page 86.

<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage Books, Second Edition 1995, page 200.

<sup>37</sup> Foucault, 1995, page 201.



Jacques Derrida.<sup>38</sup> According to Austin, words such as ‘I do’ are performative speech, meaning that they execute an action through being said.<sup>39</sup> Derrida expanded upon this idea, arguing that these words gained their power through citation. By citing similar speech, performative words can be recognized, and their power validated by others. The words ‘I do’ act to join two people in marriage not simply out of any inherent power, but because they resemble other previously spoken invocations.<sup>40</sup> In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler took up the idea of performativity, and related it to the idea of gender. “Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power.”<sup>41</sup> Butler argues that gender is also performative, beginning with the first words spoken over an individual at birth, ‘It’s a boy/girl!’ Gender becomes performative by being citational, as it requires people to ‘cite’ certain gendered norms that can be recognized and understood by others. Men and women continue this re-iterative performance throughout their lives, and are continually ‘gendered’ by properly enacting certain roles.

Since the theories of Butler and Foucault reveal that gender is more a cultural idea than a biological identity, the particular ways in which gender is performed and recognized should accordingly vary among different cultures and at different points in history. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler sought to critique earlier forms of feminism in which the subject of ‘women’ was simply taken as a given. Butler argues that the concept ‘woman’ (and by extension, of ‘man’) is not a universal biological essence, but an identity given meaning through its specific context of race, class, and ethnicity.<sup>42</sup> It may then assist our understanding of gender to explore the particular ways through which gender is articulated and constructed in different cultural and historical contexts.

The writing of Foucault and Butler has been central to the development of queer theory, which provides an interdisciplinary body of theory with which to approach the

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<sup>38</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*, New York: Routledge, 1993, page 224.

<sup>39</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context”, in *Limited, Inc.*, Gerald Graff, ed.; tr. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

<sup>41</sup> Butler, 1993, page 225.

<sup>42</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, First Edition 1990, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition 1999, page 7.

study of sexuality. Queer theory has served as a highly useful way to analyze gender and sexuality in my ethnography, but queer theory in turn may be better developed through ethnographic research. Much of queer theory has been developed by writers from backgrounds in philosophy and literature, who often used rhetorical or literary examples to illustrate their theories. Ethnography may serve as a way to explore how gender performativity actually manifests and operates in the lives of real people. Bordeaux's placement on the margin of Afrikaner culture may make his stories particularly useful for such analysis. Describing the work of Foucault, gender activist and theorist Riki Wilchins explains that it is often necessary to look at marginalized figures to demonstrate the power of discourse.

"To clearly see discursive power at work, we need bodies at society's margins. Margins are margins because that's where the discourse begins to fray, where whatever paradigm we're in starts to lose its explanatory power and all those inconvenient exceptions began to cause problems."<sup>43</sup>

We often take our normalized understanding of gendered bodies for granted, simply accepting them as biological. Foucault became interested in Hermine Barbin because of what she reveals about the 'natural' gender binary system. As a hermaphrodite, she confounds our normalized ideas of gender, letting us see the fissures in what we take as natural. Similarly, the instances when Bordeaux was punished for enacting 'abnormal' desires reveal how 'normality' was defined in his community. If we look at these moments in his life when his actions were policed or 'corrected', we can begin to understand how masculinity was performed in Afrikaner culture during his childhood. Ethnographic research on subjects like Bordeaux may help us to more fully recognize the subtle ways in which gender works in all our lives.

### *The desires of normal boys*

Bordeaux learned early in life what he was allowed, and what he was not. He learned that his sister could have Cabbage Patch dolls and My Little Pony toys, but that it would be wrong for him to play with them. And though he learned that he shouldn't be

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<sup>43</sup> Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*, Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2004, page 71.

doing these things, he still wanted to. Accordingly, he was forced to develop clever ways around this prohibition. When his family was out, Bordeaux would sneak into his sister's room to play with her Barbie. He would carefully undress her, taking off each article of clothing that she wore, and laying them out on the floor beside him. He could then try her out in different outfits, assured that he would be able to return her to her proper clothes when he was done, leaving her just as his sister had left her. As long as no one knew, he could satisfy his desires.

Why should Bordeaux have been forced to play with his sister's toys in secret? What was he risking? Surely, the main reason present in his mind was that he risked the disapproval of his family. But why should they have objected? What made his actions punishable? If gender really is inherent and biological, what challenge did he present? The affront his activities would have caused can be explained by exploring the link between gender and action.

It is commonly thought that a gender is an attribute an individual has, and an action is something that an individual does. Yet under Butler's theory of performativity, we see that gender is itself a series of actions: actions that reference similar previous actions. "As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation."<sup>44</sup> Butler argues that it is through citational acts that people are gendered. It is through particular referential actions that one enacts the 'regulatory ideal', and thus is gendered. Playing with dolls and having an interest in fashion were citational acts; unfortunately for Bordeaux, he was citing the 'wrong' gender. By acting on girly desires, Bordeaux was not just refusing to act like a boy; he was threatening his status as a boy. This is not to say that he could 'become' a girl by acting like a girl, or that he would now fail to be recognized as a boy. Since gender is always citational, and requires the recognition of others, he alone did not have that much agency. His actions could only cause him to fall short of a proper masculine performance, marking him as a failure and an abnormality. The fact that people should have felt the need to correct him, or to

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<sup>44</sup> Butler, 1999, page 178.

reprimand him for his deviance, reveals that the gender system is always in threat, in need of regulation and enforcement.

### *Discursive power in Hoedspruit*

The anxiety that Bordeaux's actions caused reveal that the gender system is always in need of reinforcement. But through what process did that reinforcement work? In many of Bordeaux's stories, there is a sense of threat and anxiety around enacting his girly desires. He knew that he would be in serious trouble if he were caught with his sister's dolls, or wearing her dress. He had even had the experiences of being reprimanded and shouted at for not acting like enough of a boy. Yet though Bordeaux often risked chastisement for his deviances, he never told me about being 'punished' in any traditional sense in any of the stories that he told me. He was not grounded for playing with dolls, or spanked for wanting to take dance lessons. The sting that hurt most was being told that he was abnormal, of recognizing that other people disapproved of his actions.

A clear illustration of this is when Bordeaux gave the speech in class saying that he wished to be a fashion designer. His mother spoke with him firmly, clearly trying to impress upon him how upset she was that he had told his classmates that he wanted to be a designer. She reasoned with him through a call to 'normality', asking him to consider whether his actions were similar to those of other boys. Since Bordeaux had not told his mother about the presentation, he realized that she had found out because other people in the community had been talking about him. He had knowingly said something that a boy in his town should not have, and everyone around him had taken notice. He had been recognized as a misfit. It was a lesson that Bordeaux had learned early in life, and would hear repeated again and again. Gender was a performance, and he would get punished for playing it incorrectly.

Importantly, he would not be punished directly, but through discreet methods. The people in his community spoke about him behind his back, making him aware of his status as an abnormality in the community. He learned to recognize how other people saw him, and through internalizing that gaze, became adept at monitoring his own

behavior. He began to recognize what was 'normal' and allowed, and what would mark him as strange. He could censor his own actions to fit the regulatory ideal of his community, and he often did. If he wanted to play with dolls, he would have to do it when no one was at home and there was no risk of being seen. This is discursive power at work.

### *Childhood drag shows and the possibility for subversion*

Bordeaux often found ways of playing traditional childhood games with altered rules. Just as he learned how to play with his sister's Barbie without getting caught, he learned ways to play games in ways that satisfied his desires. He could be a single father when playing house, eliminating the romantic relationship with a wife. He could mess around with Playmobil, but he could put his toys in romantic relationships. Most notably, he could play wedding-wedding, and get to wear the gown.

