

Double Agents: Queer Citizenship(s) in Contemporary South African Visual Culture

**By
Anna Stielau**

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SUPERVISORS: Andrew Lamprecht and Jean Brundrit

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Abstract

South Africa claims the most progressive constitution on the African continent, extending protections to all citizens regardless of race, gender, ability or sexual orientation. Much has been published in recent years about the induction of LGBTIQ persons into this inclusive post-1994 human rights framework, often with a particular focus on the role of the state in instituting non-discrimination legislation and promoting equality. This document reflects my belief that South African sexuality scholarship too often presents incorporation into a unified nation-state as the only desirable outcome for queer citizens.

By mapping the manner in which sexual difference has been uneasily imagined in national discourses, I argue here that the ideal South African citizen remains a heterosexual citizen presupposed as private, patriotic, familial and reproductive. I posit that when non-normative sexual identities and practices become visible in the public sphere, they risk assimilation into “acceptable” modes of representation produced in accordance with the expectations and responsibilities attending state-sanctioned national membership. In so doing, I assert, these cultural forms mandate a queerness that leaves structural inequalities intact. To look beyond this horizon I choose to explore dissident citizenship forms that intervene in dominant cultural narratives to expand the boundaries of belonging. Specifically, I concern myself with representations of queer subjects in visual culture and the multiple audiences these representations invite.

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Introduction

The material and symbolic conditions of South African citizenship remain a site of contention, and for good reason. Unlike race or sex, citizenship claims no inherent ontological stability. "We are not born citizens," writes Eduardo Mendieta in *Citizenship and Trust*, "we become citizens" (2007: 158). For Mendieta this process is both undeniably global and inevitably local: a messy tangle of rights and responsibilities bound by the connective tissue of public affect to a legal order. It is also, crucially, an exercise in imagination and an act of faith, facilitated by the consumption of print and visual media that support the fiction of collective experience (Anderson, 1991). And national belonging is, to all intents and purposes, a fiction. Citizens imagine themselves to belong to a national community, as Arjun Appadurai suggests, and thus "[t]he modern nation-state [...] grows less out of natural facts – such as language, blood, soil, and race – and more as a quintessential cultural product, a product of the collective imagination" (1993: 414).

But imaginations are fallible. They have limits. In a way this document provides me with an opportunity to test those limits, to mark their expression as gaps and excesses in the national imaginary and to assess their torsion. To that end I deploy the multivalent and often contradictory figure of the South African "queer"¹ citizen as a litmus. This focus is informed by my belief that attention to the representation (and self-representation) of South Africa's queer community can index faultlines in citizenship itself, and moreover, that recognition of these cultural faultlines may contribute to enlarging the register of being and belonging in this country.

Jonathan Dollimore (1991) affirms this stance by drawing on Michel Foucault's reading of the sexual "deviant". To Dollimore, deviants come to occupy a dualistic relationship to power that is at once culturally marginal and discursively central. "Even as the sexual deviant is banished to the margins of society, he or she remains integral to it, not in spite of but because of that marginality," he argues (Ibid, 222). Produced at the nation's fringes, this deviant citizen is identified by Jack Halberstam as a queer double agent, "one who must be loyal to the nation but cannot fail to betray it" (2011: 163). Simultaneously insiders and outsiders, such individuals access the sweeping viewpoint that only a liminal location can afford.

Admittedly, the discursive circulation of queerness is a far from perfect gauge of nation-citizen relations. While citizenship can theoretically bestow national membership, legitimacy and protections upon all rights-bearing agents, the state does not distribute these equally or unconditionally. Sexuality *cannot* be read as an independent indicator devoid of raced, gendered and economic calibrations. In South Africa we know this intimately. The narrowness of the category "citizen" and its contingency have been made brutally apparent. During the Apartheid era black South Africans were deprived of many of the entitlements of full participatory citizenship, from free movement to enfranchisement. LGBTIQ² South Africans, too, were prohibited from full entry

¹ The scare quotes mark my hesitation around the use of the word queer as a catch-all identity. While I will consider the implications, merit and limitations of the term later in this introduction, I want to signal an initial sense of unease around its definitional frame.

² The acronym LGBTIQ, standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Intersex and Queer, has been variously expanded to include an A (Asexuality), P (Pansexuality), C (Curious, which in some initialisms is replaced by a second Q, for questioning), 2S (Two-spirited) and most recently another A (Ally). Although the sheer inclusivity of this umbrella has given rise to debate around its usefulness (see Clarke et al, 2010), it represents an effort to recognise the diversity of sexual and gender identification, expression and experience within the queer community.

into citizenship and with it national culture. In the face of this history of exclusion our fledgling democracy modified the definition of citizenship, aspiring to a more inclusive nation. "No citizen may be deprived of citizenship," the South African Constitution maintains, granting *sine qua non* rights irrespective of race, religion, gender, ability or sexual orientation (Chapter 2, Section 20 of 1996).

I concern myself in this document with those moments in which a seemingly democratised citizenship ceases to be visible, to be unequivocal, to be articulatable or perhaps to be attainable. The central question underpinning my research is split into three related parts. First, how truly have the gates of citizenship been opened to all queer South Africans if that citizenship is taken, as Vasu Reddy (2011: 22) recommends it should be, as a "necessary precondition for equal membership in the democratic project and in nation-building"? Second, how broadly can the category "queer citizen" be said to encompass all sexually non-normative South Africans? Finally, how might prevailing citizenship narratives infringe upon or attempt to regulate erotic autonomy, and if they can be said to do so, how might they be productively transgressed? Tagged onto that last question is a concern that generates much of the impetus of my project - after Leo Bersani, I am interested in asking whether queers can (and should) be good citizens (1995:112). Together these lines of inquiry also respond to the call for multiple, disputational narratives of citizenship issued by W.C. Harris (2009); a call to make visible queer experience *as part of the nation* in a way that might trouble existing ideological and organisational forms.

Chapter 1 provides the scaffolding for the document that follows. In it I map the theoretical landscape of my research question and survey the often fraught relationship between queer sexual subject and state in South Africa. Close attention to historic moments of legal, social and representational friction allows me to more effectively examine their contemporary expression, contending that certain modes of "ideal" or "proper" citizenship exist in South Africa, that these modes permeate what Lauren Berlant (1997) has called the National Symbolic,³ and that they can and do exclude queer experiences.

Chapter 2 further problematises the notion of a queer citizenship, thinking through the push toward visibility that has characterised much post-apartheid queer life. I argue that visibility in the eye of the nation is not distributed evenly or with equal consequence, and that public performances of visible queerness risk sanctioning certain subjectivities while erasing others. In particular I am interested in disturbing the "white episteme of queerness" that operates within established cultural institutions (Puar, 2001), specifically regional Prides, the Mother City Queer Project (MCQP) and the Out in Africa (OiA) Film Festival.

Building on this discussion, Chapters 3 and 4 function as two halves of a whole. Coming up against the concrete border posts of national belonging, both attempt to look beyond their limits. Chapter 3 considers suffering as a practice of citizenship, granting pain the status of a claim to rights and a demand for inclusion. I demonstrate how queer and straight victimhood is figured differently, and examine the ways in which artists Zanele Muholi and Steven Cohen each weaponise weakness and marshal suffering strategically. In this, I maintain that these practitioners offer an alternative way of being in the national body that does not approximate heterosexual models of citizenship. Unpicking this thought further, Chapter 4 advances the idea of utopia as key to the construction of what Achille Mbembe (in de Robillard, 2014: 3) has termed "new imaginaries of citizenship and belonging." I argue for a utopian impulse at work in the oeuvres of performance artists Athi-Patra

³ Berlant (1997: 20, 26) understands the National Symbolic to be those multiple symbols, texts, histories, media, and ways of acting and feeling that together produce "idealised national knowledge."

Ruga and Umlilo that challenges the linear telos of existing national myths, and conclude by posing queer utopianism, after José E. Muñoz (2009), as a future-oriented instinct that might cogently interface with citizenship to queer the nation.

The indiscriminate visual archive that provides the foundation for this dissertation has no pretences towards being exhaustive. Lauren Berlant (1997) might call it a silly, erratic or banal archive. Its objects of interest run the gamut from art to soap operas, passing political campaigns, advertisements and music videos along the way. This reveals my conviction that to appraise national life, it is necessary to consider the means by which that life transects individual experience. While this undeniably happens in the arena of fine art, it also takes place in the realm of everyday communication. It is the very ordinariness and ephemerality of such an archive, as Berlant has so convincingly shown, that makes it worth reading.

Because my objects of interest are so disparate I will treat my terms more precisely throughout. From the get-go I want to clarify my use of the word "queer" and nod to the term's baggage. As an adjective or a noun I use queer to indicate a spectrum of non-straight expression. This spectrum includes gay, lesbian and bisexual identifications but also accommodates other fluid and potentially unclassifiable forms of sexual non-conformity. In this I follow Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose classic definition takes the word to mean "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning, when the constituent element of anyone's gender or sexuality cannot be made to signify monolithically" (1993: 8). Queerness denotes an oppositional subjecthood, and in its theoretical application it stands for a political praxis set against dominant or normalising ideologies.

Sedgwick also points out the volatility and dis-ease of the term and I feel compelled to do the same. In *Queer Performativity* she argues that "there's no way that any amount of affirmative reclamation is going to succeed in detaching the word [queer] from its associations with shame and with the terrifying powerlessness of gender-dissonant or otherwise stigmatized childhood" (1993: 4). To this I would add that there is currently no way to detach the word queer from metropolitan Euro-American academic discourse. This is most apparent in efforts, like this one, to write about queer life outside the West. Douglas Clarke (2013) observes that for a body of scholarship aiming to disrupt power, Western queer theorising remains paradoxically rooted in the West's historic and popular notions of what it means to be African. Zethu Matebeni takes this observation further, highlighting the problems embedded in academic efforts to position queerness as a universal point of reference. In her wry critique of sexuality studies in South Africa, *How Not to Write About Queer South Africa*, she remarks sarcastically, "Like gay, queer does the same work, but sounds better [...] Don't worry that most South Africans do not use the word queer, they will all soon catch on" (2014: 61).

I hope my use of this burdened term does not convey a naive investment in its contextual durability or a colonising desire to envelop South African experiences in a branded package. As a cultural, theoretical or personal space, "queerness" exists here as shorthand - a means to an end rather than an absolute position. While I agree with the critique levelled by Matebeni, I ultimately maintain that there is room to dovetail her stance with William Spurlin's in *Imperialism within the Margins*. Spurlin concedes that "while influenced by and not entirely removed from Western queer identity politics and cultural practices, [the word queer] is not reducible to them" (2006: 20).

I use queer until something better comes along, and as the best kind of disruption I have at my disposal. In applying it I hold tight to writer Notisha Massaquoi's plea for a "new queer frame of reference" to house African experiences (2013: 37), but recognise that queer might not be that frame of reference. I use queer for now, hoping that there is still more to say.

Chapter 1_Re-membering the Nation: Locating Sexuality in Post-Apartheid South African Citizenship Narratives

South Africa's transition to democracy and the inclusion of sexual orientation in the equality clause gave lesbian and gay people full citizenship for the first time in our history. *We must now claim our citizenship.*

Report of the Interim Executive Committee (IEC) of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality, December '94- December '95. NCGLE Collection. GALA Archives, Johannesburg

[Italics author's own]

The question of becoming and being a citizen haunts the rhetoric of transitional public culture in South Africa. In dismantling the Apartheid⁴ machine it was imperative to radically re-evaluate South African political experience at both personal (individual and familial) and collective (communitarian and national) levels. Rosemary Nagy calls this process a "cosmopolitan *re-membering* of the nation" (emphasis author's own, 2006: 626); cosmopolitan in that it saw South Africa reintroduced to the world and re-membering in that it saw South Africa reintroduced to itself.

Termed the "official South Africa citizenship project,"⁵ this re-membering was an effort by the post-apartheid state to engender a sense of shared history and national belonging in South African citizens. In the long shadow of Apartheid it became necessary to ask what it meant to be South African. How could a more inclusive polity be realised and, equally importantly, legitimated in a newly democratic nation?

In arguably the first moments of South Africa's constitutional democracy,⁶ appeals to this embryonic national collectivity abound. The *Weekly Mail and Guardian* newspaper of 29 April 1994 paints a picture of a society united in an act of political participation. "Despite kilometre-long queues, administrative blunders and disappointments, the party mood rarely sagged [...] White and black made friends in the long queues [...] they stood patiently from dawn to dusk while the bureaucrats and politicians squabbled" ("I have waited all my life...", 1994: 1). Similarly the 27 April headline of Gauteng publication *The Star* proclaims "Millions line up for freedom" (van Heerden, 1994: 1). An image accompanying the article shows long queues filing into the middle distance, indicating the enormity of the event. Captioning this photograph is the simple demand, "Let the people vote!".

4 I consider Apartheid to be a political regime of institutionalised racism, mass genocide, land seizures, labour exploitation and political disenfranchisement (Munro, 2012: ix- xi). Although it was implemented with increasing ferocity in South Africa from the election of the Afrikaner National Party in 1948 to the adoption of an interim constitution in 1993 and took many forms, the Apartheid model also unquestionably has its roots in colonialism.

5 See Liz Manicom's essay "Constituting Women as Citizens: Ambiguities in the Making of Gendered Political Subjects in Post-Apartheid South Africa" (2005) for a closer reading of this project.

6 Multiple forms of democracy exist. For the purpose of the text that follows, I rely on David Miller's broad-based definition (2003: 38) which identifies two beliefs at the core of the democratic process. One, that no person is naturally superior to another and thus that each person should enjoy equal political rights and two, that the interests of the people are best safeguarded by making them the final repository of political authority. Although the simplicity of Miller's stance is appealing, I must also acknowledge Amartya Sen's injunction that the efficacy of a democracy should be judged "not just by the institutions that formally exist, but by the extent to which different voices from diverse sections of the population can actually be heard" (2009: xiii). Hence, true democracy can be said to live not in the aspirational ideal of universal suffrage and inalienable rights but in the robust enactment of that ideal.

But just who were "the people"?

Under the National Party the people meant white South Africans, a minority population. The African National Congress (ANC), strongest contenders for a majority parliament and subsequent winners of five national elections, conceived the people as all South Africans of voting age, united by an ability to permanently alter the country's political landscape. The ANC's 1994 Election Manifesto documents the scope of this shared civic feeling. It opens on a call to inclusive citizenship, "On 27 April, for the first time in our history, all of us will stand tall and proud as equal citizens in our common home," and concludes on an even more forceful invocation of community:

Together as South Africans - men and women of all colours, young and old, urban and rural - we have the power to build a better life for all. Together let's change South Africa. So that, once and for all, our country can know peace and security. So that we can join the rest of humankind a proud and united people working together for a better world (1994: n.p).

Undoubtedly the intention is to speak to those who identify as belonging to a shared South African nation, the only limit imposed upon an otherwise unequivocal summons. The word "we" punctuates the text, inculcating all readers (many of whom could vote legally for the first time) in this spirit of togetherness and positioning the ANC in direct contrast to the rigidity of Apartheid ideological commitments.⁷ Never before had South Africanness been so inclusive, so elastic or so polysemic. When Albie Sachs asked in his 1989 lecture "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom", "What are we fighting for if not the right to express our humanity in all its forms?" (1990: 19), he framed the same sentiment as a rhetorical question whose answer was presumed to be self-evident. A more expansive definition of South African humanity was at stake.

Here at the dawn of a new nation, the figure of the queer citizen could first spark into public consciousness. With the prospect of democracy emitting its guiding light, Brenna Munro suggests, South African gay people became "imaginable as fellow citizens" for the first time (2012: viii). Beyond encouraging public recognition, the new constitutional democracy also initiated the process of legally reifying queers' status as citizens. By affording protections to non-heterosexuals⁸ the state backed this emergent queer polity; a move that tacitly endorsed the cosmopolitan modernity that accompanies equality (Ibid, ix).⁹ William Spurlin frames this entire interregnum period, in its unsettling of stable categories like citizenship, as a "queer space of analysis" (2006: 19).

The overarching goal of this chapter is to attend to the ways in which this reimagining of sexual subjectivities as civic subjectivities became possible. I hope to achieve this by considering the narratives that have contoured South African citizenship and examining the presence (or absence) of the queer citizen within them. With that aim in mind I begin this chapter by discussing literature in the field of citizenship studies, placing emphasis on the ways in which the figure of the queer sexual

7 After Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (1998) I take these commitments to necessitate first and foremost racism, but also include sexism, homophobia, language biases, social class biases and nationalism.

8 Between May 1994 and June 1996 the Constitutional Assembly of South Africa drafted a new constitution based on principles of non-discrimination. It included a clause explicitly prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the first of its kind in the world (Cock, 2002: 35). In no uncertain terms this document states that discrimination "directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth" is condemned (Act 108, Article 9 [3], my emphasis).

9 Munro (2012) makes a case for the formula "gay = modernity = capitalism," arguing that South Africa's re-entrance into the global community was aided by the adoption of anti-discriminatory policies.

or intimate citizen¹⁰ has been configured in academic thought. Although this brief literature review is the groundwork for the argument that follows, it is also an introduction to ideas I cover in more detail later in this dissertation and which I develop as it becomes necessary to do so.

The second section tracks the evolution of sexual citizenship from its Apartheid-era forms to its contemporary South African shape/s. Needless to say I do not aim to comprehensively survey South African citizenship in its entirety. We are a nation of fifty-three million people and over the past twenty-one years have told many stories about our national identity. Instead I follow Liz Manicom (2005) in choosing to attend to the development of authorising citizenship narratives and specifically the idea of "rainbowism". Such stories about South Africanness are designed to engineer political feeling and, I will argue, to produce certain kinds of citizens.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Who (or what) is a citizen?

Late twentieth and early twenty-first century social thought attests to a vigorous and increasing interest in citizenship as a field of academic enquiry (Delanty, 2000; Isin and Nielsen, 2008). Turner (1993) goes so far as to claim that citizenship has become "an indispensable component of modern social theory," but warns against treating the citizen as an abstract unit of political thought. Citizens emerge from a confluence of specific cultural, structural and historic factors that intertwine with colonialism, he suggests, and their study retains a distinctly Western inflection (Turner, 1993: v).

Let me distinguish initially, then, between citizen and subject, as in the subject of imperial rule. For Lahra Smith, whose *Making Citizens in Africa* (2013) documents present-day national life in Ethiopia, the difference is primarily one of agency: "[A] citizen is one who makes the laws by which he or she lives, whereas a subject has no such claim or ability" (2013: 3). Balibar (1991) concurs, but complicates these poles. In answer to the question "Who comes after the subject?", he concludes "[a]fter the subject comes the citizen" whose recognition should theoretically end the subjection of the subject (Ibid, 38-9). Balibar's citizen is an all-or-nothing sovereign actor, neither wholly individual nor entirely collective, residing in a state of dialogical tension with subjectness. This citizen is brought into being by her participation in politics.