It was Bordeaux's story of playing wedding-wedding dressed as Princess Diana that most interested me initially. Drag performances were central to Judith Butler's investigation of gender. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler lists Esther Newton's *Mother Camp*, an ethnography of American drag queens, as one of the influences for her theories. In the preface to *Gender Trouble*, she questions the relationship between drag and gender identity. "Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established?"<sup>45</sup> A drag queen can cite the same codes that a 'biological' woman uses in getting dressed to go out. This may reveal that the femininity of a woman is as much a performance as the femininity of a drag queen. "To claim that gender is like drag, or is drag is to suggest that 'imitation' is at the heart of the heterosexual project and its gender binarisms, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations."<sup>46</sup> As Butler states, both are copies, neither is the original; however, only one gains validity by being recognized as 'natural.' It is gender's citationality, the process that gives gender its power, which can

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<sup>45</sup> Butler, 1999, page xxvii.

<sup>46</sup> Butler, 1993, page 125.

also serve to undermine that power. “*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself- as well as its contingency.*”<sup>47</sup> By adopting the codes that define women, drag queens may reveal the level to which gender is always performance, creating a potential space for subversion.

After the publication of *Gender Trouble*, Butler was criticized for ignoring the materiality of the body. In particular, she was critiqued for seemingly suggesting that people could subvert the gender system through drag performances. Many read her work as granting individuals too much agency, and took her to be saying that a man could ‘become’ a woman by dressing as one, or that one could choose which gender they wished to perform. In response, she clarified and further explored many of these ideas in the work *Bodies that Matter*. In the introduction, she states that drag does not necessarily work to subvert ideas of gender, and may even strengthen and enforce them. “At best, it seems, drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes.”<sup>48</sup> We should thus not take Bordeaux’s stories purely as a subversion of the gender system. Even dressed as Princess Diana, he would still be recognized as a boy, albeit an unusual one dressed up in his mother’s nightgown.

It may of course be giving young Bordeaux too much power to say that he could have been able to subvert his culture’s gender norms through ‘performing’ femininity. After all, stating that gender is performative does not mean that people are active agents in choosing what gender they are allowed to perform. Yet when I heard Bordeaux’s story of dressing up as Princess Diana, the element that struck me most was his mother’s reaction. She saw her son in drag, violating his acceptable gender role. Her response was subtle and sweet, if regulatory. She did not simply tell him to take off the costume, or to stop playing pretend. Rather, she went to her sewing machine and created for him a new costume to wear: pants, a shirt, and a tie, so that he could play the part of Prince Charles. She gave him a different role to play, the proper role, of a prince rather than a princess. She replaced one performance- the improper one- with a different performance-

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<sup>47</sup> Butler, 1999, page 175, emphasis in original.

<sup>48</sup> Butler, 1993, page 125.

the proper one. He could continue to wear a costume, but now he wore the costume of a man.

Similarly, when the students of Bordeaux's primary school marched onto the sporting field, both boys and girls were wearing costumes. They wore Voortrekker style dress, referencing an idealized historical concept of life in a nostalgic past. The image of the Great Trek is central to Afrikaner mythology, and performances of the historical event have been instrumental in shaping Afrikaner nationalism. From the beginning, these performances have been highly gendered. Describing a procession of recreated wagons at a 1938 recreation of the Great Trek, Anne McClintock remarks,

"Each wagon became the microcosm of colonial society at large: the whip-wielding white patriarch prancing on horseback... mother and children ensconced in the wagon- the women's starched white bonnets signifying the purity of the race, the decorous surrender of their sexuality to the patriarch..."<sup>49</sup>

The Voortrekkers themselves have taken on heroic significance in Afrikaner ideology. In his book, *The Afrikaners of South Africa*, Vernon February states that in Afrikaner mythology, "Voortrekkers personified that which was best in the Afrikaner nation."<sup>50</sup> It is worth noting, then, that the costumes that Bordeaux and his classmates were required to wear in attempting to personify this ideal of Afrikaner identity reflect markedly different gender roles. The boys wore khaki shirts and long pants, suggesting a masculine identity linked to the veld. They were meant to be rugged and outdoorsy, strong and 'manly.' The girls wore elaborate frilly dresses, evoking a sense of refinement and hyperbolic femininity. They were to be delicate, 'womanly.' Afrikaner mythology idealizes exaggerated gender roles. When the students march onto that field in their Voortrekker finest, every boy and girl was playing a part. Bordeaux's only problem was that he desired to play the other one.

The stories of Bordeaux playing wedding-wedding and of his school performing the volkspele are salient examples, in that they were *actual* performances. But they are revealing of the everyday performativity of gender in children's lives. When the children

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<sup>49</sup> Anne McClintock, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven.': Women and Nationalism in South Africa", *Transition*, Number 51, 1991, page 107.

<sup>50</sup> Vernon February, *The Afrikaners of South Africa*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1991, page 44.

in Bordeaux's class were asked to present on what they would like to be when they grew up, there were a limited set of acceptable answers: boys were to be farmers, girls were to be missionaries, teachers, or farmer's wives, positions that are similarly revealing of the acceptable gender roles in the community. Bordeaux's answer, that he wanted to go into fashion design, was most provoking not simply because it was different, but because he 'cited' incorrectly.

*Conclusion: The girl in the mirror*

*"I looked at myself in the mirror and giggled uncomfortably. Under the dress I was not wearing anything. I had wanted to feel how the fabric felt against my skin. It was an incredible sensation. I think I was rushing from excitement. I looked and felt so feminine. So incredibly fine.*

*"There was no boy to take my hand and dance with me. But I was embodying both male and female roles. In the mirror, looking back at me, was a very effeminate girl with a short haircut. Under the layers of petticoats was a boy with a flat chest and penis.*

*"I was excited and scared at the same time. I knew if someone caught me in the dress I would never hear the end of it. And at the same time I wanted someone to see me and tell me I looked lovely."*

In a subtle way, Bordeaux's stories reveal gender for the artifice that it is. They represent moments throughout his life when his desires were restrained by a larger power. These were encounters with the discursive power that regulated gender in his community, instances where his behavior was defined as abnormal, and he was compelled to censor himself. We can clearly see the strength of discursive power in his life; his community shamed him into normality, to the point where he began to regulate his own behavior as he felt they saw it.

When Bordeaux looked at himself in the mirror while wearing his sister's volkspele dress, he viewed himself with multiple sets of eyes. He could admire himself in the beautiful gown that had been denied him, enjoying the fulfillment of his illicit desires. At the same time, he was forced to view himself with the hegemonic gaze of



society that he had been forced to internalize. He was thus aware that others would disapprove of what he was doing, and he realized that he could never wear this dress in public. But most promisingly, he was able to imagine that someone might conceivably view him in the dress, and compliment him for how he looked. So perhaps, if even in just a few minutes stolen in his sister's room, there could be a moment of subversion in Bordeaux's life.