Participation is frequently cited in definitions of citizenship, setting up a paradox in which it both produces and defines that which is described. J.M. Barbalet demonstrates this usage, characterising citizenship as "participation in or membership of a community" (1988: 2, my italics). Contained within that definition are two related claims that deserve acknowledgement, given the apparent paradox at stake. Firstly, that participation is not a necessary criterion (or not the only criterion) for community membership, and secondly, that citizenship can be freed from the nation through which it is so often read. A sense of citizenship is not only and not always bounded by geography.

¹⁰ Although the terms sexual and intimate citizen are used interchangeably in some of the literature around queer citizenship (see Weeks, 1998) there is a distinction. Intimate citizenship takes as its object of interest the whole field of private life. Ken Plummer (2001: 38) argues it as those "intimate spheres of life" that entail choices around "who to live with, how to raise children, how to handle one's body, how to relate as a gendered being [and] how to be an erotic person." Sexual citizenship foregrounds sexuality as a defining characteristic of national experience, allowing for a more focussed engagement with it as claim, as identity and as practice.

In conceiving citizenship in this way Barbalet draws liberally upon T.H Marshall's (1973: 29) definition, cited so often I would be remiss not to include it here:

Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed. There is no universal principle that determines what those rights and duties shall be, but societies in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed.

Marshall builds his case for closer critical attention to the relationship between capitalism and citizenship in his treatise *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950 [1973]), now considered a foundational text in citizenship studies. A contemporary of other scholars of sociality like Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, Marshall's approach was novel in that it formulated a rights-based model of citizenship at odds with the class system. Highlighting the extent to which social, legal and political rights are determined by social standing, Marshall understands citizenship as both status and claim. To him (in Turner and Hamilton, 1994: 228), a reading of a citizen's status "emphasise[s] the fact that expectations (of a normative kind) exist in the relevant social groups" while attention to citizenship in its operation as claim exceeds these legal parameters and attaches certain capacities to the person in question. Legal rights exist by being exercised, and a person who exercises those rights produces the status that accompanies them (Ibid).

In other words, I can now splice Balibar and Barbalet's participatory citizenship (the citizen as actor) with the attribution of social membership, or the citizen-as-acted-upon. Citizens are agents inasmuch as they are regarded as such by "relevant social groups" and must behave in accordance with the expectations placed upon them, or at least attempt to live up to them. Citizenship is conditional and also aspirational.

Theorist Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality proves useful in exploring this tension between act and expectation in greater depth. Governmentality is loosely understood as "the technologies and procedures for directing human behaviour" (Rose et al, 2009: 1), particularly those determined by the state.¹¹ It encompasses both the manner in which a society creates "governable" citizens and the practice whereby citizens align themselves to the political modes that police their conduct (Foucault in Nyanzi, 2011: 481). Governmentality, Foucault suggests, provides insight into both forms of governance and the means by which these are enacted inside a governed subject. Citizens are the site of power and its object, with access to a citizenship that offers agency only inasmuch as individuals are deemed worthy by the powers that be.

There are undoubtedly problems with T.H. Marshall's theory. Foucault's work around power proves Marshall an idealist, but criticism has also been levelled at the Anglo-centrism of his analysis (Turner, 1990), its conservative bent (Barbalet, 1988; Turner, 1990), and his lack of interest in the gendered and racialised implications of citizenship (Walby, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997). These critiques lay bare the degree to which Marshall predicated his investigation on an assumption of universality, privileging the experiences of a white, working class European male. This figure's reality, he believes, can translate into other contexts and retain both form and impact. In downplaying the local faces of citizenship, Marshall leaves little room for relativism.

¹¹ In my use of "state" I intend more than a synonym for government. I take the state to mean, after William Connolly, the entirety of a political order from citizens through public officials to rhetorical modes of consolidation and division (2005: 206-7).

Iris Young notes that this liberal ideal of “universalised citizenship” comes at the expense of more nuanced and differentiated understandings of individual experience. In upholding one-size-fits-all definitions of citizenship, we are inclined to disregard the possibilities of heterogeneous publics: those ways of being, doing and relating that do not fit tidily within the strictures of state-sanctioned belonging (1989: 256-8). In addition, ideals of universal citizenship foreground the interests of a dominant or more vocal social group as the default civic position.

Significantly, Marshall’s work does offer insight into citizenship as an aspirational directive, presenting the “ideal” citizen as the terminal point to which “developing” citizenship practices are heading. This ideal citizen is not a person. Rather it is a disembodied set of cultural indexes that accrue power historically, strung together by belief in the nation. Nicoll (in Aizura, 2006: 289) calls this ideal the “culturally-specific national subject” with which a population can – and arguably, must – identify.

Ideal citizens have been presented as male (Young, 1990; McClintock, 1994), masculinist (Brown, 1992), militant (Payne, 2010), able-bodied (Cora, 2007) and heterosexual (Valentine, 1996; Posel, 2011). Each precludes its counterpart: women, feminists, the anti-war, the disabled and the non-heterosexual. These configurations advocate a belonging that is also a process of exclusion, an operation which becomes significant in that it affords the nation-state enormous power over the lives of individuals. As Klug confirms (2000), nations may make citizens but they can also unmake them. His point begs the question: what is a nation to confer belonging in this way?

Benedict Anderson famously defines a nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (1991: 6). To Anderson this community requires creative consensus and invention. It hangs on the experience of simultaneity – shared space and time – that creates a web of kinship enfolding complete strangers in the experience of “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Ibid, 7). A nation is sovereign in that it occupies a seat of hierarchical power once only divinely ordained or dynastic, and it is also limited, in that it is finite. To belong to a nation, to be a citizen, is not to belong elsewhere.

Although the very concept of a citizen necessitates a non-citizen, this division is never as clear-cut as “insiders/citizens”, “outsiders/non-citizens” (Smith, 2013: 3). Smith argues that it is precisely this ambivalence that makes citizenship such a useful analytic tool with which to approach political life in Africa today. “[B]ecause the institutional and structural reforms of recent years that have swept across the continent have been inextricably linked up with the battle over the “right to have rights,” she elaborates (Ibid, 5), “[g]roups that were left out of the political reforms of the newly independent African states of the 1960s have since clamoured for greater access to the ‘goods’ of citizenship.” Outsiders may be citizens, too.

Smith goes on to imagine more than a citizenship that acts upon a citizen. In her terms citizenship is not purely a legal, social or political monolith. It can accommodate the individuated, even the intimate, and acquires affective and imaginative dimensions that gain meaning with regard to personal experience. Meaningful citizenship of this kind is about the way in which rights are exercised, their best practice and their implications for citizens’ lives. It can be multiple, contested and contradictory (Ibid).

In summary, critical studies of citizenship over the last few decades have taught us that citizenship is a labile category. It is closely tied to the nation-state but not exclusively so, and opens itself up to action upon as much as action by citizens. Theoretical engagements have also begun to signpost citizenship’s extension beyond institutionalised power into local and personal practices of making (and making by) citizens, be they social, political, cultural or symbolic.

1.1.2. Then who (or what) is a queer citizen?

Ways of being a citizen have multiplied alongside definitions of the term, perhaps because the language of citizenship studies lends itself to varied engagements with the possibilities of assimilation and belonging. Marking the breadth of this offshoot scholarship, Isin and Nielsen map new forms of citizenship that have surfaced in academia (2008:1). Research is now devoted to a range of social phenomena including ecological citizens, aboriginal citizens, market citizens, consumer citizens, cosmopolitan citizens, global citizens and sexual or intimate citizens.

Each category construes citizenship as contingent, albeit differently so. “The claim to a new form of belonging, which is what citizenship is ultimately all about,” Jeffrey Weeks suggests, “arises from and reflects the remaking of the self and the multiplicity or diversity of possible identities that characterise the late or post-modern world” (1998: 35). Of all these, sexual citizenship is perhaps the most difficult to define (Richardson, 1998). Unlike, say, ecological citizenship, which entails an examination of the tangible consequences of belonging to a natural world, sexual citizenship has an indeterminate arena of influence. Bridging the divide between private sphere¹² (the space of desire and domesticity) and public and civic sphere, sexual citizenship brings both realms under equal scrutiny.

Some writers (Phelan, 2001; Richardson and Monro, 2012) take the issue of rights, and specifically access to rights and the degree to which they are granted or denied to certain groups, as a point of departure to make arguments around the compatibility of minority sexualities and national belonging. Others (Berlant, 1997; van Zyl and Steyn, 2005) are more interested in what diverse sexualities might offer understandings of citizenship – how they can challenge, destabilise or queer hegemonic power. Several theorists reject the entire order of state-sexual citizen relations (Edelman, 2004; Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz, 2005), arguing that current politics depend on ideologies that disregard non-normative sexual experience and therefore cannot embrace queers without attempting to correct them. On the other end of the continuum, Bell and Binnie (2000) see sexuality as infiltrating all aspects of social life, arguing that all citizenship is sexual citizenship and (perhaps) all citizenship can be queered.

This wealth of disparate thought may derive from the fact that sexual identity is intrinsically fluid and unstable (Weeks et al, 2003: 123). The fixing of sexuality into identificatory categories – heterosexuality, homosexuality and so forth – is a comparatively recent development. This idea is demonstrated by Foucault in his influential *History of Sexuality* (1990 [1979]). Foucault holds that sex is increasingly significant to our modern sense of self, so much so that it is now key to the formation of subjectivities. Because of this, sexuality has become an epistemologically confining category. The most persuasive example to substantiate Foucault’s observation is the emergence of “the homosexual” as a medico-judicial entity in the mid-nineteenth century (Lubbe, 2012: 4).

The naming of behaviours as homosexual or heterosexual allows them to enter discourse as something knowable. Before homosexuality provided linguistic anchorage, sexuality was something you did and not something you were. In this respect there is a parallel worth acknowledging with constructions of citizenship as both a set of practices and a claim. Like citizenship, sexuality is a formation equal parts descriptor and performance. In the case of homosexuality the claim is to a singular identity, necessarily shoring up the ragged borders of sexuality to make it acquit itself in a more orderly fashion. This amounts to a rejection of de-centralised sexual performances and

¹² The philosopher Jürgen Habermas (in Berlant, 1997: 4-5), describing the “intimate sphere” of modernity, nominates it as a space of the domestic and familial, fostering a sense of self that can only become a sense of citizenship when it is abstracted and alienated by a public, political sphere.

more than that, engineers a tension between homosexuality and its bigger, bolder hetero sibling. Homosexuality is reduced to an identity of opposition,¹³ a not-heterosexuality, that only gains meaning (and value) relationally.

This makes possible, Foucault holds (in Katz, 2007: 174), a strong advance in the regulation of sexuality, but also allows for the formation of a “reverse” discourse: “[H]omosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.” In gaining words to think itself into being, homosexuality also gained terms for resistance. Reverse discourse remains one of the most basic principles of gay emancipatory movements and continues to buttress their theorising (Katz, 2007).

Queer theory in particular has attended to the use-value of speaking from the margins in the language of an oppressor. Echoing Foucault with one important distinction, David Halperin argues that “[t]hose who knowingly occupy such a marginal location, who assume a de-essentialized identity that is purely positional in character, are properly speaking not gay but *queer*” (1995: 62, emphasis author’s own). To Halperin queer identity need not be grounded in any stable reality, and is *by definition* at odds with normative behaviours and logics (Ibid). Queerness, then, cuts through the neat language of sexuality in much the same way that sexual citizenship can be said to crisscross a larger civic body. It is a bridge between intersecting identities and a hairline crack in preordained standards. But what standards specifically might queerness, as lived in the public eye, disturb?

Brenda Cossman (2007) suggests that traditional modes of social membership are being systematically eroded by queer sexual subjectivities. Sexual citizenship, she argues, is subject to overt policing, but queer citizens are also uniquely positioned to sway the balance of power and with it, the entire regime of heteronormativity¹⁴ from which regulatory mechanisms acquire meaning. Unlike Halperin, however, Cossman does not believe all queers do so in and of themselves. Some are model citizens, self-governing rather than subversive.

Accordingly, the position of the queer subject relative to the state can be imagined as either assimilationist (regulated and normalised) or oppositional (challenging norms). In South Africa, for example, rights are afforded to citizens irrespective of sexual preference, and hence heterosexuality can no longer be said to guard the gates to citizenship on paper. Since citizenship in its ideal form is seemingly no longer dependant on a particular sexual identity, the acceptance of regulative norms can make a “good” citizen of even the most avowed homosexual, inasmuch as he, she, or they proceed to internalise those norms.

Oppositional feminist and queer critiques characterise this normalising impulse in contemporary queer culture – Michael Warner (2000) drily calls it a “knocking on the door” of heterosexual privilege – as the triumph of the heteronormative state over the queer subject. Warner, Berlant (1997), Bell and Binnie (2000) and Richardson (1998, 2012) variously argue that a model of ideal citizenship has been transposed over queer social life in order to rectify any hint of difference as it manifests. This model includes the desire for (and achievement of) long term monogamous partnership and marriage rights; co-habitation and property ownership and parenthood.

¹³ I follow William Connolly (2005) in thinking through identity as relational and thus necessarily collective. In my case my identity is a skein of the things that I consider myself – female, white, South African, gay, middle-class, English-speaking, etc – and further specified by all that I am not, or at least not at present. Connolly calls this an oppositional identity mode, an identity made sensible through difference and not derived from commonality.

¹⁴ Berlant and Warner define heteronormativity as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged” (2002: 194). For the authors it is also intertwined with national heterosexuality, the sanitised, immaculate and sentimental space of pure citizenship (Ibid, 189).

Within this paradigm an anti-assimilationist queer citizenship is also a dissident citizenship, in that it resists established norms. Rejecting marriage is also rejecting the state that ordains marriages, much as rejecting parenthood is the refusal to bear future citizens of the nation. Dissident citizenship is, if we take Holloway Sparks (1997) at her word, an extension of existing modes of belonging with the potential for wide-ranging political influence. Sparks holds that dissident citizenship is characterised by “the practices of marginalized citizens who publicly contest prevailing arrangements of power by means of oppositional democratic practices that augment or replace institutionalized channels of democratic opposition when those channels are inadequate or unavailable” (1997: 75). Challenges to civic power from identity in particular – from race, ability, orientation, etc. – prioritise experiences beyond those condoned by the nation, laying claim to a citizenship over and above that authorised by the state.

I have attempted to demonstrate that while sexual citizenship falls within citizenship studies more broadly, it is a nebulous and fragmented object of study. The transformation of homosexuality from deviation to identity may have mobilised the queer citizen in political discourse and allowed for a claim to rights on the grounds of collective sexual life, but a politics bound to common belonging also risks assimilation into normative national culture. Although I have been treating the “queer citizen” as a loosely universal idea, I hope below to build a case for the localness and specificity of this figure in South Africa and to indicate the need for an accompanying local and specific theorising of the state-sexual citizen relationship.

1.2 Before the rainbow, there were storms: Queer citizenship under Apartheid

In his controversial 1941 publication *There are no South Africans*, journalist G.H. Calpin notes the absence of a fixed national identity among white South Africans. He identifies this absence as a unique regional characteristic, disparagingly remarking, “The worst of South Africa is that you never come across a South African. There is no surprise in the discovery that the United States produces Americans, or China, Chinese; or Lapland, Laplanders. The naturalness of so natural a condition does not strike one until its exception appears. The exception is South Africa...” (Calpin in Godsell and Motlatsi, 2008: 13). Although Calpin’s text preceded the large-scale social engineering project of Apartheid, the anxieties implicit in his statement resound in early Apartheid policy. When the National Party came to power in 1948 a conscious effort was made to solidify national identity. In addressing the precise parameters of South African citizenship, the Citizenship Act of 1949 recognised naturalised locals as incontestably *not* European, permanently divorcing South African politics from an original colonial power and consolidating independence. Freshly minted rights were afforded accordingly.

However, this citizenship (and the rights it guaranteed) was exclusive and limited. While white South Africans were granted full citizenship and the protections, participation and identity that came with it, the state denied this status to the black majority. Instead they were cast as “ethnic citizens” and consigned to separate geographic archipelagos located at the literal and metaphoric margins of South Africa (Klug, 2000: 56). Called homelands or Bantustans, these subsidiary states were concretised under the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951. They served to legally validate what had already become socially apparent: race was a supra-identity in South Africa, eclipsing born and naturalised citizenship and determining who did and did not belong.



Figure 1: Henning, J. 1985. "n Poefadder het my gepik". *Die Rapport*. Reproduced in N. Hoad, K. Martin and G. Reid (eds.). 2005. *Sex and Politics in South Africa*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books

Much has been written about racist citizenship policies under Apartheid and their furthering of the state's white supremacist agenda. While race was the deepest dividing line in South Africa's population and arguably remains so, it was not the only division. Citizenship was awarded most emphatically to those who met a number of additional criteria. "I believe that the Afrikaner is an honest, God-fearing person, who has demonstrated practically the right way of being," former South African President P.W. Botha announced to his cabinet in 1985. From this he concluded that "the white man is created to rule the black man," adding an afterthought: if black South Africans should win state power, "what would happen to our women?" (in Mailu, 1985: n.p). With the weight of his appointment's moral and political authority behind him, Botha outlined a citizenship that is explicitly racialised (white) but also gendered (male), religious (Calvinist) and sexualised (heterosexual). In this section I examine the latter assumption in greater depth, turning to what Amanda Swarr calls the "compulsory heterosexuality"¹⁵ of the regime (2012: 103).

The history of sexual repression under the National Party's forty-year hold on power remains largely unwritten (Retief, 1995: 99), but in order to better understand contemporary state-sexual citizen relations, it warrants critical attention. In 1957 the Immorality Act sent a tremor through South Africa's sexual landscape. The act was primarily used to prosecute sex workers and interracial sex or miscegenation, but was also used – before it was replaced by other legal provisions – to prosecute homosexual behaviour, identifying certain sexual practices as immoral (De Vos, 1996). In doing so

¹⁵ Swarr takes her cue here from the work of Adrienne Rich (1980), who reads heterosexuality as an institution in opposition to feminist commitments. Rich thinks of compulsory heterosexuality – those societal expectations, institutions, practices, and experiences that define the most intimate aspects of our lives – as confining women to gender roles that render them subordinate to men.

the Immorality Act construed certain sexualities as moral, as enforceable, and as befitting a South African population. Effectively it legislated intra-racial heterosexuality as both norm and benchmark.