University of Cape Town

*Protecting the Bastion:*

Homosociality and Homophobia in Afrikaner Men's Organizations

*"In high school I shared a room with three guys, Andre, Gerrit, and Hein. We were kind of friends, I guess. I was going through a phase where I was trying to spend less time with my friend Joseph, I guess to be popular. My roommates approved of me distancing myself from Joseph, and we got along together.*

*"One afternoon after lunch we all returned to our room. We had to get our homework books and change into plain clothes, and we had a few minutes to relax. It was a nice day in late spring, and we were all feeling kind of lazy.*

*"Andre had gotten undressed, and was lying on his bed in just his underwear. The other guys were getting changed, and I was at my bed, sorting through my schoolbag. The next moment, I saw Andre pulling his underpants down, revealing his penis. This was a boy's res, so seeing his penis was nothing new. But that day was a bit different. In my estimation- and everyone else's, as penis sizes were commonly discussed among guys- Andre had an average sized penis. But today he was holding it in his right hand, and it looked very erect and very large. Andre was majorly impressed with the size of his penis. He held it in his hand and called upon us to look at it. We all turned around and looked at him. He was really very big and it was quite a sight, especially since Andre was fairly short, and it looked a bit disproportionate.*

*"We all acted like we were shocked or a bit grossed out, but impressed nonetheless. The other boys kept on staring while Andre was holding it in his hand and admiring himself. 'Wow, look how big it is. Isn't this just a beautiful cock? It's huge!' Gerrit looked genuinely impressed, and Hein just laughed at him. I didn't make any comments. I was a bit embarrassed, so I turned around and kept on going through my books, just stealing a sideways glance.*

*"Then Andre said to me, 'Hey Bordeaux, do you want to touch it? I bet you want to touch this beauty.'*

*"Everybody kind of laughed at Andre's joke. I felt extremely uncomfortable. I laughed nervously and told him to 'fuck off', that there was no way I wanted to touch his penis.*

*"Next thing, however, he went all soft again. Andre pulled up his underwear and got dressed. Nobody said another thing about what just happened. There was an air of silliness in the room, like something totally stupid had just happened, and it did not need any more pondering."*

One of the greatest contradictions that Bordeaux experienced throughout his adolescence was the homophobia to which he was subjected. From the beginning of high school, Bordeaux was targeted and ostracized as a homosexual. At the same time, his male classmates were involved in intensely homoerotic activities: they played around in the shower, compared penis sizes, and even masturbated together in groups. And though Bordeaux was growing increasingly attracted to other boys, he wasn't involved in the homoerotic activities of the guys around him. He found himself in a confusing position; he was targeted as a homosexual, and mocked and ostracized for something that he wasn't doing, but that it seemed the other boys were.

Despite his desire to find a more liberal environment after high school, he encountered homophobia at the Rand Afrikaanse University (RAU) that was even harsher in tone. At RAU, Bordeaux lived in a men's residence hall known as Bastion. At Bastion, male students were known as *ridders*, knights, and they were required to be manly. They demonstrated this manliness through being involved in initiation ceremonies, through enduring hazing rituals, and significantly, through engaging in intensely homophobic behavior. Yet much of the content of the initiation ceremonies and hazing rituals looked strangely similar to the activities that the *ridders* showed contempt for through their homophobia. In this essay, I'll look at the two sides of this contradiction: homosociality, and homophobia. Through a reading of Bordeaux's experiences in high school and university, I will explore the relationship between male bonding and homophobic exclusion to see how masculine power maintained its control through Afrikaner men's organizations.

## *Homosociality*

The term homosocial is used to describe the relationships formed between men. The concept of homosociality was developed in part through the work of anthropologists researching the kinship-system, the organization of laws and rules governing social relations. In his work *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss argued that marriage is a form of gift exchange, a process whereby various goods are given from one person or group to another in order to strengthen social ties. Levi-Strauss argued that in marriage one group gives their women to another group in order to create a bond between the two groups. Levi-Strauss argues that it is this exchange of women that forms the basis of social organization. As evidence, he points out that incest is universally taboo, though the laws that define incest are not. He argues that this suggests that incest is forbidden not for any biological reasons, but because it would prevent the proper exchange of women, and thereby hinder the development of social bonds.<sup>51</sup>

Analyzing Levi-Strauss's work, Gayle Rubin elaborates on what this means for gender relations. "If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical powers of social linkage".<sup>52</sup> Thus the most important bond formed through exchange marriage is not between man and wife, but between the two men involved in the trade. Rubin uses Levi-Strauss's assertions to argue that homosocial bonds are at the center of gender division, and the oppression of homosexuals.

"The sexual division of labour is implicated in both aspects of gender-male and female- it creates them, and it creates them heterosexual. The suppression of the homosexual component of human sexuality, and by corollary, the oppression of homosexuals, is therefore a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Summarized in Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," *Feminism & History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pages 115-116.

<sup>52</sup> Rubin, page 118.

<sup>53</sup> Rubin, page 122.

Homosexual relationships disrupt the development of heterosexual relationships, and therefore must be controlled. Importantly, this does not mean a total ban on homosexual activity. As evidence, Rubin describes a group of people in Papua New Guinea who use oral sex between different generations of males as a means to strengthen social bonds between men. They do this, however, in order to become men so that they can then impregnate women. Homosocial bonds can involve homosexual behavior, as long as it leads to the proper heterosexual order.

The concept of homosociality is particularly important for an analysis of Afrikaner male power, as a framework of homosocial male bonds support Afrikaner culture. From early in his life, Bordeaux was expected to take part in male bonding exercises. He was forced, despite his protests, to play rugby in primary school. He was a target on the field, and a scapegoat when the team struggled. At the end of the fifth grade he was required to attend veld school with all of the other male students in the area. The concepts behind veld school are highly evocative of a romantic Afrikaner concept of masculinity: a group of young boys becoming men through hardship and work in the outdoors. Bordeaux found veld school tiresome, and considered it to be a waste of time. While the other boys were bonding by skinny-dipping and playing games, Bordeaux was watching from a critical distance, unsure of his position in the rituals.

Afrikaner nationalism was founded upon these bonds between men: between father and son, male students in the residence halls, soldiers in the army, and perhaps most significantly, between the men of the Broederbond, the 'brotherhood'. The Broederbond was a secret society of Afrikaner men that served to promote the interests of the Afrikaner nation. The development of the Broederbond was concomitant with the development of Afrikaner nationalism and culture, as Anne McClintock reveals. "The same year (as Afrikaans was recognized as an official language), a small, clandestine clique of Afrikaans men launched a secret society, with the mission of capturing the loyalties of dispirited Afrikaners and fostering white male business power."<sup>54</sup> In the years following its creation, the Broederbond founded a number of organizations, such as the Federation of Afrikaans Culture (FAK), that were designed to promote Afrikaner

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<sup>54</sup> Anne McClintock, page 107.

culture as a distinct identity.<sup>55</sup> “Covering activities from school drama to literary societies, (the FAK) spread through towns and cities all over the country, sponsoring ethnic activities among Afrikaners and working actively toward the creation of a self-conscious Afrikaner identity.”<sup>56</sup> The Broederbond is thus in many ways at the center of the Afrikaner nation, and male homosociality is in turn at the center of the Broederbond. McClintock points out that the very name of the group, the brotherhood, reveals the level to which Afrikaner nationalism is based upon male power. “Henceforth, Afrikaner nationalism would be synonymous with white male interests, white male aspirations, and white male politics.”<sup>57</sup> We must then understand male bonding in Afrikaner culture not simply as a form of social relationship, but as representative of the hegemonic male power that underlies Afrikaner nationalism.

### *Demonstrating kragdadigheid*

In the ethnography *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*, Vincent Crapanzano speaks with Hennie, an older Afrikaner man, about the bonds between father and son.

“There is a tremendous identification between father and son. The son puts on a show of masculinity. We have a special word for it in Afrikaans: *kragdadigheid*, ‘power’, ‘strength.’ ‘Potency,’ I think, is the best translation. The son must show his potency, his *kragdadigheid*, before his father.”<sup>58</sup>

As an example of this, Hennie relates the story of Dirkie Uys, a heroic figure in Afrikaner mythology.<sup>59</sup> After witnessing his father being wounded by a group of Zulu fighters, Dirkie bravely stands over his body, protecting his father. In so doing, he proves his manhood. Hennie suggests that this is revealing of the way that Afrikaner men often feel the need to ‘demonstrate’ their masculinity through their relationships with other men. As I discuss more fully in the next essay, “Racheltjie de Beer and the Homosexual

<sup>55</sup> Mark Suzman, *Ethnic Nationalism and Stare Power: The Rise of Irish Nationalism, Afrikaner Nationalism, and Zionism*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999, pages 39-40.

<sup>56</sup> Suzman, page 40.

<sup>57</sup> McClintock, page 107.

<sup>58</sup> Vincent Crapanzano, *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*, New York: Vintage Books, 1986, page 71.

<sup>59</sup> Crapanzano, 1986, page 75.

Menace.” stories about Afrikaner children are often instructive parables, meant to teach children properly gendered roles. By taking the place of his father during his moment of weakness, Dirkie becomes a man himself. Young boys demonstrate their strength to males of greater power, thereby developing homosocial bonds.

The strongest representation of homosocial bonding in Bordeaux’s life took place in Bastion, the residence hall in which he lived at university. At Bastion, the male residents were called upon to be *ridders*, knights. They demonstrated this through showing their power, and displaying homophobic behavior. At a group talk, some of the upper-level male students told a story in which they attacked and assaulted a homosexual who was passing out flyers on campus. Bordeaux recalls that this story was told with pride, and was meant to display that the men of his residence were ‘real men.’ In *Waiting*, Hennie tells a similar story in which his uncle captured and injured a coloured man who had been stealing produce from his farm. This thief had boasted of being imbued with a magical strength, so Hennie’s uncle recounted this event as a demonstration of his own masculinity and power. In *The Country of My Skull*, Antjie Krog retells a strikingly similar story about her own brothers.<sup>60</sup>

The students of Bastion became knights through an elaborate series of ceremonies and initiations. These initiation rites and hazing rituals were designed exactly for the younger males to show the established males of Bastion that they were worthy of joining the knighthood. As Lionel Tiger states in an essay on initiation rituals, these acts are best understood as a form of ‘courtship’:

“To affirm to its members and to outsiders that recruits are worthy of membership, a process of initiation is contrived which involves stringent ordeals to test the courage and endurance of initiates... The initiation ceremony, then, is part of a male-male ‘courtship’ pattern tied to a tendency for males to seek status among other males...”<sup>61</sup>

Initiation rituals are a form of courtship in which men attempt to prove to men with more power that they are worthy of forming a bond. The process of being inducted into the

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<sup>60</sup> Antjie Krog, “They Never Wept, the Men of my Race”, *Country of my Skull*, Johannesburg: Random House, 1998.

<sup>61</sup> Lionel Tiger, “Males Courting Males”, *The Hazing Reader*, ed. By Hank Nuwer, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, page 15.

knighthood at Bastion culminated in a ceremony in which the young male initiates were forced to stand together naked and sing the house song. Activities involving nudity and homoerotic behavior are common in hazing rituals.<sup>62</sup> Yet these acts are matched equally by declarations of homophobia. What is the connection between homoerotic displays, and homophobic attitudes?

In a volume on homosexuality in American fraternities, Pamela Freeman points out that homophobia is commonly invoked in hazing rituals.

“In all-male organizations, hazing often is used to prove a member’s masculinity, as shown through an ability to endure pain and demonstrate heterosexuality. Hazing activities that subject male initiates to name-calling (e.g., “faggot”) and coming into close contact with the genitalia of other male initiates are designed to ridicule and cause discomfort. Based on an assumption that men who are masculine will find such behavior to be abhorrent, the initiates do not dare act as if they are comfortable with the activities, but they know they must comply with their orders or be subjected to even harsher punishment.”<sup>63</sup>

Freeman suggests that homophobia is at the root of this hazing, as ‘masculine’ men can think of nothing more demeaning than being forced to act like a homosexual. I do not feel that the equation is so simple. I would argue, rather, that homophobia is not necessarily the *cause* of hazing rituals that draw upon homoerotic behavior, but its *effect*. Put otherwise, men in fraternities do not just engage in seemingly homoerotic activities because they are homophobic; rather, they display homophobia because the activities they engage in are seemingly homoerotic.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues this point in her book *Between Men*, as she articulates a theory of ‘homosocial desire.’ Homosocial desire, as she points out, embodies an internal paradox.

“In fact, (homosociality) is applied to such activities as ‘male bonding’, which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the

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<sup>62</sup> Tiger, page 15.

<sup>63</sup> Pamela W. Freeman, “The Relationship between Hazing and Homophobia”, *Brotherhood: Gay Life in College Fraternities*, edited by Shane L. Windmeyer, New York: Alyson Books, 2005, page 274.



orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual- a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted."<sup>64</sup>

We understand the activities between heterosexual men and homosexual men as being entirely different. Sedgwick, however, suggests the possibility of a connection between them- a "continuum" that runs from one to the other without a clear boundary defining them as distinct. For though it is true that the male students at Bastion were 'forced' to engage in homoerotic behavior during initiation, there were as many instances when they engaged in similar behavior despite not being forced. For example, how do we explain activities such as comparing penis sizes, playing games naked, masturbating together that were not only homoerotic, but also voluntary and pleasurable? Men engage in a number of activities that are homoerotic, both in hazing rituals, and in everyday bonding. The homoeroticism of hazing rituals is thus internal to its functioning as homosocial bonding. The homophobia these men also display is thus an after effect- a means through which the activities they engage in are marked as safe, as different from homosexual activity.

### *Policing homosexuality*

For homosociality to be marked as safe, homosexuality must be policed. Masculinity at Bastion was policed in part through an organization known as the SS, the Secret Police. Though taking its name from the Nazi Secret Police, Bastion's SS likely based itself as much on the organization of the Broederbond. Like the Broederbond, the SS was a secretive association of men organized around conservative Afrikaner values. More importantly, both organizations exerted their covert influence to maintain male power and conformist policies. The Broederbond had not only worked to develop the identity of the Afrikaner nation; it was also a regulatory force that maintained the obedience and loyalty of its members to the politics of the National Party. To do this, it exerted "pressure on those who would break rank and seek rewards outside of the

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<sup>64</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, page 1-2.

(National) party or Afrikanerdom.”<sup>65</sup> Yet more than through the execution of actual violence, they worked mainly through threats of violence. In a common room in Bastion, there was a photo album documenting how the SS had treated past indiscretions, including a photograph of a room that had been torched, with an ominous warning that the same would happen to anyone who strayed. After Bordeaux was targeted as a homosexual, he began to receive threats of violence, letting him know that he had not been accepted at Bastion.

Bordeaux’s experience was not unique to him, and is in fact reflective of the larger position of gay men in South Africa. In an article on the legislation of homosexuality, Glen Retief points out that by the 1980s the police had stopped openly harassing homosexuals, and gay bars were allowed to remain open. Despite this, regulation of homosexuals continued, but police now waged a “low-intensity war” against them.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, even at times when gay communities were allowed to develop, laws were kept in place to keep the threat of prosecution present. In ‘Unapprehended Felons’, Edwin Cameron cites the rulings on several cases to demonstrate that courts maintained that homosexuality was unnatural and abhorrent, leaving all homosexuals with an unprotected legal status. “These laws are seldom enforced,” Cameron admits, yet, as he continues later: “the criminal prohibitions as well as the discriminatory age of consent have a negative effect on gay men and women’s lives. Even when not enforced, such laws reduce gay men and women to what one writer has called ‘unapprehended felons.’”<sup>67</sup> Like the shadowy threats of the SS, anti-sodomy laws were kept in place to be used when the police or courts wished to enforce them, creating a perpetual sense of unease. This created an environment in which homosexuals could be persecuted by their community, encouraging and allowing discrimination, blackmail, and homophobic violence. This is a tool of hegemonic masculinity. “While hegemonic masculinity generally operates without recourse to violence, it is the case that

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<sup>65</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, “The Ascendancy of Afrikanerdom”, *The Anti-apartheid Reader*, edited by David Mermelstein, New York: Grove Press, 1987, page 79.

<sup>66</sup> Glen Retief, “Keeping Sodom out of the laager: State Repression of homosexuality in apartheid South Africa”, in *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*, edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994, page 104.

<sup>67</sup> Edwin Cameron, “Unapprehended Felons: Gays and Lesbians in the Law in South Africa,” in *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*, edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994, page 92.

the capacity for and the threat of violence underpins it.”<sup>68</sup> The homophobic threat of violence, more than the execution of violence itself, worked to keep homosexuality illicit.