Twenty-five years after Calpin voiced uncertainty about what qualified as "South Africanness," a police bust in Johannesburg highlighted what did not. A party hosted at a private home in Forest Town was raided, leading to the discovery of more than three hundred and fifty men engaged in an orgy featuring "the most indecent acts imaginable."¹⁶ Despite media outrage, none of the men were prosecuted. Only public homosexuality or other "acts against the order of nature" were criminalised by the Immorality Act and located within the purview of the law.

Horrified officials were forced to take a stand, justifying their approach by definitively severing private homosexuality from appropriate South African citizenship. Justice Minister P.C. Pelser (in Retief, 1995: 99) drives home homosexuality's presumed threat to a "healthy" South African society in a parliamentary address on the 21 April, 1967:

...And who can deny that this was also the canker that afflicted the Biblical Sodom? No, Sir, history has given us a clear warning and we should not allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that we may casually dispose of this viper in our midst by regarding it as innocent fun. It is a proven fact that sooner or later homosexual instincts make their effects felt on a community if they are permitted to run riot [...] Therefore we should be on the alert and do what there is to do lest we be saddled with a problem which will be the utter ruin of our spiritual and moral fibre.

As "the viper" hiding within South Africa's national community, homosexuality is discursively ghettoised. Glossed as poisonous, queerness now acts upon, not through, South Africanness, threatening the very foundations of society.

1968 saw the instigation of a parliamentary process to change the legislation regulating homosexual activities in South Africa (Du Pisani, 2012: 187). As retold in Mark Gevisser's essay "A Different Fight for Freedom," a team of South African Police (S.A.P.)¹⁷ promptly cracked down on an infamous gay cruising site, the Esplanade, in Durban. Their actions resulted in the arrest of thirty men on charges of indecent assault, nine of whom received suspended sentences.¹⁸ In his judgement magistrate J.P. Pretorius announces, "Your type is a menace to society and likely to corrupt and bring about degradation to innocent and unsuspecting, decent-living young men and so spell ruin to their future..." (in Gevisser, 1994: 18). Again there is a line drawn in the legal and political sand of the South African nation. On the one side the figure of the good South African (young, decent-living, innocent) is valorised while on the other, the predatory homosexual emerges as clearly defined for the first time.¹⁹

Glen Retief, in "Keeping Sodom out of the Laager: State Repression of Homosexuality under Apartheid," reads pertinent punitive cases as evidence of homosexuality's challenge to white male

¹⁶ Rebecca Sinclair's study, titled "The Official Treatment of White, South African, Homosexual Men and the Consequent Reaction of Gay Liberation from the 1960s to 2000" (2004) elaborates upon the exact events of that night.

¹⁷ To indicate their distinction from services provided under the Apartheid criminal justice system, afforded a justifiably bad name, the South African Police were rebranded the South African Police Service, or S.A.P.S, after formal demilitarisation in 1994.

¹⁸ Records vary on the specifics of this case. Mark Gevisser, for example, suggests that the sentences were enforceable, and amounted to between 9 and 15 months per plaintiff. I follow the details stipulated in the *Natal Daily News* article of 23 July 1956, "Nine Men Sentenced for Indecency".

¹⁹ Although not always, to the state, irreparably so. Van Zyl, de Gruchy, Lapinsky, Lewin and Read (1999) document efforts to correct perceived sexual deviance in the South African Defence Force in their paper "The Aversion Project". Diagnosed as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association until 1973, homosexuality was thought to be treatable by extreme aversion therapy: the use of sexual humiliation, electro-shock therapy and surgical intervention.

hegemony, and hence to the primacy of a predominantly white, male Apartheid regime. Gay men, he suggests, strike at the heart of Apartheid social ideals, and sexual deviance would therefore lead to the ideological downfall of the nation.

The relationship between queer citizens and the Apartheid state deteriorated further with the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. HIV was first diagnosed on South African soil in 1982 (Pushparagavan, 2014: n.p). The gay community contracted the virus at a disproportionately rapid rate and thus were largely held accountable for the spread of the disease and its devastating social impact (Gevisser and Cameron, 1995: 4-5). The openly homosexual and the openly HIV positive each faced enormous public stigma. Published in national Afrikaans-language newspaper *Die Rapport* in 1987, the cartoon “n Poefadder het my gepik” [Figure 1] illustrates the manner in which deep-seated homophobia is entrenched in discourse around the epidemic. Homosexuality is presented as the cause of HIV (or VIGS in Afrikaans). “How did you catch HIV?” a doctor asks his patient. The patient replies, “A poefadder bit me.” The pun is in the word puff-adder, a poisonous snake, which becomes “poefadder”, with “poef” being a derogatory word for a gay man. In an echo of Pelter’s viper in the grass, homosexuality is imagined as toxic and a vehicle for disease.

The Apartheid state’s stance on homosexuality was unilaterally declamatory, but it is worth noting that anti-Apartheid struggle icons, too, fluctuated in their treatment of sexual and gender difference. Mamphela Ramphele (in Gqola, 2001: 46) points to a gender bias built into Black Consciousness thought and embedded in struggle rhetoric. She observes that “[Black Consciousness] didn’t have space for women because it was a language borrowed from a culture, English culture, which never accepted women really as full citizens.” Besides inheriting colonial sexism, some vocal proponents of the struggle also embraced colonial homophobia. Famously, African National Congress Executive Member Ruth Mompati (in Tatchell, 2005: 142) announced in 1987 that she “cannot even begin to understand why people want lesbian and gay rights.” She added,

The gays have no problems. They have nice houses and plenty to eat. I don’t see them suffering. No one is persecuting them. We haven’t heard about this problem in South Africa until recently. It seems to be fashionable in the West (Ibid).

Mompoti is sometimes quoted as concluding, “We don’t have a policy on flower sellers either” (in Cock, 2003: 35). Entrenched in this statement are two closely linked misconceptions: that homosexuality is alien to African culture and imported from a morally corrupt West, and that the gay rights struggle is a minor issue in a country with legislated racial discrimination. Like her Apartheid-era counterparts, Mompati interprets homosexuality as a “problem” for South African society and moreover, a concern for privileged whites.

Some six months before Ruth Mompati wrote off “the gays”, Simon Nkoli, one of the few black members of the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA), was standing trial for high treason alongside twenty-one other anti-Apartheid activists. Later known as the Delmas Treason Trials, the event received international media attention and led to the 1987 expulsion of GASA from the International Gay and Lesbian Association. This larger body maintained that GASA had failed to support Nkoli during the criminal procedure (Muholi, 2010: n.p). Nkoli used the trial as a platform to debate similarities between the gay rights movement and the battle against racism, stating after his acquittal, “I’m fighting for the abolition of Apartheid, and I fight for the right of freedom of sexual orientation. These are inextricably linked [...] I cannot be free as a black man if I am not free as a gay man” (cited in Cock, 2002: 36).

International pressure in the wake of Nkoli’s acquittal led the ANC to revise official policy and with it their gay rights stance. In a letter to British activist Peter Tatchell, then-ANC Director of Information Thabo Mbeki (in Tatchell, 2002: n.p) declares,

The ANC is indeed very firmly committed to removing all forms of discrimination and oppression in a liberated South Africa [...] That commitment must surely extend to the protection of gay rights [...] I would like to believe that that my colleague [...] Ruth Mompati did not want to suggest in any way that a free South Africa would want to see gays discriminated against or subjected to any form of repression.

A democratic South Africa was aligned with queer personal freedoms before it had fully materialised.

Bear in mind that this selection of germane cases does not – cannot – represent anything more than a superficial sampling of the treatment of sexual identity under the Apartheid regime. It has simply allowed me to call attention to moments of friction between sexual dissidents and the state. The patrons of the Esplanade corrupt society, the attendees at the Forest Town party are an affront to The Republic, and Mompati’s untroubled gays trouble the nation.

1.3 After the rain fell: Queer citizenship in the “new” South Africa

Given their treatment by the Apartheid government, queer citizens covered political ground in leaps and bounds after 1994. In terms of the legal benefits enjoyed by same-sex couples under democracy, some turnkey moments include, but are not limited to, the 1993 insertion of the Equality Clause into the interim South African constitution (a temporary provision formalised in 1996); the 1995 revision of the Labour Relations Act to bar unfair dismissals on the grounds of sexual orientation; the repeal of the common-law offense of sodomy²⁰ in 1998; the recognition of spousal benefits for same sex couples that same year;²¹ lesbian and gay couples attaining rights to joint parenthood of an adopted minor²² and the passage of the Civil Union Act of 2006, which made South African the fifth nation in the world (and the first in Africa) to legalise same-sex marriage.

The wording of Justice Albie Sachs’s findings in the Civil Union appeal, released to the press in December 2005, is often quoted as evidence for South Africa’s ideals of inclusivity. Sachs writes in paragraph 71 of the judgement:

The exclusion of same-sex couples from the benefits and responsibilities of marriage [...] is not a small and tangential inconvenience resulting from a few surviving relics of societal prejudice destined to evaporate like the morning dew. It represents a harsh if oblique statement by the law that same-sex couples are outsiders, and that their need for affirmation and protection of their intimate relations as human beings is somehow less than that of heterosexual couples. It reinforces the wounding notion that they are to be treated as biological oddities, as failed or lapsed human beings who do not fit into normal society...²³

In Sachs’ explanation there exists a notable contrast to the imagining of sexual citizenship under Apartheid. Queer citizens are now recognised as legally belonging (or deserving to belong, at least)

²⁰ The Constitutional court found that section 20A of the Sexual Offences Act violated protections for privacy, equality and dignity. As a consequence of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian equality et al v. Minister of Justice, consensual homosexual conduct was decriminalised.

²¹ Langemaat v. Minister of Safety and Security et al, 1998

²² Du Toit and De Vos v. Minister of Social Welfare, 2001

²³ For the judgement in its entirety see Fourie and Another v. Minister of Home Affairs, TPD case number 17280/02.

to the nation and the “normal society” it encloses. Nonetheless, even Sachs reads this “normality” as the preserve of heterosexuals.

So celebrated has South Africa become on an international human rights circuit that, in a review of state-sponsored homophobia in southern Africa, Human Rights Watch (HRW) allocates the country a celebratory chapter of its own. HRW acknowledges the impact of the South African rights model on the continent, making the introductory claim that national government has shown “an unprecedented African commitment to acknowledging and upholding the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender residents and citizens” (2001: 179). But South Africa’s rights achievements, while remarkable, continue to mask the degree to which popular consciousness has regressed. Reid points out that there is an appreciable gap between the ideals of the South African Constitution and the day-to-day realities of many queer people (2010: 38). While sexual equality is ostensibly built into national identity, the law and the hand that upholds it do not coincide for everyone. Shefer and Potgeiter underscore this, pointing out that while the Constitution protects sexual rights, the country remains “a highly homophobic, heterosexist culture where heterosexuality is privileged above other forms of sexuality as the ideal, correct form of sexuality and relationship” (2006: 104).

An example of political heterosexism in action can be found in a series of advertisements for the Democratic Alliance’s²⁴ Student Organization (DASO), collectively entitled “In our future.” The first image of the campaign appeared on posters in early 2012 [Figure 2a]. It shows a young, good-looking interracial couple, naked to the waist. The white man has his arms around the black woman’s midriff and she clings to his shoulders. The moment is so intimate that it could pass as foreplay.²⁵ The copy reads, “In OUR future, you wouldn’t look twice.” The use of the second-person pronoun is almost accusatory, holding the viewer accountable for their own behaviour toward interracial relationships while simultaneously identifying the Democratic Alliance as a non-racialist party. The DA are already in the idealised future, we are given to understand. A press statement extrapolates:

In OUR future South Africa would be a place where there is tolerance for everyone, even if their life choices are different from our own [...] With this campaign, we as the DA Youth are putting forward our vision for the future to South Africans. Where the DA governs, this vision is becoming a reality for citizens. Together, we can make it a reality in every corner of South Africa (DASO, 2012: n.p.)

A second image supposedly from the same campaign went viral on social media site Twitter later that month [Figure 2b]. It follows an identical visual formula but this time the interracial couple are both male. This image was revealed to be an unauthorised, unofficial parody (Mambaonline, 26 January 2012). Although DA Spokesperson Mbali Ntuli commended the creativity of the parody and reiterated the party’s pro-equality stance (Ibid, 2012: n.p.), the DASO image promoting a queer friendly future, when it came, took a different tack.

In this final advertisement, LGBTIQ rights activist and founder of rape advocacy group Luleki Sizwe Ndumie Funda is pictured with her partner [Figure 3]. They are both fully dressed and the moment has none of the erotic thrill of its predecessor. The couple’s body language is affectionate but chaste. This time the tagline is “In OUR Future, they will be free to love without fear.” The possessive first person collective pronoun “our” is set in stark contrast to the objective case third person, “they”. They, those people who do those things, are not a part of the party’s inclusive “our”.

²⁴ As of the time of writing the Democratic Alliance are the official opposition to the governing African National Congress.

²⁵ So sexual is the undertone that journalist Chris Roper accused the party of using sex to sell their political agenda in the article “Democratic Arousal: Whoring for Helen” (2012).



Figure 2a: “In OUR future” DASO campaign poster released in January 2012.



Figure 2b: “In OUR future” parody poster released several weeks later. Designer unknown.

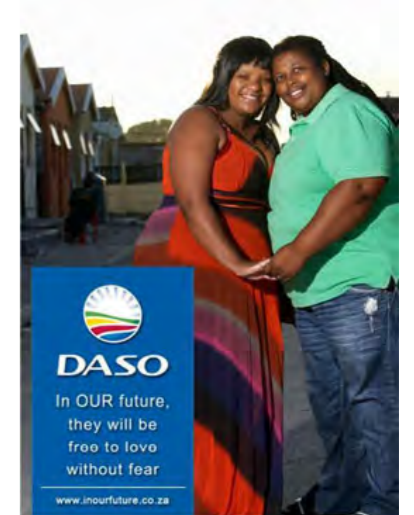


Figure 3: Activist Ndumie Funda (right) and partner. 2012. DASO’s “In OUR future” campaign poster.

This image illustrates that even the possibility of sex between women lies outside the bounds of what DASO, and through them the DA, think would appeal to a general public. This allows the viewer to read into whom the DA believes comprises South Africa's public – specifically, the straight voter. Even in an ostensibly positive representation, homosexuality occupies the position of national Other, confined to the margins of the body politic.

1.4. Over the rainbow: Sexuality and the authorising citizenship narrative

During April 2014, international soft drinks manufacturer Coca-Cola launched a South African promotional campaign entitled “#RainbowNation” in celebration of the country's twentieth year of constitutional democracy. The campaign took the form of a series of interventions in and around Mary Fitzgerald Square in central Johannesburg, with satellite billboards appearing on roadsides in wider Gauteng. In each location mists of non-drinkable water were propelled into the air, catching the sunlight at an angle calculated to produce rainbows for the pleasure of passers-by [Figure 4].

These “accidental” viewers were, if the accompanying television commercial is to be believed, almost exclusively young, attractive and racially diverse. The commercial opens on a time-lapse of the present-day Johannesburg skyline, which transitions into archival footage of voters in South Africa's first democratic election. This juxtaposition – a leap from immediate geography to remote history – is made less jarring by a consistent quality of light. Each shot is veiled in sunlight, so much so, in fact, that lens flare obscures the faces of individual voters in the initial election scene. In silhouette they become an undifferentiated mass, wiped clean of the markers of race, gender or sexuality. Arguably the erasure of contingent typologies better equips voters to represent the broader, uniform iconicity of a national body.²⁶

An emphasis on the national as transcending the limits of historically determined subjectivity underpins the advertisement that follows. Coca-Cola direct their addresses to the South African nation *en masse*: “We wanted to remind people what the symbol of the rainbow stood for [...] we didn't just show the symbol, we created it,” declares a sonorous voice-over. But to which people specifically is the reminder issued, and by what criteria is this amorphous audience defined? “You look at the rainbow and you smile. That's why they call us the rainbow nation,” the voice of a participant chimes in, adding, “We have a lot to smile about.” “The rainbow reminds us of our best possible selves,” says a woman proudly. The use of the plural pronoun situates any and every listener in this process – we all need reminding.

Although the mode of address is inclusive, its point of origin is not immediately apparent. No speaker is shown to the camera. These voices are not awarded flesh in any material sense, I would suggest, because bodies are invested with raced, gendered, and sexual meaning. In that sense bodies are inherently a site of difference. Disembodied, the anonymous and invisible South African speakers becomes a mouthpiece for national sentimentality. They speak on behalf of all citizens

²⁶ In her critique of representative democracy, Hannah Arendt (1958) maintains that voting *must* dissolve the distinction between individual and collective political reality. For Arendt neither the opinion nor the action of a private citizen is truly required in the political process. In marking a ballot a citizen delegates responsibility to an elected representative and in so doing sacrifices agency.



Figure 4: “A rainbow for the rainbow nation.” Coca Cola's #RainbowNation intervention in Mary Fitzgerald square, Johannesburg. 2014. Photo credit to FCB Johannesburg.

– and to all citizens – in the language of nationalism,²⁷ albeit co-opted by Coca-Cola to serve a commercial agenda.²⁸

Although the speakers are detached from the body, Coca-Cola's advertisement is nonetheless full of faces. Within the first twenty seconds a parade of strangely similar head-and-shoulders shots of South Africans, all silent, motionless, and smiling, greets the viewer [Figure 5]. Styled as a spontaneous photo opportunity, this sequence aims to foreground racial variety. Without names or context, however, these portraits are devoid of any individual autonomy or indeed, any meaningful engagement with South African cultural realities. The lasting impression is one of commonality despite diversity, not because of it: a unity that transcends difference.

Citizenship, Hall and Held argue, only offers itself up at the exclusion of other identity markers. It demands the suppression of all experiences that might stand to divide a national polity and thus potentially complicate the terms of national membership. The authors identify the reconciliation of individual and collective identity as the defining function of the modern nation state, explaining that many citizens “belong to other histories, cultures and traditions [and ...] these cultural differences are crucial to their sense of identity, identification and ‘belongingness’ [...] but these differences present challenges to, and produce new tensions within what we called [...] the idea of citizenship” (1989: 175).

²⁷ Under Apartheid nationalism was strategically tied to race, imagined as exceeding all other identity formations. Ernest Gellner (1983: 1) calls out this nation-building trope for its emphasis on the individual political subject, arguing that national identities must necessarily supersede ethnic or racial allegiances. Gellner explains that these “boundaries within a given state—a contingency already formally excluded by the principle in its general formulation— should not separate the power-holders from the rest.”