One of the strangest elements of Bordeaux’s experiences was the tension that being labeled as a homosexual left him in. Though he experienced homophobia throughout his high school and college years, and was never completely accepted, neither was he completely excluded either. When other students wanted their back scratched, or to have lotion applied, they asked him. When his roommate Andre showed off his penis to the other boys, he specifically asked Bordeaux if wanted to touch it. Would these actions not put their sexualities into question as well?

In describing the history of homosexuality in England, Sedgwick reveals a situation much like under Apartheid in South Africa, where for long periods of history homosexual communities were allowed to exist, though they were never fully accepted into mainstream society. This leads Sedgwick to ask, “...what does it mean- whom may it benefit- when the oppression of homosexual men has a marginal, terroristic, synecdochic structure rather than a wholesale, genocidal, literalizing one?”<sup>69</sup> The primary effect is that homosexuality was kept perpetually vague and undefined. For homosexuality to be fully condemned and outlawed may mean that certain homosocial activities might also be put under fire. By keeping homophobic exclusion always *in progress*, the distinction between homosocial and homosexual is less something inherent to the act itself, and something defined through the process of policing and regulation.

Homophobia is thus a means by which to differentiate homosocial activities and homosexual behavior, and to keep the boundary between them in place. “What modern European-style homophobia delineates is thus a space, and perhaps a mechanism, of domination, rather than the agency or motivation or political thrust of that domination.”<sup>70</sup> By displaying an extreme homophobia, the men of Bastion could engage in seemingly homoerotic activities, while still placing their own masculinity and heterosexuality above question. Yet the distinction between them is never fully defined, and always kept in progress. Sedgwick underlines this point, arguing:

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<sup>68</sup> Robert Morrell, “Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Dec. 1998, page 609.

<sup>69</sup> Sedgwick, page 88.

<sup>70</sup> Sedgwick, page 87.

“From this point of view, another phenomena that begins to make sense in a new way is the tendency toward important correspondences and similarities between the most sanctioned forms of male-homosocial bonding, and the most reprobated expressions of male homosexual sociality. To put it in twentieth-century American terms, the fact that what goes on at football games, in fraternities, at the Bohemian Grove, and at climactic moments in war novels can look, with only a slight shift of optic, quite startlingly “homosexual,” is not merely an expression of the psychic origin of these institutions in a repressed or sublimated homosexual genitality. Instead, it is the coming to visibility of the normally implicit terms of a coercive double bind... For a man to be a man’s man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being ‘interested in men’.”<sup>71</sup>

The closeness that men experience through male bonding places them on a poorly defined continuum with the closeness that homosexual men share. Homophobia defines a line separating them, making homosocial behavior safe.

### *Conclusion*

In one of his worst experiences at university, Bordeaux was also called upon to ‘prove’ his masculinity. At the end of the initiation week, he was locked into a room with a woman with whom he was supposed to have sex. He freaked out, and as soon as he was let out of the room, he fled the residence. He later told the story to school officials. While it had been damning enough for him not to have had sex with this woman, it had been far worse that he had turned in the other male students involved. Looking back on it later, he recognized that this sealed his fate within the residence, marking him as a target. He had refused not only heterosexual relations, but more importantly, homosocial bonds.

Hegemonic male power, as characterized by Afrikaner men’s organizations, relies upon a strong network of relationships between men. The formation of these

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<sup>71</sup> Sedgwick, page 89.

relationships relied heavily upon homosocial bonding. The continuum that runs between the homosocial and the homosexual is never clearly defined, however, leaving both categories perpetually unclear. By choosing Bordeaux as a target for homophobic treatment, that continuum could be broken, and a barrier established. Other men could act in a homoerotic manner, and by teasing Bordeaux that he liked it, they could displace any threat to their own masculinity. Homosocial behavior could continue, because homosexuality could be pinpointed in a scapegoat. This is not to say all homosocial behavior is simply homosexual behavior, or to suggest that all men are harboring homosexual desire. Rather, it is to demonstrate that the difference between homosocial and homosexual is never clearly distinct- but through homophobia, they are made to seem as though they are. It is through the use of the homophobic threat that homosociality is preserved, and hegemonic male power is secured. By tormenting Bordeaux, the Knights of RAU were protecting the Bastion, maintaining the fortress of white male power.

*Racheltjie de Beer and the homosexual menace*

The threat to white civilization

*“In every People in the world is embodied a Divine Idea and the task of each People is to build upon that Idea and to perfect it. So God created the Afrikaner People with a unique language, a unique philosophy of life, and their own history and tradition in order that they might fulfill a particular calling and destiny here in the southern corner of Africa.”*

– J.C. van Rooy, chairman of the Broederbond, 1944

On a family trip to South-west Africa,<sup>72</sup> Bordeaux heard a series of tapes telling the stories of Afrikaner children heroes. There was the tale of Racheltjie de Beer, the young girl who sacrificed her life to keep her brother from freezing to death in the Karoo. And there was Japie Greyling, who was willing to risk being executed to defend his father and the Boer commando. The experiences of the children in these stories represent the classic model for Afrikaner self-definition: white Afrikaans-speaking individuals, caught in a moment of struggle and self-sacrifice. Yet though the stories of Racheltjie and Japie are relatively similar, we can begin to see some notable differences if we compare them carefully. Boys and girls may both become symbols of Afrikaner identity, but they do so in markedly different ways.

The stories on the tapes were enacted dramatically, and Bordeaux remembers having a strong emotional reaction to listening to them. He also remembers being terrified on his vacation, afraid of the terrorists who seemed so nearby in South-West Africa. In the Afrikaner nation of Bordeaux's childhood, there were a great many forces to fear. There were black Africans fighting for independence, communists trying to take over the African continent, and white homosexuals threatening to pervert and corrupt the youth of South Africa. What did these threats have in common, and what affront did they present to the Afrikaner nation? In this essay, I will examine the political mythology of Afrikaner nationalism in order to see how images of struggle, sacrifice, and heroism were used during the height of Apartheid. By exploring this mythology in relation to the

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<sup>72</sup> Now Namibia.

political and social climate of South Africa in the 1980s, I will see how the 'threats' of the era, including homosexuality, were understood. I will then closely examine the stories of children heroes, to look at what gender roles these stories defined for young boys and girls. Finally, I will investigate the link between these two issues, to explore the social function of mythology, and to uncover the role that heterosexuality plays in Afrikaner ideology.

### *The myths of the nation*

Anthropologists have long been interested in the social function of mythology. While myths are commonly considered to be static, timeless, and irrelevant to the present, anthropologists have argued that they actually serve an important function in contemporary life. Arguing on the value of mythology, Bronislaw Malinowski wrote, "Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man."<sup>73</sup> Myth is an active force in people's lives that works to regulate social order by idealizing certain values. Leonard Thompson points out that myths are selectively maintained or reshaped to serve specific purposes. "Myths originate in specific circumstances as a product of special interests, and they change with the changing interests of successive generations and successive regimes. They vary in intensity: they may be dormant, they may flourish, they may decline, they may die out."<sup>74</sup> Myths are products not simply of the past that they evoke, but of the present in which they are told. Thus studying the myths that Bordeaux was told as a child will give a sense of the values that were important in the social climate of his youth.

Since myths can serve to validate the existence of a particular nation, they can serve a decidedly political function. Thompson describes a political myth as "a tale told

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<sup>73</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, from *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, quoted in Leonard Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985, page 7.

<sup>74</sup> Leonard Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985, page 8.

about the past to legitimize or discredit a regime”.<sup>75</sup> Thompson makes the distinction between conservative and radical myths, pointing out that conservative myths “often narrate events leading to the foundation of the state... legitimizing the social order”.<sup>76</sup> This can work in several ways. If it is a tale of origin, it can naturalize one group’s ascendancy to, and maintenance of, power. If it is a moralistic myth, it can delineate the values of the community, thereby giving a sense of shared ideals that the ruling party is entrusted with maintaining.

The mythology of the Afrikaner nation, like most mythologies, understands itself to be timeless. Writing on Afrikaner nationalism, Anne McClintock points out that it actually grew out of a relatively recent history. “Afrikanerdom is not the mysterious manifestation of a divine plan unfolding through centuries and flowering into history with the Great Trek... Rather, it was forged very recently in the crucible of colonial contradiction.”<sup>77</sup> Afrikaner nationalism developed out of the Anglo-Boer war, in which Afrikaans speaking settlers needed to find grounds on which to unite. “Violently improvised in the shocked aftermath of the war, Afrikaner nationalism was a doctrine of crisis.”<sup>78</sup> The Boers who survived the war developed Afrikaner nationalism as a “counter-culture” in order to survive. Importantly, this sense of struggle became central in Afrikaner mythology, as I shall further explore.

As is common in conservative nationalistic imagery, many of the most powerful symbols of Afrikaner identity are rooted in a nostalgic past. Both of the stories Bordeaux told me were set during crucial events that are considered to be founding moments of Afrikaner history. Racheltjie de Beer lived during the Great Trek, a momentous episode in Afrikaner history remembered as a time of tremendous hardship, when the Boers demonstrated their strength and will to survive. “This monumental migration of the Afrikaners in the early 1830s is seen mostly in heroic-epic proportions. It produced for the Afrikaner a mythology on which he could firmly base his nationalism.”<sup>79</sup> The story of Japie Greyling is set during the Anglo-Boer war, the event that led to the development of Afrikaner nationalism, and a time Afrikaners consider pivotal in defining their identity.

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<sup>75</sup> Thompson, page 1.

<sup>76</sup> Thompson, page 3.

<sup>77</sup> McClintock, page 106.

<sup>78</sup> McClintock, page 106.

<sup>79</sup> Vernon February, *The Afrikaners of South Africa*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1991, page 42.



It was seen as an era when they fought bravely for their independence, and were subjected to the cruelty of the English. "These wars, more than anything else, provided the Afrikaner mythology that would be of fundamental importance to Afrikaner nationalism. Enshrined in the Boer Wars were untold acts of heroism."<sup>80</sup> The Great Trek and the Anglo-Boer War were the primary events that were seen as forging Afrikaner identity, and their use as the setting of these children's stories is accordingly significant.

Significantly, both of these historic events are characterized as times of tremendous struggle. At a conference on white identity held at the University of Cape Town, performance artist Peter van Heerden gave a presentation on Afrikaner identity.<sup>81</sup> He began abruptly, making a proclamation to the audience in a loud, powerful Afrikaans. He then paused, and announced in English that he was white, male, and heterosexual. "I am an Afrikaner." He wore a Voortrekker style costume of a linen shirt, suspenders and roughly-worn khakis. After introducing himself, he screened a video piece entitled *Bok*, a statement on Afrikaner Masculinity. In the video he performed a ritualized execution, likening his own naked body to the flesh of a lamb, being slaughtered for sacrifice. The piece is cathartic and harsh, cold silences contrasting with the clap of the murder and the guttural cries of the dying man.<sup>82</sup> Van Heerden promoted this struggle as a model through which Afrikaners can attain self-definition: 'pushing-through', by sacrifice and struggle.

The struggle to survive is at the center of most Afrikaner mythology. The climax of Racheltjie's story occurs when she experiences a freezing night in the Karoo, representing the powerful image that the brutality of the land serves in Afrikaner mythology. "Land, like the Afrikaans language, the Dutch Reformed Church, and Afrikaans *kultuur*, has become a symbol of a fervent and, in my estimation, anachronistic nationalism that is grounded, perhaps like all nationalisms, in struggle: a struggle for survival."<sup>83</sup> A similar scene is displayed in a statue of a Voortrekker mother at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. She stands holding her children, flanked by wild

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<sup>80</sup> February, page 55.

<sup>81</sup> Wandile Goozen Kasibe, "White, a colour for special occasions," *Art South Africa*, Vol. 5, Issue 2, Summer 2006, pages 24-25.

<sup>82</sup> Francesca Verga, "Peter van Heerden Artthrob at the KZNSA", *Artthrob: Contemporary Art in South Africa*, <http://www.artthrob.co.za/>.

<sup>83</sup> Crapanzano, 1986, page 76.

animals. "The statue of the Voortrekker Mother and her children [says the guidebook] symbolises white civilization while the black wildebeest portray the ever threatening dangers of Africa."<sup>84</sup> It is this struggle for survival, against the land, the British, and the native Africans, that serves as one of the founding images in Afrikaner mythology.

This sense of struggle was seen not just as a form of self-preservation, but also as the fulfillment of a divine destiny. "The Afrikaner's struggle to survive in a harsh environment, to preserve his identity in the face of racial and cultural extinction, to overcome the enemy, Black or for that matter English, was understood as a means of preserving God's kingdom on earth."<sup>85</sup> The Afrikaner government envisioned itself as a stronghold of white civilization on an uncivilized continent.<sup>86</sup> In part, this comes from the historical circumstances that the Afrikaner population has always been a relatively small percentage of the population of South Africa. "In South Africa, the mythology of the Afrikaner nationalist movement reflects the fact that the Afrikaner people have never amounted to a numerical majority of the population in any specific territory."<sup>87</sup> The Afrikaners developed a myth of survival to support their tenuous position in Africa. To support the legitimacy of a white minority ruling over a black majority, the Afrikaners established an ideology of racism, making it seem natural that they should be in power.

### *The last stronghold of white civilization in Africa*

When the racist regime of Apartheid was established, it was not alone in the world. Racism was common in America and Europe, and similar colonial governments occupied most of Africa. By the 1980s, the situation had changed dramatically. "Segregation was on the way out in America; colonization was ending in Asia and tropical Africa; and local Africans were mounting a serious challenge to the white regime and denying that it was legitimate."<sup>88</sup> The world no longer supported the Apartheid

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<sup>84</sup> David Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, page 13.

<sup>85</sup> Crapanzano, 1986, page 99.

<sup>86</sup> D.F. Malan, "Apartheid: Divine Calling", *The Anti-Apartheid Reader*, edited by David Mermelstein, New York: Grove Press, 1987, page 95.

<sup>87</sup> Thompson, page 25.

<sup>88</sup> Thompson, page 30.

government. The myth of a white stronghold took on particular significance, as the values of Afrikanerdom came under stronger and stronger attack.

This sense of isolation increased as white ruled waned in Africa. White South Africans saw a parallel of themselves in Zimbabwe. "For the South African the tales of Zimbabwe are proof of his need to hold firm against the Black man. Zimbabwe (had) become a stage on which one possible scenario of South Africa's future (was) played out."<sup>89</sup> The changes taking place across the border were understood through Afrikaner mythology. "From a land of possibility Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, became like Angola, Mozambique, and even Botswana, a land of danger to be guarded against. It is the preservation of a frontier, rather than the establishment of a border, that the fighting in the South West is all about."<sup>90</sup> Though the image of the nation as a stronghold had been present in Afrikaner mythology since its development, it took on particular significance in response to these events.

The National Party used fear as one of its main resources, creating a "climate of fear and subservience."<sup>91</sup> A climate of terror developed in South Africa, as the Afrikaner government taught whites to "fear creeping communism and black power (and to equate the one with the other)."<sup>92</sup> The term 'communist' came to be used to refer to anyone who opposed the state, regardless of his or her political affiliation. "The State uses the label 'communist' in an uncritical and unexamined way as its symbol of evil."<sup>93</sup> Terrorism, likewise, was used as blanket term, describing "any act whatsoever with intention to endanger the maintenance of law and order".<sup>94</sup> Fear of communism and terrorism served as a powerful force of social manipulation. Children were taught to fear communism, and white voters were made to be anxious of black terrorists. This further supported the rule of the white minority, buttressing a political system that was increasingly under fire from outside pressure. "Black dominance- the black peril- fuels authoritarianism, justifies and legitimizes it for whites, and makes the concentration of power in a few

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<sup>89</sup> Crapanzano, 1986, page 159.