²⁸ There is an irony in Coca-Cola's appropriation of rainbowism, lying in the company's involvement in the South African market under Apartheid. Although Coca-Cola Inc. formally divested its holdings in South Africa in late 1986, this move saw no marked decrease in sales, local advertising and signage. “In placating domestic groups' threats of boycotts by taking modest actions against the apartheid government [...] Coca-Cola reclaimed its public image as a champion of human rights and democratic ideals, despite the fact that very little, if anything, had changed,” writes John Spivey (2009: 35).



Figure 5: The smiling faces of Coca Cola's #RainbowNation campaign, 2014. Advertisement stills.

The end of Apartheid saw urgent attention paid to a suitable descriptive language for “new” South African citizenship. Emerging into a discursive void still inhabited by the towering ghosts of white Calvinist nationalism, the metaphor of the rainbow nation was intended to define post-apartheid national identity. Rainbow nation rhetoric became a platform from which to imagine a new imagined community; an exercise in national mythmaking intended to amalgamate a heterogeneous population into a new whole. As the premise of Coca-Cola’s 2014 campaign testifies, this narrative retains a grip on, or at least a recognisable currency within, the South African national psyche.

The phrase “the rainbow nation,” drawn from the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, made its first official appearance at the 1994 inauguration ceremony of soon-to-be President Nelson Mandela: “We enter into a covenant that we shall build a society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall without fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - a rainbow nation which is at last at peace with itself and the world at large” (in Johnson, 2009: 6). Informally the rainbow had already played a role in the ANC’s 1994 electoral campaign. Running with the slogan “A better life for all” the party released posters featuring Mandela surrounded by a crowd of smiling children of diverse races [Figure 6]. He sits serenely in the centre. Around him, each child volunteers the same media-friendly smile that features so prominently in Coca-Cola’s campaign twenty years later.

With Mandela’s explicit endorsement in his first presidential address, “rainbowism” was swiftly adopted as the master narrative of new South African belonging. Jacklyn Cock (2002: 36) elaborates on the significance of the rainbow as a national metaphor:

The discourse of diversity, the celebration of difference and [...] the right to freedom of sexual orientation were defined as part of the challenge of building a diverse, pluralistic society. The rainbow [defined here as a broad based rainbow of different races, genders, sexualities and other social groupings such as the rural poor] emerged (and remains) as a strong collectivist and inclusivist symbol [...] and a source of national pride.

Evident in her explanation are the sheer expansiveness of rainbowism and its operation as a multifaceted citizenship story encompassing all South African experience. Cock also speaks to sexual orientation directly, describing sexuality as a shade of the rainbow on a par with other identity markers.

This is a correlation further evidenced by the Gay Flag of South Africa, designed by Eugene Brockman [Figure 7]. Here, South Africa’s new national flag is mapped onto the colours of the rainbow and appropriated as a queer symbol. “Inclusivist” in every sense, rainbowism sought to embrace every citizen irrespective of race or sexuality.

This ambition made the rainbow nation narrative vulnerable to critique from the very first. As early as 1994 Kelwyn Sole (in Distiller and Steyn, 2004: 7) warns that “...a politics of multiculturalism which does not recognise inequalities and battles for power within cultural groupings will simply begin to re-inscribe categories and notions espoused by apartheid orthodoxy, revitalised but still bearing its essentialist and reactionary agenda.” The rainbow is a clumsy and oversimplifying metaphor, Sole maintains. Loren Laundau agrees, arguing that emphasis on nationality comes at the cost of other formations of self and their unique circumstances (2005: 334). To recognise oneself as a member of the rainbow nation is to inherit the racist baggage that shaped South African society. In subsuming identities inscribed on and performed by the body, rainbowism effaces the manner in which these sub-national experiences describe day-to-day social and political life. Pumla Dineo Gqola (2015) identifies a consequence of this erasure. For her it can (and has) lead to mistaking “race as power” for “race as colour”.



Figure 6: "A better life for all". African National Congress election campaign poster, 1994.



Figure 7: The Gay Flag of South Africa, registered with the South African Heraldry Association in 2012.



Figure 8: A child reaches for the rainbow. Coca Cola's #RainbowNation campaign advertisement. 2014. Still.

Institutionalised rainbowism makes little allowance for the power imbalances still operating at the level of individual and community identity. Race, undoubtedly the most ever-present example, remains the primary predictor and dictator of economic, cultural and political access to power. Gqola lists specific failures of rainbowism by way of substantiation. She cites recent incidents of racist abuse and violence in South Africa, and acknowledges that so-called "born frees" (children born after the transition into democracy) are among the worst culprits (Ibid, 2015: n.p). Following Gqola, the harmonious diversity enshrined in rainbowism has little bearing on lived marginality.

This holds true for sexuality too, and particularly those non-normative sexualities that exist at the intersection of racial and economic marginalisation. Accurate statistics for violence against women in this country are notoriously hard to obtain, but Cape Town-based non-governmental organisation Luleki Sizwe estimates that they treat approximately ten lesbian rape survivors every week (Fihlani, 2011: n.p). A study by OUT LGBT corroborates this statistic, revealing that 10% of black lesbians and 4% of white lesbians have experienced sexual assault (Phiri, 2011: 16). The vast discrepancy between those numbers is, I would argue, a direct consequence of the privileges that whiteness affords queer subjects, further evidence of how little change "the rainbow" has wrought. Black lesbians, due to multiple disadvantages instrumentalised by Apartheid, often have fewer protective resources at their disposal and are at greater risk of violence. More than thirty self-identified lesbian women have been murdered as a direct consequence of their sexuality over the past 15 years (Smith, 2014: n.p). How has the rainbow protected them?

The rainbow nation narrative has brought South Africa little closer to producing citizens who experience their national identity as transcending race, gender and sexuality (if that should ever have been a desirable outcome). "When South Africans can be whoever they want to be and inhabit those positions proudly, perhaps we [will] really have become the rainbow nation," writes Gqola (2004: 7), but she acknowledges that this ideal remains a dream. Although the victories of constitutional equality are manifold, and although there have certainly been major legal provisions made for individual difference, everyday life lags behind these policies. A rainbow is by definition a transient and circumstantial thing, and as such makes for an unstable metaphor on which to build national identity.

Coca-Cola's "#RainbowNation" provides a useful concluding analogy. On the vast budget of a corporate giant, making a rainbow requires careful planning, timeous execution and grand-scale public participation. Even under these conditions, the impact of the rainbow is felt only at the comparatively micro-level of urban Johannesburg. Its effect is also temporary. With the conclusion of the campaign at the end of Freedom Month 2014, the rainbows fade. This is foreshadowed, perhaps, in the final moment of the advertisement, a moment of seeming optimism. A child - a new citizen of a new nation - reaches toward a rainbow that remains far out of reach [Figure 8].

Chapter 2_ Visibility and its Discontents: Assimilationism and Dissent in Post-Apartheid Queer Culture-Building

If you are not seen, if you are not heard, you do not exist.

Former Out in Africa Film Festival Director Nodi Murphy²⁹

In November 2015 the Cape Town Pride committee released the first promotional posters for the 2016 LGBTI Pride March and satellite events. Falling under the organisation's mandate – encapsulated in their slogan, "Uniting the Cultures of Cape Town" – the upcoming festival was headlined by three simple words, "Gay", "Proud" and "Colourblind", which float in cheerful bubbles against a rainbow backdrop contextualised only by the event's name and dates [Figure 9].

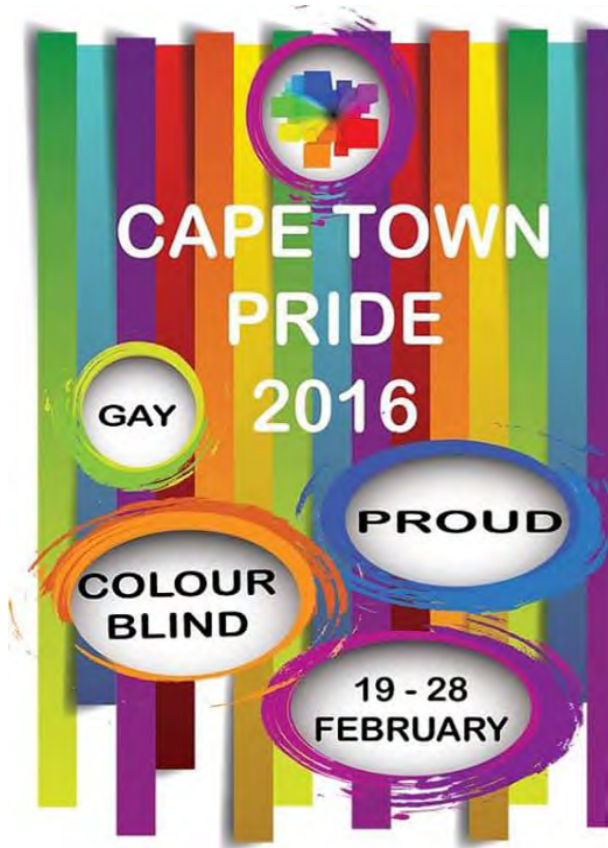


Figure 9: Cape Town Pride's 2016 provisional promotional poster, 2015.

Within moments of the poster going public my social media accounts lit up with criticisms of the campaign. Several were accompanied by the hashtag "#ShutDownCTPride" coined by University of Cape Town student activist HeJin Kim. Objections were raised around the narrowness of the term "gay" as a descriptor, constituting an erasure of other sexual identities and subjectivities, and around the trite non-racialism built into "colourblindness". As Kim puts it in an impassioned

²⁹ I conducted several interviews to substantiate the research in this chapter, which will be introduced by, and referenced in, footnotes. Murphy, N. Interview with the author. Cape Town, South Africa. 22 April 2015.

blog post on the subject, "To say 'colourblind' is merely trying to rap rainbow nationalism [sic] in an attempt to whitesplain³⁰ your fucked up attitudes" (2015: n.p).

In his reflection on race relations in post-apartheid South Africa, Sakhela Buhlungu (2007) examines the failed championing of non-racialist discourse (of which colourblindness forms part) under democracy. To Buhlungu non-racialism inadvertently fosters a culture of silence and denial that discourages debate about enduring racial inequality in the distribution of political, culture and economic power (Ibid, 85-89). To be colourblind in a divided society, he points out, is to advocate ignoring the role race still plays in national life. To be blind to race is first and foremost to be blind.

Seeing matters. It can even be revolutionary, as bell hooks suggests in *The Oppositional Gaze* (2003). "There is power in looking," she writes. "By courageously looking, we defiantly declare, 'Not only will I stare, I want my look to change reality'" (Ibid, 95). hooks is calling for recognition of the black spectator as a force to be reckoned with, staking a claim to a defiant gaze directed at a white establishment that is also a claim to agency. In that thought she makes apparent the ways in which subjecthood is bound up in the politics of vision, and with it a system of power relations. For hooks seeing, being seen and returning the gaze are all weapons in the arsenal of social change. While she is primarily concerned with the implications of these acts for race and gender, it is no wonder that the question of visibility is also central to many queer theoretical projects³¹ and habitually invoked alongside its kissing cousin, representation.³² When sexuality (so consistently relegated to a private sphere) becomes visible, it disrupts the logic of the social and creates a space for resistance and dissent. "If culture is often presented as a discrete object, a seamless web of social relations," as Nicholas Mirzoeff suggests, "sexuality is the loose end that undoes the garment" (1999: 162).

Following hooks and Mirzoeff, sexual visibility functions as a political site from which other avenues of inquiry must extend: which sexualities become visible, how they are presented and received, how each interfaces with the matrix of other collective and individual identifications and how these in turn lead us as queers to see ourselves and one another. Who is seen and how we see them speaks to more than simply the object of sight, after all. It sheds light on who is authorised to look, and why.

In the previous chapter I plotted the manner in which a constitutional standing has made LGBTIQ citizens visible to a national public and the law.³³ I now think through the mechanisms by which that same visibility has been deployed tactically by queers to unsettle, agitate or provide alternatives to official national culture. Specifically I choose to assess those performances of sexual identification that take place in public or invite the gaze of the nation, asserting what Mirzoeff (2011) calls, in

³⁰ Whitesplaining is essentially "an expression of privilege: the unconscious, unearned and largely un-examined benefits of prejudice" (Elder, 2015: n.p.). It is the assumed authority by whites to speak on behalf of, or over, a person of colour, particularly regarding race relations.

³¹ These engagements take various forms, ranging from studies of queer spectatorship/reception practices that intervene in existing scopical regimes (as in Lorraine Gamman and Caroline Evans' collaborative research [1995] or Alexander Doty's [1993] *Making Things Perfectly Queer*) to the production of work that solicits a queer gaze (see Amelia Jones's reading of queer self-representation [2012]) to queer contributions to surveillance studies, like Michel Foucault's (1995).

³² Although both terms aim to describe the politicised power of images, representation is undoubtedly the more slippery. Stuart Hall (1997), in his conceptual roadmap of the term's application in discourse, understands it as critical to the production and exchange of meaning in language. He identifies representation as the reciprocal process whereby a culture shares and sustains communication, a cycle defined by and defining its subject.

³³ In their 2008 study "Pride and Prejudice: Public Attitudes Towards Homosexuality," Reddy and Roberts provide statistical evidence for the growing gay and lesbian presence in South Africa, describing "the growth of gay and lesbian political activism and organisations, the emergence of regular social events such as pride marches and film festivals, and significant coverage in print and electronic media" (2008: 9). While these improvements are noteworthy, it is important to acknowledge the authors' conclusion that despite a marked increase in visibility, national perceptions of homosexuality remain consistently negative in the five years under consideration. In answer to the surveyed question, "Do you think it is wrong or not wrong for two adults to have same-sex relations?", 84% of respondents expressed the view that such contact is "always wrong" in 2003, while 82% answered similarly in a 2007 poll.

his text of the same name, the “the right to look”.³⁴ My focus falls on South Africa’s Pride festivals, the Mother City Queer Project (MCQP) parties and the Out in Africa (OiA) Film Festival. These institutions have been chosen for several reasons. Each has generated considerable mainstream media attention and left a lasting footprint on popular culture. Their longevity has afforded them a sustained audience over the years, but changes in that audience – or a lack thereof – may present insight into the construction and reception of a queer public. Finally, their origins coincide with the birth of South Africa’s democracy, making these sexual culture-building efforts a complement to (and an intervention in) larger nation-building projects.

I do not intend to construe visibility as simply or universally positive. Visibility is a revolutionary force but it can also be, as Peggy Phelan (2003) suggests, a trap. Becoming visible invites surveillance and discipline. It attracts and produces voyeurs. It can include and exclude, and it can determine who merits seeing. It can even, as Phelan ultimately argues, lead to a fetishizing of the subject that forces it under erasure. For Phelan this identifies the object of the gaze with a particular conjunction of patriarchy and capitalism.³⁵ To that conjunction I must add racism. As Jasbir Puar (2001) has compellingly demonstrated, the operation of whiteness upon/within queer culture privileges certain narratives of desire while invisibilising others.

Sensitive to this, I attempt to use a slightly different framing device for each subsection to better reveal this operation at work. South Africa’s Pride events are loosely read through the lens of being seen as citizens (demanding the question, which citizens are seen?), OiA as a platform for becoming visible to ourselves (but who is watching?), and MCQP as a space to perform a visibility intended for one another (but at what cost?). Where possible, I attempt to interleave these queer institutions with South Africa’s citizenship-creation efforts, finding moments of comparison, compatibility, mutual benefits and shared failings. At the end of the day I aspire to examine and to exorcise what José E. Muñoz calls “the phantasm of normative citizenship” (1999: 4-5) – heteronormative and homonormative alike – from the construction of queer publics.

2.1 Becoming visible: Post-apartheid Pride and shame

The front page of the *Sunday Times* on 14 October 1990 bears the headline “When the gays go marching in” after the gospel hymn. A photograph shows three participants in the 1990 Johannesburg Lesbian and Gay Pride March,³⁶ the first of its kind in South Africa and indeed, on the African continent [Figure 10]. The marchers are anonymous, their faces hidden beneath paper bags into which eye-holes have been crudely cut. The figure on the far right has a smile drawn from ear to ear. Below the image a caption interprets the signs carried by the trio.

Taking place as South Africa hovered in the limbo that preceded full constitutional democracy, the 1990 Pride parade commanded national attention for the LGBTIQ community on its own terms. Under the auspices of the now-defunct Gay and Lesbian Organization of Witwatersrand (GLOW),

³⁴ Mirzoeff draws this phrase from Jacques Derrida’s description of Marie-Francoise Plissart’s photo essay (“The right to inspection. The invention of the other”) in which two women are engaged in an ambiguous game of cat-and-mouse through a landscape. Redolent with homoerotic subtext, Plissart’s images are framed by Derrida as depicting lesbians. The right to look is perhaps already a queer looking.

³⁵ See John D’Emilio’s essay “Capitalism and Gay Identity” (1983) for a closer reading of this conjunction as it pertains to queer subjecthood. Emilio holds that “the homosexual lifestyle” depends upon relations of exchange within and beyond the household, allowing queers to become consumers outside the conjugal and procreative family unit.

³⁶ The event was rechristened “Joburg Pride,” a registered trademark of the Joburg Gay Pride Festival Company, in 2007 (Milani, 2015: 431).



Figure 10: Duncan, M. 1990. “When the gays go marching in.” *The Sunday Times*, 19 October. Photo credit to Pierre Oosthuysen

the earliest Pride was a public statement of queer presence. By making their respective closets visible or shunning them entirely, the first marchers called attention to their status as outsiders and appealed for an alternative. The retroactive inclusion of “yet” in “I can’t be seen yet” holds hope for a future in which conditions might improve.

Phillips (in Lister, 2003: 154) describes the strategy underpinning such minoritarian public spectacles as a “politics of presence.” When indirect representation of a marginalised group is no longer sufficient, it is necessary to overcome political exclusion by taking charge of one’s own entry into the public sphere. The 800-strong protest, wending its way through Hillbrow to Constitution Hill, occupied urban public space while resisting the normative regimes that dictate its use. The first Pride could equally be said to meet Isin and Nielsen’s criteria for an act of citizenship. It challenged non-participatory approaches to constitutional representation, became visible, became audible and was comprised of beings with claims acting toward a common goal (2008: 8). The claim to a political voice and to presence is also inescapably a claim to space. In disputing available political institutions, as Bell and Valentine propose, annual Pride marches constitute a subversive spatial act³⁷ with greater political significance. They make visible “invisibilised sexualities” whose mere presence destabilises “ambiently heterosexual” public space (1995: 18-19).

By inserting legibly queer bodies into inner-city Johannesburg, the original Pride parade was a larger-than-life version of what is arguably the master narrative event of queer visibility, coming out. Coming out implies a disclosure that is also an ontological shift from objecthood to subjecthood; a “mak[ing] visible [of] something that is not merely invisible but also deemed worthy of extermination” (Dyer and Pidduck, 2003: 10). But coming out – as an individual or as a community – is a formula indebted to Western understandings of the queer experience. It assumes that identity-building is linear and chronological with predictable landmarks along the way, beginning with confusion and ending with fully-realised selfhood. This is demonstrably oversimplified. Not everyone comes out once and all at once, and not everyone comes out about only one thing.

³⁷ David Bell and Gill Valentine are adapting Judith Butler’s notion of “subversive bodily acts” (1990), taken to describe a performative corporeal challenge that can disrupt or fracture hegemonic heteronormativity.

More than that, the focus on the individual in this approach does not always translate from context to context. As Nomfundo Lumphondwana points out (in Peach, 2005: 55), for some “the matter is much more complex [...] In an African culture you are a child of not just your mother and father but of your relatives and your community. In this context, many African lesbians cannot afford to put their individual needs over those of the broader community of which they are an integral part.”

In her essay “The Transnational Configuration of Desire,” Jasbir Puar (2001) powerfully elucidates this point. She argues that visibility is a mandated function of queerness in the West, and contributes to a hegemonic narrative that precludes slippages in queer identity. Within this framework the metaphor of the closet, particularly as applied to the nation, presumes commensurable trajectories of identity that span multiple social spaces. From the national closet a hologram of community is projected with white Western experience as its only available film stock.

Invocations of this singular community are apparent in the themes of even the earliest South African Prides. The first, “Unity in Community,” aimed to present a united front to the public and speak directly to the recently unbanned African National Congress (de Waal and Manion, 2006: 7). Later Prides testify to the longevity of community-building and space-occupation as goals for the event: 1991 was “March Together for Equality”; 1993, “Out of the Closets, into the Streets”; 1994, “Celebrate Unity”; 1996, “African Pride Beyond Boundaries”; 2010, “We’re all African” and so on. The crossing of divides – social, racial and spatial – is part of Pride’s scripting.

And there were divides, which have only widened with time. To track these it is necessary to chart shifts in the political gears of Pride. In its early days the Johannesburg event took its political momentum from the driving force of GLOW. Founded by activist Simon Nkoli, GLOW was among the first national gay rights groups with a predominantly black membership, preceded only by the Rand Gay Organization (RGO) in Gauteng (Gunkel, 2010: 66). It drew its constituency predominantly from township-based activists and organizers, who played a key role in forging connections between the gay rights struggle and the fight against Apartheid (Ibid, 55).

Gunkel ascribes the groundwork for the inclusion of a sexual orientation clause to GLOW, which “creat[ed] the visibility that was necessary to lobby for the petitions that were then sent to the constitutional court” (2010: 72). GLOW made a scene/seen, with measurable results. Queer constitutional protections were instituted at the 1991 Convention for a Democratic South Africa, the year after the first Pride (Reid, 2005).

A GLOW-authored manifesto³⁸ headed “A call to all South Africans who are committed to a non-racist, non-sexist, non-discriminatory democratic future” attests to the prioritisation of an indiscriminate visibility in initial programming. In this document the goals of the initiative are outlined (in de Waal and Manion, 2006: 15) as:

- Uniting the population in the fight for basic rights for all South Africans, including lesbians and gay men.
- Mobilising the community against discrimination.
- Asserting the role of lesbians and gay men in the current process of political change.
- Confronting South Africa with the presence of its gay and lesbian community.
- And dispelling myths nurtured by years of discrimination and stereotyping.

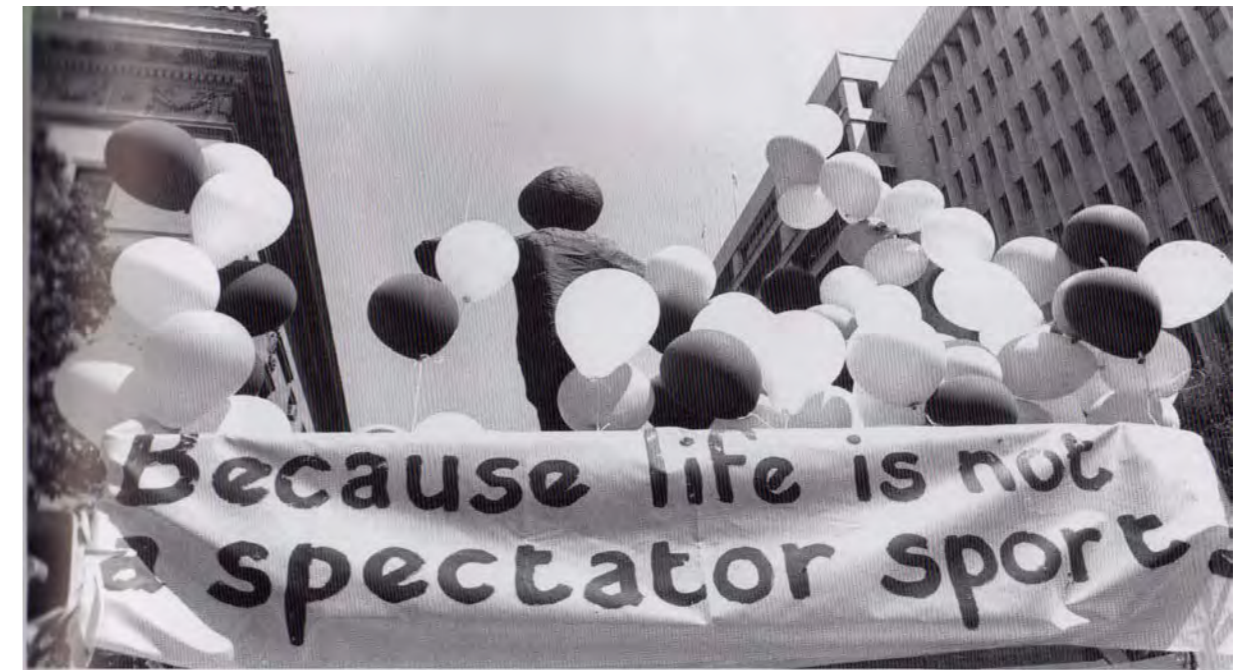


Figure 11: “Because life is not a spectator sport.” 1994. Johannesburg Pride. Photographer unknown. In S. de Waal and A. Manion (eds.). 2006. *Pride: Protest and Celebration*. Johannesburg: Fanele Books.

In concert these describe an event based on inclusion and ask for the same in kind. It is a call directed toward all South Africans, making GLOW’s demands an explicitly national concern. The first point acknowledges that “all South Africans” means a mostly straight audience, and attempts to align the struggle for sexual rights with a larger human rights battle. Point four, however, revolves around the more confrontational verb “confront,” challenging the nation to recognise “the presence of its lesbian and gay community.” Presence is understood as a radical and confrontational political gesture.

With that in mind, a 1990 *Exit* newspaper advertisement for Pride (in de Waal and Manion, 2006) seems contradictory. The copy reads, “Be there!! If you are too shy to show you face, wear a mask or fancy dress. Just be there.” Presence seems to outweigh visibility. Perhaps it was this precaution that brought the trio of masked marchers into the glare of the *Sunday Times’s* cameras. The licence for anonymity was understandable. Identifying as homosexual in a climate of stigmatisation, as Mikki van Zyl points out, means being visibly different, and that can spell danger for the seen (2009: 371). In 1990 homosexuality was still a crime under the Sexual Offences Act of 1957.

The choice to remain anonymous was not endorsed by all. Campiagner Craig Mowatt publically criticised those who wore bags. “By marching we confront the persecutors of humanity throughout the world. The wearing of the masks questions rather than asserts the legitimacy of the wearer’s existence – it is devoid of pride,” he maintains (in de Waal and Manion, 2006: 17). For Mowatt presence is undermined by anonymity, elevating visibility to the level of obligation. Being seen becomes more important than being safe and the degree and quality of an individual’s participation is assigned accordingly. A photograph from the 1994 Pride, coinciding with the first democratic elections, offers the same sentiment more convivially. An enormous banner reads “Because life is not a spectator sport” [Figure 11].

Seeing is insufficient. You have to participate wholeheartedly or not live at all.

38 Activist and academic Mark Gevisser is widely considered to be the principal author of this document, although it is not attributed to him in-text (Rundle in de Waal and Manion, 2006: 22).

There is a crucial point to make here, which I believe retains its validity in contemporary iterations of the event. The costs of visibility are not distributed across a level playing field. As they pertain to sexuality, this is perhaps most obvious in the entitlements afforded by (normalised) heterosexuality. A straight couple does not need to evaluate their surroundings before expressing affection in public or fear violence if they fail to do so. Visibility is a privilege. Carbado (2000) maintains that it may be among the most fundamental of heterosexual privileges, although in its pervasiveness the same privilege also becomes invisible and invisibilising. By that I mean it is harder to see and to register as distinct that which appears everywhere. This holds true, too, for the multiple securities that whiteness grants, which queerness does not cancel out. Assuming safe passage at a Pride event is easier if one is accustomed to walking the streets freely, much as dismissing elective anonymity as cowardice is easier if the violence meted out in consequence is held at bay by financial security, reliable policing and a safe suburban home. Lisa Duggan puts this problem very precisely, presenting it as a critique of queer identity politics: "The production of a politics from a fixed identity position privileges those for whom that position is the primary or only marked identity," she suggests (1995: 182). Racial and class hierarchies structure the experience of sexual non-conformity as they do any other experience, and complicate efforts to delegate a "proper" queer visibility.

Mowatt's visibility-as-decree interprets an already-fraught belonging to an emergent (and at risk) community as conditional. In doing so he echoes and affirms the machinations of a larger national citizenship, which, as I argue in the previous chapter, naturalises certain lives, practices and ways of being. This mirroring has become more apparent as South Africa's largest Pride events, taking place first in Johannesburg and later, Cape Town, edge ever closer toward homonormativity. For the record, I follow Duggan's (2002: 179) definition of homonormativity as

a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.

In keeping with that conception, a depoliticised Pride culture would pave the way for a homonormative whitewashing of the event itself, and a future in which it might function to hypostatise rather than flout regulative norms. Those norms include (at least for Duggan, writing from a Euro-American perspective) neoliberalism, domestic privacy, the "free" market and patriotism (Ibid).

Emily Craven alleges that Joburg Pride began to lose its political valency when Paul Stobbs took over chairmanship in 1994 (2011: 40). One of Stobbs' first moves was to rebrand the event from a "march" to a "parade" (Ibid), shifting the emphasis from protest to celebration. While efforts were made to reinstall politics at the heart of Johannesburg Pride in the late 1990s, it was sold to a private company as a commercial venture in 2002 (Ibid, 41). The subsequent decision to charge an entrance fee to festivities, compounded by a move from inner-city Johannesburg to suburban Rosebank,³⁹ appealed to an audience with both available transport and funds. "What began as a political act of defiance in a time when they [queers] were denied basic rights has turned into a cultural event sold to city dwellers as a moment to let go and have a good time," writes *Mail and Guardian* arts editor Matthew Krouse of the move (2002: n.p). The whitewashing of Pride had begun in earnest. This undertaking was repeated in the decision to locate Cape Town's Pride in Greenpoint and De Waterkant, the city's central gay ghettos. Phillip Harrison's guide to gay and lesbian tourism in South Africa describes the area as follows:

In the early 90's a young, professional [gay and arty] set discovered the charm of the area's quaint and dilapidated cottages, and the neighbourhood quickly became gentrified and property values increased significantly. [...] The arrival of well-heeled tourists, from about 1994, helped the process (2005: 39).

Pride is positively equated with affluence, without more nuanced attention to the racially homogenous neighbourhoods that follow in the wake of that convergence. "Why are the gay ghettos white?" asks Charles Nero (2005: 228), commenting on this same correlation in the United States. He concludes that the strategic negotiation of the straight world represented by queer neighbourhoods is warped by racism. It is also distorted by consumerism and economic disparity - that influx of well-heeled tourists observed by Harrison. In her incisive critique of commodity culture, Rosemary Hennessey reads the increased corporatization of queer culture as an expression of the relentless expansion of capital. "Gays," she argues, "are welcome to be visible as consumer subjects but not as social subjects" (1994: 32).

The proposal for would-be advertisers distributed before 2013's Joburg Pride provides insight into the commercialisation of the event. Describing "the market", the document reads,

It is an international fact that the LGBTIAQ market is both affluent and influential - one that increasingly attracts targeted marketing by companies world-wide eager to capitalize on Pink buying-power! On the whole, South African LGBTI individuals are high-yield, trend-setting, and brand-conscious, loyal with ample disposable income (Lunchboxmedia, 2013: n.p)

There's something really disheartening about that exclamation mark. Hot on its heels, the assumption that all South African "LGBTI individuals" are comparable to their international counterparts, "brand-conscious" and with "ample disposable income", signifies the classist, racist interests that have come to define the popular image of the community. To be queer in this construction is to consume. The sponsors driving the event support this. Coca-Cola has been known to back Joburg Pride, while Cape Town Pride is funded in part by South African Breweries. Dipika Nath (2012: n.p), in her post "Gay Pride is Political," criticises Pride's corporatisation,

You can be forgiven for thinking that the Joburg Pride website is a portal for distributing advice to businesses who want to tap into this niche market of "trend-setting" consumers who just happen to be gay. After all, doesn't equality mean equal rights to consume, just as freedom means the freedom to starve?

Nath highlights one particular incident that embodies the clash between Pride's present and its past, its aspirations and its reality. In 2012 she and some twenty others (mostly black and working class women) staged a "die-in"⁴⁰ to interrupt the passage of the parade, calling for a minute of silence to remember those murdered for their gender identity and sexuality. The intervention was staged by the One in Nine Campaign (OINC), who take their name from a 2005 statistic issued by the Medical Research Council indicating that only one out of every nine women report rape to law enforcement (Bennett, 2009: 5-6).

Activists from OINC were met with verbal and physical abuse from white partygoers. "By all accounts it was a nasty scene," writes journalist Rebecca Davis of the event, leading One in Nine members to accuse the Pride organisational committee of running a "depoliticised, elitist, commercialised event totally divorced from what the real function of Pride should be" (2012: n.p).

³⁹ In 2005 the march was briefly relocated to the city centre. When a bottle was thrown from a high-rise building and struck a participant, the event was swiftly reinstated to the "safer" environment of Rosebank (Milani, 2015: 431).

⁴⁰ Tommaso Milani (2015) problematises the trope of racialised powerlessness at work in this symbolic gesture, highlighting its ambivalence as a strategy that both reveals the high-stakes of racial power dynamics - "black bodies on the tar" - and reinforces their polarity. I hold that vulnerability can be put to work for political ends without the sacrifice of agency, an idea I develop fully in Chapter 3.



Figure 12: Screengrab of the OINC video distributed over social media, entitled "LGBT Activists disrupt Joburg Gay Parade 2012." Available https://youtu.be/Hnxip-T_Hnw [2015, 12 November]

The incident was documented in a video distributed via social media. "As lesbians and gender non-conforming people we had every right to be there, and to claim the space and assert our demands [...]," a voiceover intones evenly. The camera pans over a black banner held aloft by activists, reading in white block letters, "No cause for celebration" [Figure 12].

"Move them," shouts a marshal as the activists spread out to block the path of the parade. As if on cue Jenni Green from the Joburg Pride board - named and shamed in subtitles - arrives in a silver BMW, hooting. "This is my route," she says angrily to the camera. She is followed by footage of a white man wearing a pink feather boa pushing a black activist, while another white marcher raises two middle-fingers to the camera. Voices in the background can be heard saying "Go back to the location!" and urging those participants in cars to "Drive over them." In Nath's retelling of the event, Tanya Harford, chair of the Joburg Pride board, arrives on the scene in a fury and attempts to forcibly remove the protestors. In response to pleas for silence, Hartford yells, "I'm queer too, you stupid fuck."

This conflict throws into sharp relief a war waged for the heart of Pride. On the one hand, white marchers feel entitled to freedom of movement in the streets of the city, using the parade as a forum for celebration. This is "their route"; they are "queer, too". On the other, OINC activists contest the right to celebrate - there is "no cause for celebration" for everyone - and hope to utilise Pride as a protest platform. In doing so the latter speak on behalf of those who remain unseen and uncelebrated, specifically a still-marginalised black queer community. In an interview about the incident published in *CityPress*, activist and participant in the first Pride march Beverley Ditsie lucidly frames the tension between these two groups (in Blignaut, 2012: n.p):

Our issues were never addressed, and until they are, we will always have two separate Prides - one a parade celebrating the rights the other half enjoy; one a protest against the brutality the others face. The reality is that some of us are freer than others.

Acts of citizenship, Engin Isin (2009) suggests, must sometimes call into question dominant performances of belonging. Citizenship is a contested institution. It can suffer internal conflict and it can change. And if it can change, then it can be improved. "We can define acts of citizenship as those acts that transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (that is, claimants of rights) through creating or transforming sites and stretching scales," Isin writes (2009: 383). By disrupting defined orders and practices, a group claiming as-yet unrealised rights can open up the boundaries of belonging.

In challenging investments in Pride as a commercial event devoid of politics, OINC activists make visible those who have been ignored (and in some cases, actively invisibilised) by heteronormative and homonormative culture alike. They spectacularise their own exclusion from queer public life in what amounts to a "symbolic act of defiance" (Milani, 2014: 450). In doing so they claim a dynamic community citizenship above and beyond that dispensed by both the state and a depoliticised white, middle-class queer community.

2.2. The screen is a closet: Out in Africa and a queer representational economy

Barbara Hammer's experimental film *Out in South Africa* (1995), culled from footage produced during her time as a guest at the first Out in Africa (OiA) Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Cape Town, features a moment of disconcerting double vision. Propped up against what appears to be an off-road vehicle, the camera sees a stretch of grassland scattered with bare Acacia trees. A hand emerges from off-screen and, as though it were the viewer's own, deposits a pair of sunglasses in the immediate foreground. We briefly see the landscape through two lenses, one obvious and the other invisible. The camera appears to show the world as it is, while through the smaller set of frames the scene is washed in colour [Figure 13]. Hammer's voiceover begins, "In South Africa in 1994, the Apartheid system was abolished after nearly 50 years...". She is interrupted by a clip of Mandela delivering his inauguration speech, but continues at the cut, "In this transition period the fixed identities that the Apartheid system tried to impose of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality are now in flux [...] This is a moment of change. A moment which must be seized."

For Hammer, the Out in Africa⁴¹ Film Festival - the centre of operations for the story about regional sexualities that unfolds in her feature length documentary - epitomises a moment seized. Founded in the same year as South Africa's first democratic election, the event created an opportunity for the introduction of explicitly queer cultural texts to a country long subject to sanctions and censorship. In this, I argue here, OiA produced a self-recognition fostered through queer viewing practices that in turn enabled a sense of community distinct from larger national citizenship narratives. I set the belonging imagined by OiA up against the homonormative trajectories of Johannesburg and Cape Town Pride, but hope also to outline its limitations.