<sup>90</sup> Crapanzano, 1986, page 159.

<sup>91</sup> Rotberg, page 86.

<sup>92</sup> Rotberg, page 81.

<sup>93</sup> February, page 234.

<sup>94</sup> David Harrison, page 217.

hands that much more plausible and self-perpetuating.”<sup>95</sup> The Afrikaner fortress grew stronger in response to these changes, gaining strength from the anxiety of the population. Yet not all threats came from across the border, and within the white communities and neighborhoods of Afrikanerdom, there was another threat: white homosexuals.

### *The homosexual threat*

While terrorists and communists were argued as international threats, debates on morality within South Africa were centered on homosexuals.<sup>96</sup> The Apartheid government used fear tactics to get whites to oppose homosexuality; they formulated a weak linkage between homosexuals and the molestation of minors, playing on people’s fears of child predators.<sup>97</sup> Homosexuality was discussed in parliament, and it was debated “whether or not homosexuality was infectious and could endanger the country’s youth.”<sup>98</sup> Though different in content, the fear tactics used against homosexuals were strangely similar in form to the fear tactics used to build white anxiety about terrorism and black rule. Homosexuals were used to invoke a sense of “moral panic.” As Cape Town queer activist Glen Retief states, “One of the most tenacious myths about homosexuals is that we reproduce ourselves by corrupting the young into our sick and evil ways.” What reason did the government have to promote a fear of homosexuals? In a general history of gay and lesbian activity in South Africa, Mark Gevisser describes a 1966 police raid on a large gay party in Johannesburg. Searching for reasons for the massive police action, Gevisser dismisses several possibilities before concluding simply that “... the South African authorities were consolidating Afrikaner ‘Christian National’ control over the country, expelling from the laager anything that was deemed threatening to white civilisation.”<sup>99</sup> Yet what inherent threat to white civilization is homosexuality? To

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<sup>95</sup> Rotberg, page 85.

<sup>96</sup> Retief, page 101.

<sup>97</sup> Cameron, page 93.

<sup>98</sup> Retief, page 100.

<sup>99</sup> Mark Gevisser, “A different fight for freedom: A history of South African lesbian and gay organisation from the 1950s to 1990s”, in *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*, edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994, page 31.

understand the threat that homosexuality posed in South Africa, we need to outline the government's position on sexual relationships.

The South African government's prohibitions against homosexuality were related to a larger regulation of sexual practices. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault described the process through which sexual practices came under the jurisdiction of the state. By understanding procreation as the maintenance of a population, the state could take control over sexual practices.

"Of course, it had long been asserted that a country had to be populated if it hoped to be rich and powerful; but this was the first time that a society had affirmed, in a constant way, that its future and fortune were tied not only to the number and uprightness of its citizens, to their marriage rules and family organization, but to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex."<sup>100</sup>

Sexuality became a discourse that could be spoken of, measured by science and governed by the state. Thus the sexuality of South Africans became a matter of public importance, able to be regulated and ruled. The South African government could create laws defining what sexual practices were acceptable. "Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it."<sup>101</sup> The sexuality of the subject was no longer his own; it now belonged to the state, and could be subjected to the laws of the nation.

Many of the Apartheid prohibitions over sexuality were focused on sexual interaction between people of different racial groups. Apartheid was, as the name states, a practice of 'separateness' and racial exclusion. This manifested in many ways; in forcing all people to register as belonging to a specific racial category, in marking where different racial groups could live, in determining who could vote, and in defining what sort of facilities whites were allowed and blacks were excluded from.<sup>102</sup> Importantly though, many of the "cornerstones" of apartheid governance and philosophy, including

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<sup>100</sup> Foucault, 1990, page 26.

<sup>101</sup> Foucault, 1990, page 26.

<sup>102</sup> Fiona McLachlan, "The Apartheid Laws in Brief", *The Anti-Apartheid Reader*, edited by David Mermelstein, New York: Grove Press, 1987.

the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Immorality Acts of 1950 and 1957, were designed to regulate sexual relationships between people of different racial groups.<sup>103</sup> The obvious and most profound effect of these laws was to govern relations between races. But beyond that, they are meant to dictate the 'proper' sexual relationships, which would in turn lead to 'proper' breeding of a large population of Afrikaner subjects.

In his *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault questioned why the sexuality of the individual was made into a concern of the state. "All this garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality, is it not motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?"<sup>104</sup> For the Apartheid government, the regulation of population was even more important, as a 'pure' white population was of central importance in Afrikaner ideology. "Family (*gesin*), blood purity (*bloed suiwerheid*), religion (*godsdienst*), fatherland (*vaderlandse bodem*), and a love of freedom (*vryheidsliefde*) – these were the greatest cultural and national inheritances of the nation (*volkserfenis*)."<sup>105</sup> The Apartheid government thus saw the need to develop a healthy population with 'pure' white blood, and accordingly it exerted its power over the sexual interactions of its subjects. The belief that it was a nation in peril allowed the Apartheid government to create a sense of hysteria around reproduction, centered on the preservation of the Afrikaner family. "The family was regarded as the absolute corner-stone of Afrikanerdom. Couples with children were of immense value to the *volk*, more so than those who did not have offspring. Without the family the perpetuation of the *volk* would not be possible."<sup>106</sup> The defense of the family was seen as central to the development of the Afrikaner nation; to protect and regenerate the family was to further the nation as well.

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<sup>103</sup> Crapanzano, 1986 , page xix.

<sup>104</sup> Foucault, 1990, page 37.

<sup>105</sup> February, page 97.

<sup>106</sup> February, page 97.

With the strong importance of the family in Afrikaner nationalist ideology, it is fitting that the myths Bordeaux vividly remembers were tales of families: fathers and sons, sisters and brothers, caught in moments of peril and struggle. The two stories that Bordeaux most vividly recalled, those of Racheltjie de Beer and Japie Greyling, contain many similar structural themes and elements. They are both about young children, who, in a moment of crisis, acted bravely and self-sacrificingly. They both lived during epic moments in Afrikaner history, times of struggle and hardship. In these ways, they are classic examples of nationalistic myths: they evoke a sense of tradition, and promote a specific set of values for the present. Yet while the stories are similar, there are several crucial differences.

One of the most striking similarities in the two stories is the sense of bodily threat that the children face. Japie faces a firing squad, and Racheltjie braves a sudden frost, both to protect the lives of a loved one. However, the relationship between the children and those they save are markedly different. In his story, Japie is nearly killed by the British because he refuses to tell them which way his father went. Like the story of Dirkie Uys that I related in the last essay, Japie takes on the role of his father, and demonstrates that he has the courage to match him. Japie stands up as the surrogate man-of-the-house, defending not only his mother and family, but also the Boer commando, and in a sense, the Afrikaner nation.

Racheltjie, on the other hand, protects her younger brother. In the dialogue of the audiotape that Bordeaux heard, Racheltjie's brother was a small and defenseless child. By laying down her life for a younger sibling, she took on a distinctly matronly role. Though Racheltjie was just a child when she gave her life, her story is evocative of the image of the *volksmoeder*, the Afrikaner mother of the nation. "The defining feature of the *volksmoeder* ideology was the idea of women as mothers, not only in the private sphere of the home and the family, but also as mothers of the Afrikaner nation."<sup>107</sup> The image of the *volksmoeder* has taken on varied forms at different times, but has been

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<sup>107</sup> Louise Vincent "A Cake of Soap: The Volksmoeder Ideology and Afrikaner Women's Campaign for the Vote," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1, (1999), page 10.

gradually codified as one of maternity. This is demonstrated in the *Vrouemonument*, the Women's Monument, in which women are shown as lamenting mothers. "The monument enshrined Afrikaner motherhood as suffering, stoical, and self-sacrificial."<sup>108</sup> This model of Afrikaner motherhood perfectly describes the role that Racheltjie plays. Where Japie stands up to the British, becoming the next generation of strong Afrikaner men, Racheltjie gives her life to save her little brother's, thereby also ensuring the survival of the next generation of Afrikaner men. In these stories, the heroic acts of these Afrikaner children are intensely gendered, and characterized by reproductive heterosexuality.