The comprehensive programme of the first festival and its heavyweight guest list - besides Hammer, Pratibha Parmar, Isaac Julien and Greta Schiller were in attendance - belies the fact that homosexuality was downplayed in South African cinemas until 1985 (Botha, 2013: n.p). Queerness did not gel with the dominant Apartheid worldview except in rare moments of homophobic

41 The name "Out in Africa" may be in reference to Melanie Chait's 1989 film of the same name, which Martin Botha (2013) describes as the first South African movie to foreground the local gay and lesbian liberation struggle.

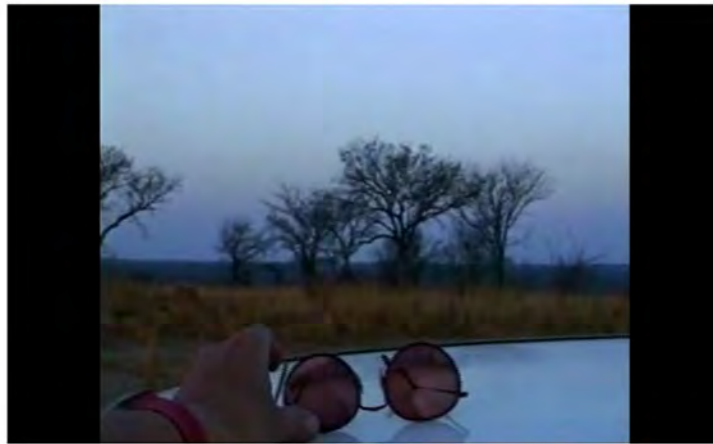


Figure 13: Barbara Hammer's *Out in South Africa*. 1995. Barbara Hammer Productions. Film still.



Figure 14: Out in Africa Film Festival Programme, 30 June- 31 July, 1994

humour⁴² or insinuation (Ibid). Written out of cinema, homosexuality was confined to what D.A. Miller calls "the shadow kingdom of connotation," effectively making sexual non-normativity invisible to cinema goers (1990: 119). Miller argues that such conditions help produce "a homosexuality held definitionally in suspense on no less a question that that of its own existence" (Ibid). Without representation, queerness is at odds with itself, ill-defined and at least partially obscured. If "the direction of our glance can constitute our social world," as Michael Warner reminds us (2002: 89), then when we do not see ourselves, that world cannot materialise.

Given the meagre depictions of homosexuality in local cinemas, the original OiA festival had a great deal of legwork to do in creating a queer representational economy. The festival located itself first and foremost as a space of recognition; as director Nodi Murphy puts it, "not a festival of excellence but of image."⁴³ That is not to say that the films screened were shoddy. Rather, the individual tastes of select audiences and organisers was incorporated into a grander political agenda. Murphy expands on this:

It was very important in the first instance that people could see themselves onscreen. If you are not seen, if you are not heard, you do not exist. That the concerns out there were not necessarily my concerns, my issues, important in my life, didn't matter. It mattered that they were important in other people's lives. There are many other queer discourses, after all.

In founding the festival on the possibility of multiple narratives played out conterminously, Murphy constructs queerness as porous, as open-ended and as a signifier of different subjectivities.

Her sentiment surfaces in the festival's original accompanying documentation. A mostly nude black man sprawls across the programme's cover, while montaged over the landscape of his body an interracial lesbian couple kiss [Figure 14]. The copy reads:

Gay rights may be in the constitution but they're not yet in our lives [...] What we need to do is get people talking. And how better to do this than through movies? Movies introduce ideas and spark off new ones. We believe this festival will give gay men, lesbians and bisexuals a chance to build their self-recognition and self-worth.⁴⁴

The festival positioned itself as a discursive space, and one supposedly encoded with the new regime's non-racialist beliefs. In fact OiA took their allegiance further still, promoting a political engagement with the discourse of queer visibility that could have deeply personal as well as communitarian repercussions. To see your likeness and the likeness of your relationships on screen or on paper is a privilege, and like all visibilities, it is afforded primarily to heterosexuals. As a society we have become very good at telling straight stories.⁴⁵

Dennis Altman (in Peach, 2005: 26) reveals the manner in which communities built around shared pleasure can circumvent heterosexist cultural dominance and, perhaps more importantly, open it to critique. He writes:

Once we start coming together to discuss films, to ask how far they reflect our own lives,

42 Leon Schuster's hidden camera comedy skits are excellent examples. Little changes. In Schuster's 2004 release *Oh Schucks...I'm Gatvol*, an extra appears in the closing credits as "Koffie Moffie," with *moffie* being a derogatory Afrikaans word for a homosexual man.

43 Murphy, N. Interview with the author. Cape Town, South Africa. 22 April 2015.

44 Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Official Programme, 1994: 1.

45 Ken Plummer's *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds* (1995) makes for an interesting development of this thought. Plummer's book, in essence a study of the social organisation of sexual storytelling, holds that intimate citizenship hinges on narrative representation, determined by a community spirit cultivated through the amplification of personal stories. We are what we say and what we see.

experiences and feelings, we have begun to move beyond being passive consumers, to become, in fact, political. For gay politics are not just demonstrations and protests. It is also understanding how far we are restricted and oppressed by images and perceptions imposed on us by a culture industry, in this case, the movies.

In the context of OiA, Altman's words resonate with the ability of cinema to inspire collectivity. Queer cinematic space, as theorist Elizabeth Freeman also suggests, is a "technology of engroupment" because a cinema is a social world capable of nurturing "kinship-like associations" (2008: 297). Notably, Freeman invokes Anderson's imagined communities as a close corollary. Seeing familiar ways of being, doing and relating on screen encourage a queer belonging founded on the comradeship of proximity.

OiA was not the first event of its kind to offer a dedicated space for queer representation and to produce a viewing community. Murphy, then working alongside James Holly at the Cape Town International Festival, had screened a little-known gay Israeli film in 1992. "The cinema was heaving with gay men," she says, "It was fabulous."⁴⁶ Motivated to pursue what she perceived as an unmined market, Murphy sought out a Cape Town-based organisation, the Association of Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians (ABIGAIL), then run by activist and filmmaker Jack Lewis. To raise money for his NGO Lewis had hosted screenings of gay VHS videos he acquired under the counter, so to speak. These attracted a mixed audience. Even rich whites from Camps Bay, Bantry Bay and Clifton were "prepared to roll up to Jazzart [in the central city] and sit on the bloody floor on crates and watch Queer movies on a video projector and stay around for a drink and so on" (in Botha, 2013: n.p.). "It was never advertised," Murphy notes, "It was all word of mouth and underground, but people came from everywhere."

With the support of Lewis, and aided by the R35000 he had succeeded in securing from Dutch humanist organisation HIVOS, OiA was born. According to Murphy,

We knew that there was a Bill of Rights coming. This was '93. We knew that change was going to happen. We wanted to trumpet that before anyone could say we couldn't. We also made the decision that we wouldn't be in back rooms anymore. We would be as out and as public as we possible could be.

The promise of constitutional protection seemed to guarantee safe entry into public space. It enticed queer cinema out of the closet and into the mall. Quite literally, in fact. OiA was the first queer-centric film festival in Africa to be hosted by a mainstream distribution chain - Ster Kinekor at Monte Casino Mall.

Like *Pride*, OiA is a "subversive spatial act." It nominates public space (temporarily but annually) as gay and lesbian and thus resists the accepted differentiation between private and public life. Anchoring the "private" realm of sexuality to the mall breaks through the conventions of heteronormativity, interfering with the hegemony of heterosexual social relations that describe a range of environments from housing and workplaces to shopping centres and the street (Bell and Valentine, 1995: 7). Murphy and Lewis made queer culture not just accessible but safe to consume. "If we could not concentrate a publically accessible culture somewhere, we would always be outnumbered or overwhelmed," write Warner and Berlant of queer culture-building (2002: 204), implying that it is through the creation of such dedicated spaces that community can coalesce *despite* national heteronormativity.

Murphy's description of the festival's debut is worth quoting at length, as evidence of both this spirit of community and the recognition it enables:

That first night it was very hard to start any movie on time. The queers were all connecting- "long time no seeing" everywhere. It was like a big party, a meet and greet [...] We were in this glossy dark corridor with lots of mirrors and these brass palm trees. We had three cinemas to ourselves and we ran a little bar so that there was a social space. People just didn't arrive for the film and leave, they hung around, they connected [...] It was very beautiful.

A distinct public is brought into being, with its own social system and reception practices, around the centrifugal force of cinema. Shared sexuality - or the experience of a shared sexuality reflected on screen, or even merely the sharing of a space in which sexuality is possible - spans all other divides in Murphy's memory. "Right from the beginning we had taxis arriving from the township [...] The queens were there. The butch dykes were there. We were there in our fabulous pantheon," she recalls. So potent is this quasi-utopian memory that it infuses even her description of space with a camp sensibility. The glossy walls and brass palms adhere to Sontag's (1966) conception of camp, as a way of seeing the world that is also a distinct aesthetic phenomenon.

OiA also represents a utopian space - or rather a Heterotopia⁴⁷ - in the sense of opportunity it offered for queer artists as well as queer audiences. Filmmaker Pratibha Parmar, whose 1991 film *Khush* screened at OiA, describes the crucial role played by queer film festivals internationally (in Peach, 2005: 74): "Queer festivals are essential for many filmmakers, especially lesbians and people of colour, because it's often the only place we can get our work screened and affirmed." Her mention of people of colour is interesting, in that it allows Parmar to position these film festivals as welcoming spaces for more than just sexuality. Ostensibly they contribute to opening the gates of representation wider still.

A public performance of non-standard relationality, in the queering of space it entails, is not always well received. Guests at the first OiA were met by a considerable mixed Christian/Islamic protest. "I just stared," says Murphy. "They were holding placards [...] and the posters said things like - this is my favourite ever - 'Save the penguins from disaster, save our children from homosexuals.' There'd been an oil-slick in Table Bay. I'd never been likened to an oil slick before." Other protestors carried signs reading "Homosexuality is UnAfrican," "Barbara Hammer go home," and an equation empirically proving that "Two men/Two women = AIDS." It was the first of several protests to plague the event, worsening the following year in indictments of the "Positive Visions" HIV awareness festival also organised by the OiA team.

These protestors arguably represent an effort to reinstate heterosexist discourse in a space made unstable by a legibly queer presence. Though brimming with religious moralisms, their placards follow a consistent formula, pathologising homosexuality (an oil slick, HIV infection), presenting it as a danger to family life ("Save our children") and construing it as non-indigenous ("Un-African"; "Go home"). In their turn, these claims summon their opposite, a once-again invisible heterosexuality that is imagined as healthy, family and future oriented and national. A heterosexuality that, unlike the audience and filmmakers of OiA, belongs in public space. "Heterosexing of space is a performative act naturalised through repetition and destabilised by the mere presence of invisibilised sexualities," Bell and Valentine observe (1995: 18). Along similar lines, "belonging is a hegemonic construction which only becomes visible when threatened" (van Zyl, 2005: 225).

Public space determines who can inhabit it. The degree to which it is policed, here by religion but equally by state apparatuses or the law, designates it as a site of limited belonging: a place you

⁴⁶ Murphy, N. Interview with the author. Cape Town, South Africa. 22 April 2015.

⁴⁷ Foucault (1986) draws a distinction between "heterotopias", or "other" spaces, and utopias, or imagined and aspirational spaces. In their interface with (but distinction from) the realm of social life, heterotopias offer momentary respite from the everyday, but for Foucault these spaces are also politically charged, historically burdened and privileged.

can only be seen to be a certain way. "Space is a pressing matter, and it matters which bodies press against it," Elspeth Probyn submits (in Bell and Valentine, 1995: 18). As late as 2009, OiA was subject to a two-day homophobic blitz in which 700 posters featuring illustrations of a (very chaste) same-sex kiss were removed along main roads from the central suburb of Seapoint to distant Muizenberg [Figure 15].

When she conducted a radio interview about the incident, several callers justified the removal of these images to Murphy on the grounds that "My child is going to see that poster." Her response the following year was to theme OiA "Naked Shrieking Terror" [Figure 16]. "Our art work this year," the team writes in the programme for the 2010 event, "plays on the irrational fear 'they' have of 'us.'" The text continues by relaying a long-running legal battle with the Film Publications board around the banning of the movie *XXY*, a case the festival eventually won. "Their plan is to draft a stricter Film and Publications Act. You may vote, you may have children, own a gun, but they will decide what you may see or read." Framed very directly in that formula are those limits of citizenship that lie in representation. "They", presumably signifying the entirety of heteronormative culture, are excluded from the chatty second person interpellation of the document's readership. "You" are not "they," reader, and they know it.

In a sense, the critique of the "normalised landscape" of heterosexual life (Van Zyl, 2009: 371) levelled by OiA is an antagonistic stance. It is perhaps more challenging than the assertion of presence broadcast by Pride events, in that it offers not only a safe space to be seen as queer but a space to see queerly: to practice queer spectatorship and queer consumption and attain the selfhood that depends upon both. In Foucault's idiom this represents a more radical reversal of homophobic national discourse than any visibility project calling for recognition. It is not enough to conceive of queerness as moral, to seek empowerment in social and legal protections or to earn a shift from margin to centre if the centre retains its gravity. Foucault would have us believe that the aim of an oppositional politics, no matter what form they take, is not liberation. It is resistance.

Lots of people tackled the protestors in 1994, according to Murphy. "The queers were brave in the face of this. They were excited by the celebration and they were irritated by the intrusion." To her, this courage in the face of homophobia, in 1994 and again in 2009, derives from assumed membership in a group deserving of protections, making it a direct response to induction into rights discourse. "We knew we had rights. We knew they were coming. We knew there was a new Constitution on its way. You couldn't touch us. We would take you to court," Murphy says.

Homonationalism, as Jasbir Puar (2007) conceives it, is the symbolic inclusion of certain gays and lesbians in the nation. Among its symptoms are the ascendancy of whiteness and the absorption of previously-excluded queer bodies into a national life that remains largely unchanged by their entry. For Puar an appeal to rights - "We will take you to court" - may well signify a politically aware, legally protected queer citizenry, but it also facilitates the production of an "acceptable" kind of queer citizen; one who invests in the power of the state, an essentially nationalist fantasy. Those who are subject to intersecting oppressions often find themselves beyond the state's normative directives (the One in Nine Campaign, for example, testifies to the failure of a police system to protect black women) and cannot depend on a benevolent nation. I am not criticising the desire to embrace recently-allocated rights or to wield them as a shield. I fully understand that impulse because as white and queer, I am reasonably safe in the knowledge that my rights are, and have historically been, protected. But assimilation into citizenship hinges on identitarian categories beyond sexuality, and it is important to remain attentive to the desire of queer events like OiA to turn to the (inevitably imperfect) technologies of an "accepting" state.



Figure 15: Out in Africa poster. 2009. Designed by Toby Twoshoes



Figure 16: "Naked Shrieking Terror". 2010. Out in Africa programme.

To OiA's credit the event does have a track record of attempting to redress racial divisions in the queer community by catering to multiple audiences simultaneously, with arguably more effective results than some of South Africa's Prides. "One of the most important functions of OiA was that it was a multi-cultural space from the very beginning," according to Murphy. "The people who worked on the festival were black, white, coloured. We even had heterosexuals working for us. We were inclusive!" In efforts to create festivals in smaller queer enclaves and thereby meet the representational needs of communities with fewer cultural resources, OiA outposts in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Durban were expanded to include film festivals in 18 rural towns. Marian Nel and Janet Shapiro identify the goals of this cinematic constellation in a publication that accompanied the 2008 Mafikeng OiA: "[These events] bring gays and lesbians together in solidarity and help to strengthen embryonic organisations. They also provide platforms for gay visibility in often hostile environments" (2009: 5).

Across a national cultural landscape, OiA addressed both the lack of queer screen presence and the invisibility of a queer viewing public. Over two decades, the festival was afforded (nominal) entry into mainstream discourse. Its advertising appeared alongside main roads, its films were screened in malls and its audiences were cultivated nation-wide. This is no longer the case, however. Funding constraints and poor attendance led to the festival's closure in 2014. At least in part, changes in attendance rates could be attributed to an increase in access to representation – personally, Murphy holds bootleg copies of Euro-American queer films responsible – or to a perceived decrease in need on the part of South Africa's queer public. Murphy clarifies this second point:

The rest of Africa is seen as deeply homophobic. There are things to be done there. Funders would rather channel their money [into seemingly homophobic nations], forgetting of course that [South Africa] is still deeply homophobic. I don't think the gay and lesbian community are tackling that homophobia, and they should be. The constitution has made it a little bit amorphous. It rises up here and there, then people realise that they can't actually make homophobic statements anymore but they still feel that way. Homophobia has just been driven underground.

She adds, "We had a constitution ahead of our movement." In other words, South Africa's revolutionary sexual orientation clause and ethos of tolerance anticipated a social reform that has yet to be fully realised. Beneath that observation lies a complex disavowal of the place of queer citizenship, and its patterns of inclusion and exclusion, in the new South Africa. Many queer national subjects remain at the margins, Murphy infers, but their marginality is now veiled in layers of progressive political rhetoric.

2.3. Seeing you, seeing me: The Mother City Queer Project and the consumer-citizen

In its itinerant spatiality, the nomadic annual Mother City Queer Project (MCQP) shares little common ground with OiA, so firmly located is the latter in conventionally public space acclimatised as queer for the duration of the event. It does, however, have a common historic moment. MCQP was founded in 1994, alongside the film festival and the new South Africa. Where Pride took shape around a political agenda aimed at reformation and OiA cleaved to a more intimate desire for representation and community, MCQP operated as initially distinct from both agendas.

"We knew we wanted to make something,"⁴⁸ cofounder Andre Vorster recalls in a potted history of the event's origins. He had been diagnosed with HIV in 1994, immediately after the death of his then-boyfriend from AIDS-related pneumonia and two weeks before the national elections. The diagnosis was speculative and, it turns out, inaccurate; the ELIZA test had yet to reach South Africa's shores and allow for greater diagnostic rigour. Vorster describes the experience,

I was spectacularly ill. [Cape Town-based artist] Beezy Bailey arrived with a bunch of flowers and said 'This is your goodbye, it's probably good that you'll lose a bit of weight before you die.' We'd lost so many people that it became sort of politically incorrect. This was it. I had lost so many friends. It was like the sinking Titanic, really. So we thought, let's just have a fucking party. I'm going to go down with a bang. In style.

Although it functioned on a personal level as a eulogy for his boyfriend and an homage to Vorster, the first MCQP, then titled "The Locker Room Project",⁴⁹ retained a political conscience. "We called ourselves the Politicised Party Princesses of the Peninsula," says Vorster, referring to himself and cofounder Andrew Putter. An "instructional" document released in November 1994 [Figure 17] locates the party in South Africa's changing political terrain, as a model for, and exercise of, the new freedoms at stake:

Now is the time to celebrate! We are living in extraordinary times here at the top of Africa. For the first time it's possible to express and enjoy our differences without apology or fear. Our new freedom is underwritten by the most open and tolerant (interim!) constitution in the world [...] Now it's our turn.⁵⁰

If the order of the day at Pride was transformation, and at OiA, representation, MCQP's was celebration. Phillip Harrison calls the event a "celebratory extravaganza" that represented a coming out, of sorts, for queer club culture (2005: 42). This framing, I suggest in this section, relies on the performance of a situational, hyperbolic queerness geared not towards a national public, or at least not entirely, but toward one another. I argue that MCQP is the creation of community through excessive visibility enacted in a space intended to support its weight. Once again I maintain that this visibility is conditional and furthermore, costly.

The party was first imagined as a kind of extended art happening with attendees as the works on display. "It was an exhibition," says Vorster, and an exhibition requires exhibits (and exhibitionism?). Participants straddled the line between viewer and viewed, at once soliciting and returning the gaze. This dual positioning was made apparent from the beginning in a ritual that continues in today's version of the event. Partygoers perform their entry by bowing and waving to the crowd as if it were composed of fans amassed to greet them.

Fears of elitism rooted in the party's ties to Cape Town's art community led organisers to seek an audience superficially representative of the city's diverse LGBTIQ population. "Everyone lived in their own little bubble," says Vorster, describing the largely unchanged legacy of an Apartheid space economy that broke Cape Town into micro-communities. Rather than cater to a homogenous market, the decision was made to appeal to smaller groups on a more personal and specific basis. Vorster headed up an effort to produce short-run advertising campaigns distributed by hand.

48 Vorster, A. Interview with the author. 14 March 2015.

49 The name suggests the event's ties to artist Andrew Putter's earlier efforts to host an exhibition of homoerotic sports images in the cricket showers at the University of Cape Town. Though the exhibition never took place, many of the images were shown as part of the Locker Room Project in the form of party décor.

50 Andre Vorster and Andrew Putter, "Why a Queer event in Cape Town?". The Locker Room Project Instructional Pamphlet. [Unpublished] Distributed in Cape Town and surrounds, December 1994.



Figure 17: "The Locker Room Instructional Pamphlet". 1994. Andre Vorster's private collection.

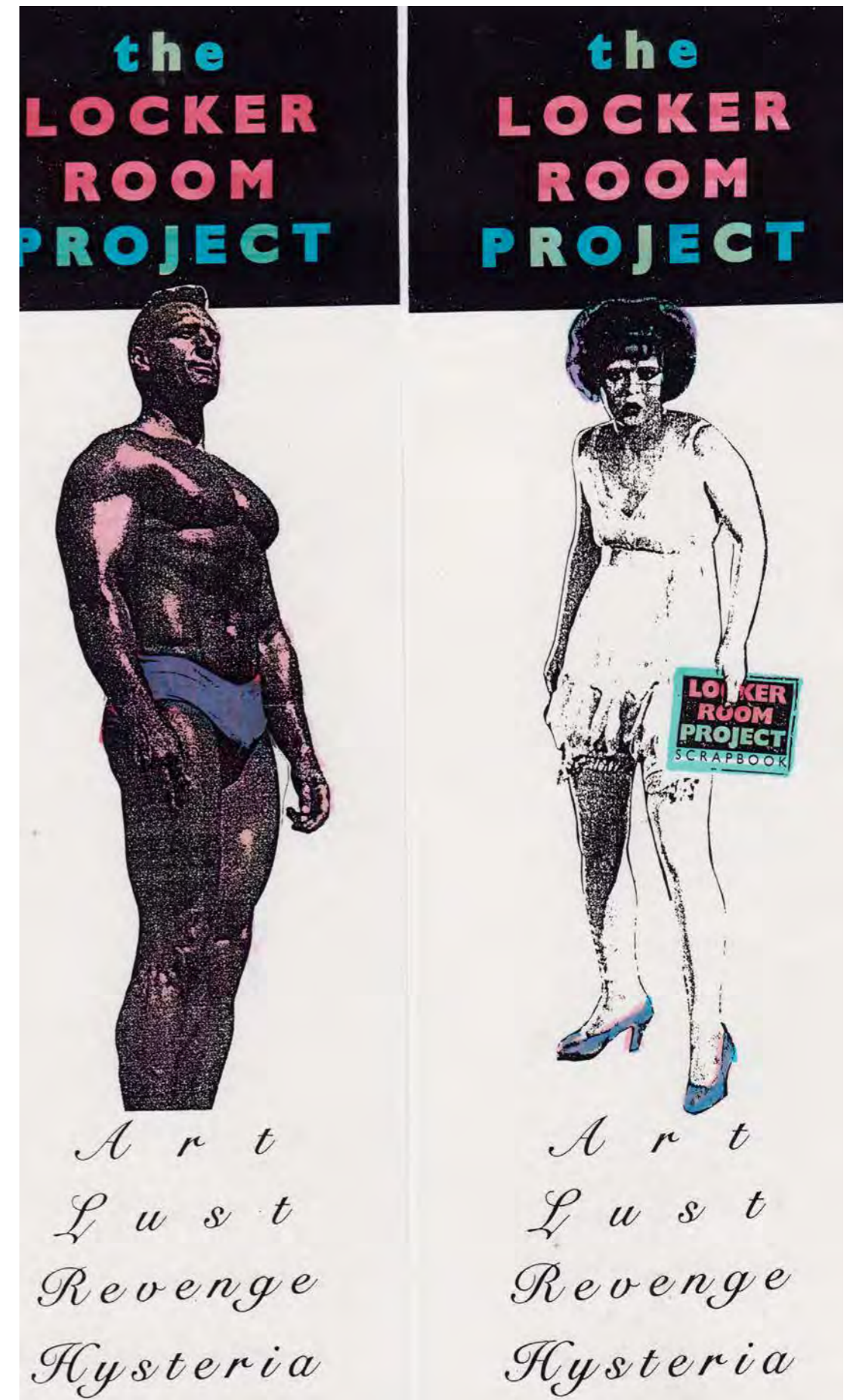


Figure 18a, left: Promotional pamphlet for MCQP intended for the "Muscle Mary" tribe. 1994. Vorster's private collection.

Figure 18b, right: Promotional pamphlet intended for the "Angry Lesbians". 1994. Vorster's private collection.

We broke the whole city down into probably like a hundred completely different queer tribes. Sometimes there was one person in a tribe, sometimes there were 500. We had to identify where they went and what music they listened to. That was how we could catch a different crowd [...]. For the lesbians there were flyers, for the moffies there were flyers, for the coloured hairdresser moffies there was a flyer [...] There wasn't just one poster.

Interestingly, Vorster distinguishes between moffies – gay men – and “coloured hairdresser moffies.” In this bracketing of markets, race underpins sexuality so profoundly that it requires an overhaul of consumerist emphasis. While these two groups may share a sexual preference, they are otherwise distinct. The pamphlets produced for Cape Town’s “queer tribes” thus document the social fissures that defined the city space of the time, at least as Vorster and Putter perceived them.

A pamphlet produced for the “Muscle Mary” tribe⁵¹ shows a photocopied Charles Atlas in ¾ view, his muscles no-less pronounced in the low-grade reproduction [Figure 18a]. Ink has been applied by hand to elements of the image, calling attention to the figure’s underwear. Another flyer, this time intended for the “Angry Lesbians”,⁵² depicts a scowling woman with legs akimbo [Figure 18b]. Both are accompanied by the words “Art, Lust, Revenge, Hysteria.” As templates of gay “tribal” identity, these figures effectively interpellate the viewer. So focussed is their target market and so specific their invitation, they might even be said to dictate the very subjectivities they invoke. That is, to generate a notion of what belonging to a queer tribe entails by offering a model subject position. Both figures are white.

With that in mind it is important to acknowledge that MCQP was, and remains, a white-dominated party. Vorster recognises this racial imbalance. “We aspired to as much racial diversity as we could at the time,” he says. “Looking back, if we had addressed the fact that we’d done it in post-apartheid South Africa, which we had, we should have addressed the racial issue more then. That should have been our focus.” He attributes his difficulty to the fact that the gay and lesbian community was cleanly divided along race and class lines. Vorster, as a white gay man based in and around the central city, felt unsure how to cross those divides. “Gay Cape Town,” writes Natalie Oswin, quoting Glen Elder, “is a segregated space of social exclusion” (2005: 84). For all its aspirations to community it can be parochial, and is guilty of meeting the needs of some residents over others. MCQP is no exception.

In a way, the first events played with – even pandered to – the factionalism of the city. MCQP is a costume party. The costumes it inspires function in much the same way as a uniform (or, in the case of “The Locker Room” which was themed around sports culture, a kit) to present a visually unified group. This forges a sense of belonging, making “teams” out of individuals. “[Dressing up] encouraged people to try and find other people [...] To add them to your team. That’s what made the event start growing,” Vorster says. “There were even big teams of men who were married [to women] leaving their poor wives at home and picking up screaming queens at the bar.” So effective was this temporary community that it distanced participants from the straight world. “You could dress up and come out,” says Vorster. For those for whom this distance from the heterosexual world was insufficient, the costumes could be accessorised with a mask.

Much like the original Johannesburg Pride committee, Vorster and Putter included an implicit “paper bags optional” clause in their publicity materials. “We hinted [...] that if you weren’t comfortable [being photographed], just put a brown paper bag over your head and show off your body instead.”

51 A subgroup of gay men Vorster describes as distinguished by a muscular physique.

52 The “aggressive lesbian,” notes Richard Dyer (1993), is a mainstream stereotype of a gender non-conforming woman understood to be dangerous or threatening to heterosexual society. She is a site of straight, and male, anxiety.



Figure 19: Organiser Andrew Putter enters “The Locker Room” via an impromptu stage. MCQP, 1994. Photo credit to Andre Vorster.



Figure 20: Andre Vorster and Andrew Putter in full costume on the cover of the Arts section of the *Weekend Argus*, December 1995. Photo credit to Jackie Meiring.



Figure 21: “Royal Navy” promotional posters. MCQP, 2014. Distributed in Cape Town and surrounds.

Although the nature of visibility was flexible, something must be revealed. According to Vorster, "People would phone in and say, 'When does the show start?' and we'd say, when you arrive. You are the show. You arrive onto a stage and you present yourselves. Everyone is here to look at you...". One entered "The Locker Room" at the River Club in Observatory by means of a brightly-lit pseudo-stage, setting up a performative, interactive queer viewing experience [Figure 19]. Self-identification at MCQP is linked to the identifications and performances of others, and to a queer/ed space and time inhabited together. Mirzoeff pins down this type of relationship as intersubjective: "I see myself because somebody sees me" (1999: 164).

The impact of MCQP extended beyond the walls of the River Club, reverberating through a still larger national public. A 1995 issue of the *Cape Argus* enthuses that the party was nothing but "unbridled, celebratory gay abandon," noting that "[e]veryone [...] had gone to great lengths to dress as imaginatively as possible" (Garratt, 1995). The *Mail and Guardian* describes "The Secret Garden," the 1996 MCQP, as an opportunity to "throw discretion to the wind," urging the queer and the curious to attend (Staff reporter, 1995).

By garnering mainstream media attention MCQP presented images of unapologetic queer and gender transgression to South Africa. These even graced the cover of national newspapers [Figure 20]. "We had front pages of every *Sunday Times*, *Cape Times*, *the Argus*, every year for five years in a row [...] We couldn't afford advertising so we had to make news. [...] The media in Cape Town were very supportive - they thought this was a great thing. It was photogenic, colourful, friendly," recalls Vorster. "Friendly" is a curious choice of word. It signifies a leisure event that a reading public might embrace as non-threatening. And - as the snowballing media attention also demonstrates - the word designates a kind of sanitisation, ensuring a queerness enough in sync with existing norms as to be considered acceptable. "We're not just a little moffie party once a year, we're a big organisation," says an MCQP board member by 2003 (in Oswin, 2005).

And they were. The event was under the joint coordination of Andre Vorster and Andrew Putter until 1996, when Putter left to pursue other projects. Vorster continued as full-time chair until 2005 when he sold the brand name. Its current owners have grown the party to some 10000-odd attendees, many of whom fly in from outside South Africa. Much like marketing to local communities with disposable income, marketing to queer tourists, as Katlego Disemelo (2014) shows, makes of visibility a commodity reserved for a few. If the party's evolution is any indication, the queer citizen is ever-more a consumer citizen, accommodated within a national sphere only inasmuch as he or she does not disturb its ongoing social, economic and discursive inequalities. Today MCQP bears little resemblance to its grungy, low-budget origins. Gone are the regional "queer tribes" and personalised advertising campaigns, with the event now promiscuously marketed via mass produced posters to an affluent white middle-class audience. The 2014 theme "Royal Navy" saw the streets of central Cape Town overshadowed by either a conventionally handsome white man in a crop top or a pretty white woman, her head tilted coquettishly to one side [Figure 21]. Give me a low-res angry lesbian any day.

The party retains its presence in the press, cropping up annually in everything from mainstream newspapers to tabloids like *The Daily Voice*. In this, I would argue, MCQP has covered some ground in enabling queer visibility, or at least carved out a seeable space for it. The elaborate costumes still disseminate across a larger national body, a process now facilitated by social media. However, the long life of these representations might be a consequence of the increased heterosexuality of the event. "The straight people came and they came," says Vorster. In 2014, the current owners approached him in an attempt to appeal to a queer market once more. "They said it's become too straight," he recalls,

If it were me, I'd market it directly back to the queer community [...] You don't let the straight people be a 70-80% majority. It starts to be that there are too many straight men coming in and a man pinches their bum and then if they turn on him, there are far many more straight men in the circle and the moffie is trapped. The numbers have to be so we [the queers] are in a majority, and we're safe.

The Mother City Queer Project's induction into normative culture evidences the increased visibility of a queer scene, but the queerness of that scene is up for debate. Considered in context, the event stands for the co-option of a seemingly transgressive politics into neoliberal orthodoxy. Its "gay-friendly" tone conforms to cosmopolitan consumption patterns, and whatever radicalism once set it in motion is dead or dormant.

2.4 On what remains invisible and what comes afterward

In a message of support to the 2002 Johannesburg Pride committee, former Minister of the Presidency Essop Pahad (in de Waal and Manion, 2006: 143) describes national Pride events as "a matter of pride and pleasure" that underline the values and attitudes of the new South Africa. "Gone are the brown paper bags that some people wore so they would not be recognised. They've been replaced by floats defiantly blaring out music [...]," says journalist Julia Beffon. "It's a sign of the progress that we've made" (Ibid, 133).

Like visibility, progress is relative. Although Out in Africa attempted to circulate a local queer representational economy, the festival has closed its doors. Both mainstream Pride events and the Mother City Queer Project have been accused of making visible only white, middle-class queerness. In the case of MCQP, that queerness is also progressively less than queer. And as Rosemary Hennessy puts it, "redressing gay invisibility by promoting images of a seamlessly middle-class gay consumer or by inviting us to see queer identities only in terms of style, textuality, or performative play helps produce imaginary gay/queer subjects that keep invisible the divisions of wealth and labour that these images and knowledges depend on" (1994: 69). The more permissive the state becomes to a visible queer presence that leaves inequalities intact, the more ill-conforming or historically marginalised bodies are erased in a replication of normative power relations.

In a letter to the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper, academic Nyx McLean questioned the 2015 Cape Town Pride theme, "Return to the Rainbow." "We're returning to the rainbow?" McLean asks, "Whose rainbow is this?" (2015a). They follow this up with another article assessing 2016's Colourblind theme, ending on a fervent call to arms: "We need to develop a Pride that speaks to the Global South and to our continent, and that is truly representative and inclusive. We need to bring the politics back to Pride and remember that we belong to each other" (2015b).

Let me conclude this section by looking more optimistically to the future, then. While the projects of OiA and MCQP remain suspended and eroded respectively, splinter groups have embarked on the uphill battle of bringing politics back to Pride. Among them, the Johannesburg People's Pride and more recently Cape Town's Alternative Inclusive Pride have successfully mobilised queer communities in majority black, economically disadvantaged areas of urban South Africa. With limited financial backing and little or no commercial agenda, it is to these spaces we must now look for McLean's challenge to both heteronormative and homonormative imaginaries. If a radically inclusive, dynamic and sustainable visibility can play out in a national arena, it is beyond institutionalised queer culture that we will find it.

Chapter 3 _Precarious Living: Suffering and the Practice of Citizenship

Somewhere, sometime, something was lost, but no story can be told about it; no memory can retrieve it; a fractured horizon looms in which to make one's way as a spectral agency, one for whom a full 'recovery' is impossible, one for whom the irrecoverable becomes, paradoxically, the condition of a new political agency.

Judith Butler, 'Afterword' in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (2003: 467)

Failure is not an option. I hear my father's words stretching over the years, painted over time like the line in the centre of the road [...] "Do not shame me, Nicholas. Do not ever shame me" [...] Nobody ever fails in our family.

André Carl van der Merwe, *Moffie* (2011: 125)

In André Carl van der Merwe's novel *Moffie*, the protagonist Nicholas relays a life history punctuated with incidents of violence, fear and failure. At school he is a poor student and to his father at home he is "a moffie": "I mean he's a sissy not a homo", his father, in denial, is quick to correct himself (2011: 20). Nicholas's compulsory military service during the Border War amplifies his unhappiness. Although he survives a brutal training regime and finds allies among his peers, he struggles to live up to the heavily regulated standards of masculinity deemed the proper expression of Apartheid South Africa's military power. His ever-present sexuality plagues him, initially "a secret too large to bear, too devastating to share and too dreadful not to" (2011: 115).