Thus, these myths are not just about the preservation and the protection of the Afrikaner nation, they are about its *reproduction*. Both stories of boys and girls demonstrate the heroic reproduction of the Afrikaner nation: girls through giving their lives to protect and produce future generations, and boys through themselves becoming the next generation of strong Afrikaner men. The centrality of heterosexuality in the discourse of whiteness may not be unique to the Afrikaner culture. In his writing on whiteness, Richard Dyer comments, "concepts of race are always concepts of the body and also of heterosexuality. Race is a means of categorizing different types of human body which reproduce themselves... Heterosexuality is the means of ensuring, but also the site of endangering, the reproduction of these differences."<sup>109</sup> Yet though it may not have been unique, heterosexuality took on a particular significance for the Afrikaner mythology due to its heightened sense of struggle. It was this need for the preservation of the Afrikaner race, against British incursion and black Africans, that homosexuality threatened. Homosexuals were seen as hindering the growth of the Afrikaner population, and of contaminating the youth with the "infectious spread of the condition."<sup>110</sup> Homosexuals were seen as engaging in sexual practices that would fail to produce children, and they were portrayed as corrupting Afrikaner youth. For these reasons, homosexuals were understood as a threat to the development of the Afrikaner population, and thus a threat to white civilization that needed to be wiped out. As Glen Retief

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<sup>108</sup> McClintock, page 109.

<sup>109</sup> Richard Dyer, *White*, London: Routledge, 1997, page 20.

<sup>110</sup> Cameron, page 93.



poetically states, “The canker of Sodom had to be sliced out before it ruined the moral fibre of the nation.”<sup>111</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In the South Africa of Bordeaux’s youth, the Afrikaner nation saw itself as being under threat. The state regulated racism that had been the foundation of Apartheid was under threat, both from outside pressures, and internal struggle. The Afrikaner nation saw itself as a stronghold, with a mission to fulfill in Africa. At the heart of this mission were properly gendered relationships between men and women, centered on heterosexual procreation. Heterosexuality is thus central to Afrikaner identity, and at the heart of the Afrikaner’s sense of struggle. In turn, the prohibition against homosexuality was not simply incidental. Rather, it was part of a larger means through which the sexual activities of Afrikaner subjects were regulated and controlled, and population growth encouraged.

Stories like those of Afrikaner children heroes were used to naturalize the heterosexual imperative. They valorized strong boys and girls enacting gendered roles, symbolizing the reproduction of the nation. Given that these two myths represent the centrality of heterosexuality to the Afrikaner nation, it is interesting that Bordeaux offered an alternative reading of them. While he had been greatly emotionally moved upon hearing them, he saw himself neither in the self-sacrificing of Racheltjie, or the bravery of Japie. He certainly would not have given his life to save his little brother, forgivable perhaps because he was not hearing the story as an older sister. And he would not have simply stood up to the British, refusing to tell them which way his father had gone. Rather, he would have given them a clever answer, leading them off the track. He could imagine himself in the story, but he could also imagine a different solution. It is from this starting point, however small, that Bordeaux may have been able to begin questioning his relationship to the Afrikaner nation, and perhaps to wondering if he had a place in it at all.

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<sup>111</sup> Retief, page 102.

## *Epilogue*

The ethnographer arrives in the field

In December, as my time in South Africa ended, I finally visited the field sites that I had been writing about for months. On our last full day in the Cape, Bordeaux and I spent a few hours touring the Winelands. After having coffee in Stellenbosch and lunch in Franschoek, we visited Paarl, Bordeaux's childhood home. We drove to the beautiful property on which Bordeaux had grown up, and parked the car outside its gates.

"That's where Megan lived," Bordeaux pointed out as we stood in the cul-de-sac. "And that was where I lived," he told me, nodding to the house at the center of the lawn.

Heading back through town, we passed the Dutch Reformed church his family had attended, and drove through the residential neighborhood that surrounded his first primary school. Before leaving Paarl, we made a stop at the Afrikaanse Taal Monument.

We saw the monument long before we arrived, its spire thrusting up above the canopy of greenery. "I haven't come here since my last school trip when I was little," Bordeaux remarked as we curved up the drive.

After paying the entrance fee, we parked in the nearly deserted lot. A craftsman was set up in the shade, selling small canvases depicting pastoral landscapes and bucolic village scenes. We walked up the steps, leaning back to stare up at the gleaming half-circle of concrete towers.

"Of course. It's phallic," I commented as Bordeaux read the dedication plaque.

"And of course, the biggest part represents the Afrikaners," Bordeaux added, pointing to the diagram.

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We left Cape Town together the next afternoon, our plane landing in Johannesburg in late afternoon. We collected our suitcases, and met Bordeaux's parents beyond the baggage claim. After exchanging introductions and pleasantries, we followed them to their van, and began the long drive to their home. It was dark by the time we arrived in Hoedspruit, a dense forest of shadows the only suggestion of the landscape that surrounded us. Coasting up the gravelly drive to his house, we were met by his brother,

who helped us bring our bags into the house. Though Bordeaux had told me that his family was now very accepting, I was still surprised by how warm they were, and we spent an hour in the kitchen talking before deciding to go to bed. We fell asleep on a mattress in the living room, listening to the steady buzz of insects outside.

The following morning, Bordeaux took me to see the town. The area, as he had told me many months earlier, was beautiful: lush green bush growing to the edge of the road, and climbing up the distant rocky outcroppings. There were a number of game lodges and private reserves along the road, their elaborate gates sticking out through the forest.

The town, however, was not as attractive. “Man, this place gets uglier every time I see it,” Bordeaux sighed as we cruised the main strip. He scanned a group of men standing outside of a shop. “And so do the people...” We passed several new developments, African village style complexes meant to draw tourists. “My dad *hates* these new places,” Bordeaux informed me.

“Whoa!” I exclaimed, turning in my seat to look at a pair of giant concrete hats installed outside of a shopping center. “What are those?”

“Oh... those are hats. *Hoedspruit*. Hat stream.”

We parked under a patch of shade outside the Spar supermarket, and walked up the steps to the shopping plaza. “This is the hair salon where the Indian woman got turned away,” Bordeaux informed me. We peeked in the windows, gawking at the elderly clientele inside. “That was probably the woman who refused her service,” he remarked, pointing to a withered old lady with a pile of dyed hair. “And this,” he stated as we turned, “is... what? It’s gone!” I turned and looked into the windows of a well-stocked bottle shop. “Le Café,” he moaned. “It’s gone!”

That afternoon I sat outside on the porch with Bordeaux’s family, drinking coffee with *beskuit* and observing the flycatchers dragging their tails through the warm sticky air. Stepping out of the house, Bordeaux called me in to join him in the living room. We sat on the couch, a heavy photo album spread across our laps. He showed me pictures of his parents in their younger years, and of him and his sister playing dress up. As he slowly turned the pages, I caught a quick glimpse of a young boy in a red skirt.

“Wait a minute,” I stopped him, catching the page before he changed it. “Is that a photo of your brother?”

“Yeah, wasn’t he awful? The little terrorist...”

“Is he wearing a skirt in that photo?”

“Well, yes. But because he was being a ‘Red Indian.’ See? That’s his headdress,” Bordeaux explained. “So that was ok.”

University of Cape Town

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