For much of *Moffie*, homosexuality is parsed as devastating and dreadful not just for the consequences it may inspire but in and of itself. In experiencing his sexuality in this way - as inevitably entailing a kind of suffering - Nicholas is not alone. The history of queer cultural representation, Heather Love suggests, is "littered with the corpses of sexual and gender deviants," while survivors frequently outlast the dead in a fashion that "makes death seem attractive" (2007: 1). So prominently does suffering feature in queer life narratives that it might be characterised as the dominant mode by which those narratives enter discourse. From Radclyffe Hall's (1928) "tragical problem of sexual inversion" in *The Well of Loneliness*⁵³ through "the spectacle of suffering and death" (Bersani, 1987: 198) that was (and is) the AIDS epidemic to Hollywood's periodical affirmation⁵⁴ of the figure of the doomed deviant, the suffering of sexual and gender dissidents has become programmatic. Hitting the nail on the head or perhaps securing it in the coffin, theorist Sara Ahmed quotes playwright Matt Crowley in her book *The Promise of Happiness*: "Show me a happy homosexual and I'll show you a gay corpse" (2010: 94). Telling stories of queer unhappiness matters, she concludes.

So far much of this document has concerned itself with unhappy queers of all stripes. In the previous two chapters I considered the implications of sexuality in the experience of South African

⁵³ Lisa Walker (in Ahmed, 2010: 89) notes not without irony that "the Well's status as the lesbian novel is inseparable from its reputation as the most depressing lesbian novel ever written."

⁵⁴ In their introduction to *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies*, Molly McGarry and George Haggerty characterise mainstream culture's appetite for "dead queers who might have lived otherwise" as "voracious" (2015: 4).

citizenship, acknowledging the tense historical relationship between queer sexual subject and state and mapping the manner in which sexual difference has been uneasily imagined in relation to larger national discourses. The South African sexual citizen, I argue, remains a heterosexual citizen, dutifully privatised, familial and reproductive. I also attempted to demonstrate that, when non-normative sexual identities and practices become visible in the public sphere, they risk assimilation into "acceptable" modes of representation that provide access to the securities of state-sanctioned national membership. To be acceptable is to come to see yourself in terms not your own - to hazard sacrificing agency and self-determination on the altar of respectability. And acceptability, as Bell and Binnie point out (2000: 3), demands "a modality of sexual citizenship that is [...] de-radicalised, de-eroticized and confined in all senses of the word: kept in place, policed, limited." Accordingly, one-time sexual outlaws have been outnumbered, become self-disciplining or disappeared entirely, even as other communities still suffer the repercussions of institutionalised homophobia.

Cumulatively this line of argument offers a bleak portrait of South African sexual citizenship, in which the consequences and rewards of public visibility and political viability are not equally distributed. In Chapter 3 I take this model of queer (un)belonging in a slightly different direction, arguing that suffering and its affects might present a potent, even radical, political mode. Drawing on the work of theorists with a vested interest in the anti-communitarian and affective dimensions of queer life, among them Judith Butler, Lauren Berlant, Lee Edelman, Kylie Thomas and Sara Ahmed, I ask what it means to marshal a politics of unhappiness in South Africa.

For me this argument has its origin in February 2015, when I attended a public debate entitled "Same-sex love in Africa." The panel was organised by the African Arts Institute (AFAI) and chaired by AFAI's executive director, Mike van Graan. The four guest speakers included activist and academic Zethu Matebeni, cultural commentator and legal theorist Pierre de Vos, performance artist Mamela Nyamza and Imam Ismail Ngqoyiyana from the Gugulethu Islamic community. The first three panellists, self-identified members of the queer community, attracted positive responses from an audience largely sympathetic to their respective standpoints. When the Imam spoke, however, he posed homosexuality as unAfrican, insinuating that he understood the impulse to stone "perverts" to death.⁵⁵

In an atmosphere of escalating hostility, hands were raised to challenge his beliefs on various grounds. A supporter of the Imam accused the audience of victimising him. In response, someone seated behind me rose to her feet and said (I am quoting from memory), "When we disagree with you, you feel disrespected. When you disagree with us, we are raped and murdered. Who is the victim?" The room was momentarily silent.

In this chapter I want to think about how a strategic intervention can throw the balance of power. I want to think about what it means to weaponise weakness, and particularly what it might mean to grant this newly dangerous quality a national dimension and afford it the status of a claim to justice. Before I do so, a caveat. In intimating that unhappiness and suffering might be generative forces for broader social and political change, I intend to tread carefully. The desire to frame a range of human experiences as subversive - an increasingly common strategy in the overlap between queer and cultural studies - can too easily mask the fact that those experiences impact individuals. They are real, they have consequences and they can devastate. Bearing this in mind I intentionally place emphasis on the multiple ways in which suffering has been utilised *strategically* by and against non-normative sexual subjects, rather than its involuntarily experience.

⁵⁵ In a blog post entitled "Those intolerant of bigotry do not invite bigots to speak" (2015: n.p), Pierre de Vos details the events of that evening, holding AFAI responsible for providing a platform for bigotry. Mike van Graan's response (2015: n.p), also published on Vos's blog, argues that refusing to engage an opposing argument about gay rights is narrow-minded, and akin to allowing such views to go unchecked.

3.1 Beyond intractability: Belonging and the citizen-victim

By way of an introduction to the subject of this chapter, this section briefly evaluates appearances of the “injured queer” trope in advocacy media. My goal is not to demonstrate the prevalence of narratives of victimhood in representations of the LGBTIQ community – a citation or statistic would suffice in that regard – but to illustrate the ways in which victimhood is figured and legitimated differently in relation to queer and straight lives. To this end I specifically consider national educational campaigns that take rape as their primary focus. Such campaigns interest me because they stage an intimate conversation between the imagined and embodied experience of suffering, and indeed, the social and political understanding of victimhood, through engineered contact with a national community.

In 2014 the South African Department of Justice mounted the first national gay rights awareness campaign on the African continent. Heralded as “historic” (DeBarros, 2014: n.p), the campaign saw the development of a task team intended to fast-track LGBTIQ cases through the criminal justice system and the publication of an accompanying educational pamphlet of frequently asked questions⁵⁶ about sexuality and gender identity. The campaign most decisively entered public consciousness via a Public Service Announcement (PSA) airing on national broadcasting networks.

While undoubtedly well intended, this PSA adopts a problematic script for South African queer life that I want to unpack in detail. The advertisement opens with a couple walking hand in hand, seemingly at ease despite hostile glances from passers-by. An abrupt cut to a bedroom scene shows these nameless women during a brief moment of intimacy. “You look dashing, my love,” one says to her partner who admires herself in the mirror [Figure 22]. Their happiness is short-lived. Within moments, that same woman is portrayed running from attackers in a darkened bus station. There is no segue. She is swiftly overcome and (although this is only implied off-frame) raped.⁵⁷ The remaining minute of airtime is devoted to the aftermath of that rape. The shame of the victim is emphasised, and her community’s support and an eventual prosecution signify landmark victories on the road to physical and emotional healing.

The message is optimistic – the advert concludes with the Honorable Jeff Radebe, Minister of Justice, announcing that “We are all equal before the law” – but the modality of its optimism is dubious. Belonging, that “dimension of citizenship that resonates with the emotional” (Mkhize et al, 2010: 7), is experienced as the result of injury. Before the rape people stare in the streets. In its aftermath, the community (here a kind of stand-in for the broader national community hailed by Radebe) gathers in the courtroom to support the victim [Figure 23]. Eventually public and legal confirmation of citizenship is granted as a response to gross alienation from basic human rights. That sequence of events skirts a more dangerous assumption about the experience of power at the meeting place of national and sexual identity – that those denied legitimacy in the past may find it in the future through victimhood and recovery, and thus that belonging is a reward, not a right.

⁵⁶ These range from the definitional – “What is meant by the term ‘bisexual?’” – to the broadly cultural – “Is it true that being gay or lesbian is ‘unAfrican’ or a Western import?” – to the astonishingly specific, “Are homosexual people perverts who watch pornography and sexually abuse children?” (Department of Justice, 2014, available <http://www.justice.gov.za/vg/lgbti-faq.html>, 7 July 2015).

⁵⁷ The homophobic victimisation of lesbian women through sexual assault is termed *corrective* or *curative rape*, taking its name from the false conviction that forced heterosexual sex will ‘cure’ lesbianism and convert the victim to heterosexuality (ActionAid, 2009: n.p). The term *curative rape* has become synonymous with the “poor” black lesbian experience in townships (Matebeni, 2013: 345), because this community is disproportionately affected by the crime. As Matebeni goes on to note, a lexicon of rape that includes the words “curative” and “corrective” holds that there is something to fix, and grants the perpetrator an elevated status as “curer.” I use the term only when no alternative presents itself.



Figure 22: “You look dashing, my love”. 2014. Department of Justice Public Service Announcement. Advertisement still.



Figure 23: The community gathers in support. 2014. Department of Justice Public Service Announcement. Advertisement still.

It would be impossible to engage this particular PSA without noting that the sexuality of the couple, and their status as placeholders for a queer community, is inseparable from their race, their gender and their perceived economic status. These are black lesbians, a vulnerable minority who may face the quadruple threat of homophobia, racism, sexism and economic disadvantage, and the pivotal plot-point of their depicted story is a rape. Zethu Matebeni (2013: 344) points to the reductive assumptions embedded in this trope: "This victim narrative [...] is a problematic, limited view of how we as black lesbians experience the fullness of our lives." Although the PSA ostensibly highlights sexual equality, it does so via the expression of (fictionalised) violence toward black lesbians.

It is also the butch-presenting⁵⁸ woman, not her more conventionally feminine partner, who faces punishment for her legible queerness. Violence is dished out in proportionate response to visible sexual difference, if only in order to communicate the specificity of the crime. This is a hate crime⁵⁹ so it takes as its object someone the audience might recognise as an object of hate. The gayer you look (an identification compounded by blackness and femaleness and class), the more you risk hurt, and the more your subsequent survival becomes a product of not just your injury but your identity.

Outside of an explicitly political agenda, the "injured queer" plotline has found considerable traction on mainstream television.⁶⁰ The soap operas *Society* and *Isidingo* prominently featured queer rape-and-recovery stories, while popular educational "sex-drama" *Intersextions*, co-funded by Johns Hopkins Health Education in South Africa (JHHESA) and state broadcaster the South African Broadcasting Commission (SABC), has corrective rape as the impetus of its only lesbian-centric narrative to date (Mokati, 2013: n.p).

For the most part *Intersextions* revolves around the behavioural prevention of HIV infection in heterosexual romantic love. The conceit of the show is that each episode asks the question "Do you know who your lover's previous lovers are?" to promote sexual literacy. Episode 8 of Season 2 follows butch Lorraine (Lerato Mvelase) who is gang-raped by acquaintances after her girlfriend rejects their advances in a bar [Figure 24]. Unlike the anonymous characters in the Department of Justice PSA, Lorraine receives little sympathy from her community at first. Her violation unfolds as the central narrative force of this grim episode. When the gang's ringleader is arrested at last, Lorraine's still-swollen face testifies to physical and psychological wounds that remain unhealed. And in fact there are more suffering than happy queers in the promiscuous world of *Intersextions*. A previous plotline sees gay character Thami commit suicide after a brutal prison rape (Mokati, 2013).

In its focus on the prevention of HIV transmission, *Intersextions* has an indisputably civic agenda. A document published to accompany the first season of the show corroborates the SABC's allegiance to nation-building directives, detailing "specific social objectives which relate to the fact that South Africa is a country in rapid transition" (JHHESA, 2013: 3). The broadcaster goes on to highlight its role in "promoting a public discourse that will help redefine social values and build social cohesion" (Ibid).

⁵⁸ Gender non-conformity, and specifically butchness, increases a body's visibility and with it, its vulnerability to violence (Drushel and German, 2009: 122)

⁵⁹ I am choosing to understand hate crime in Roderick Brown's terms (2012: 63) terms, as "a criminal offense committed against a person, property, or society because of his or her actual or perceived membership in any particular group or identifying class, such as race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, ethnicity, national origin, social status or political opinion, because of perpetrator's bias, prejudice or hate."

⁶⁰ Although my focus here is on media with an educational bent, a number of locally produced programmes have also included gay characters. Popular soap operas *Egoli*, *Isidingo* and *Generations* are perhaps the most notable. The form of these portrayals vary, and I choose not make an ambitious claim about the centrality of injury as a plot device in these labyrinthine texts. That said, it seems worth noting that after his first gay kiss on *Generations*, actor Thami Mngqolo, who plays the character Senzo, expressed fear of being "physically attacked or threatened" by angry fans (Citypress, 2009: n.p). While he experienced no such violence, a Facebook group entitled "We will stop watching *Generations* if Senzo and Jason continue kissing" petitioned writers to scrap the gay storyline (Ibid). If not unhappy themselves, gay characters may ignite unhappiness in others.



Figure 24: "Stupid lesbian". 2014. *Intersextions*, ep08, s02. Video still.

An investment in sex education – or, in the case of *Intersextions*, an inverse attention to the suffering born from its lack – produces a better nation. The show aired on SABC 1, whose slogan for many years was the nationally-unifying *Simunye* or “We are one.”

The coupling of suffering and citizenship, as Lauren Berlant (1997) persuasively argues, speaks volumes about the exertion of national power on individuals, inasmuch as it reveals both the impersonality and the intimacy of that power. Berlant notes that the figure of the citizen-victim – “pathological, poignant, heroic and grotesque” (1997: 1) – is simultaneously specific and generic. Trauma happens to you but in a political arena it also happens *about* you, and in this form can most effectively be projected onto the community you represent. Such a manoeuvre relies on the production of “kinds of people [...] both attached to and underdescribed by the identities that organise them” (Ibid, emphasis author’s own). Berlant suggests that citizen trauma, embodied in a “kind of people,” can obscure differences in social hierarchy, in identity and in the type of trauma in question (Ibid, 2).⁶¹

Following Berlant, citizen-victimhood and the identities that determine its cultural expression – what Mark Seltzer (1998) calls “wound culture” in his work on American identity – can be said to describe people differently. As grounds for comparison the “#Stoprape” initiative, structurally similar to the sexual rights awareness campaign, deserves a mention. Launched by the brand LeadSA in partnership with the Department of Basic Education in January 2014, “#Stoprape” was a response to the horrific rape, disembowelment and murder of 17 year old Anene Booysen in Bredasdorp the previous year (Ispas, 2014: n.p). Like the Department of Justice’s efforts, this campaign had a primarily educational focus and culminated in the publication of an educational document.

Where the PSA attempted to address a queer public uncoupled from a larger national public (a “kind of people”), “#Stoprape” is oriented⁶² toward the generic national and takes root in nationalist discourse. On 1 March 2014, the Department of Basic Education compelled high schools to call special assemblies dedicated to the campaign:

Following the singing of the National Anthem, we want principals, educators, learners or activists to address the assemblies for 15 minutes about rape and sexual crimes. The focus will be on education/awareness and more importantly what to do [...] (Motshekga, 2013: n.p)

This contextual proximity between the national anthem, *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*, and “#Stoprape” requires attention. In *Who Sings the Nation State?*, a conversation conducted with Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler (2011) suggests that singing is the assertion of a “right to rights.” She is speaking to

⁶¹ Berlant is considering trauma as a crucial component of American citizenship – the citizen of today is imagined, she argues, as a person traumatized by some aspect of national life – and considers the role of this injurious identity formation in economic, racial, familial, sexual and corporeal existence. I would suggest there is a case to be made for a local application of Berlant’s thesis. Shared trauma, both immediate and generational, has galvanised a new South African national identity in more ways than one, consolidating the “we” that is the post-Apartheid national community but also demarcating the boundaries of that “we” through aggressive immigration reform and xenophobia: an us vs. them paradigm. Unfortunately, an in-depth exploration of this link lies beyond this particular research project.

⁶² I take “#Stoprape” as a straight campaign (for lack of a better phrase) because queer identity, and specifically lesbian identity, has been erased from an undifferentiated conception of rape in the criminal justice system. As Matebeni (2013: 345) points out, “According to police records and accounts of crime in South Africa, corrective rape does not exist.” All rape is categorised identically. While she sees this as potentially necessary – “Marking certain groups as victims of a special kind of crime can make them vulnerable to unintended further victimisation” – I would counter Matebeni’s reading with the argument that rape, conceived ontologically within an existing symbolic order, is always already heterosexual and heterosexualising.

the national anthem⁶³ as a declaration of belonging, excluding those ill-equipped or unable to sing along. Christopher Kelen (2015: 110) elaborates on the exclusion/inclusion paradigm operating in anthems:

Singing our anthem, we welcome ourselves to the participatory event in which we understand or assume we are as the others are who sing what we sing, mean what we mean in so singing. We are singing together. [...] The singing of anthems does not just happen to represent those singing as, for instance, an act of musical taste; rather it constitutes an avowed (if at times automatic) act of self-representation, one for which citizenship qualifications are required.

Piggybacking on the sense of togetherness inspired by a song made for citizens, “#Stoprape” addresses itself to potential perpetrators through the prism of national inclusion. Where the queer rape victim finds inclusion – and consequently citizenship – by surviving, “#Stoprape” (with its heterosexual inflection) takes inclusion as guarantor of active and uninjured subjecthood. Citizenship is assumed to be a point of departure and not of arrival. This reading is supported by the form the campaign continues to take at school level. Each student is encouraged to sign a pledge with the cadence of an oath of allegiance (LeadSA, 2014: n.p):

I pledge:

To uphold the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

To abide by the laws of the country

To respect the rights of others irrespective of age, race, gender or sexual orientation

Not to rape or commit any form of sexual harassment, abuse or violence

To report any form of wrongdoing to authorities

To honour the responsibilities that come with these rights and to be a good citizen

*Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*⁶⁴

Like a set of commandments the “#Stoprape” pledge presents good citizenship and sexual violence as incompatible. The action it takes is not retroactive but pre-emptive, its subject not the particular sexual citizen but a broad-based citizenry. A “#Stoprape” advertisement that aired in cinemas advances this agenda. In the interactive commercial, cinema goers choose the outcome of a rape of opportunity. Handheld video footage closes in on an unconscious girl in a pink dress sprawled on a bed. Viewers are forced into would-be-rapist, and assumably heterosexual male, point of view. A countdown begins. Audience members are then encouraged to vote on what happens next via Twitter (Savage, 2013: n.p). As a national population, we are invited (those of us privileged enough to go to movies and own smartphones) to change the course of one person’s life. Figured in “#Stoprape”, good citizenship entails helping those who might be victims, not identifying yourself as one.

⁶³ Butler’s comment is made in reference to *The Star-Spangled Banner*, the national anthem of the United States of America. She questions the political location of a native Spanish speaker voicing an oath written for an English tongue. Can the claim to rights hold true when its articulation is conditional, Butler asks? South Africa’s national anthem contains five of our eleven national languages, so the same reservations cannot be said to apply without adaptation. However, in that the national anthem entails a performance of allegiance intended for citizens and citizens alone, Butler’s observation stands for the purposes of my argument.

⁶⁴ *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika* or “God Bless Africa” is also premised on a theistic nation-space, yoking the Christian God to the African continent.

Although both rape-related narratives are animated by an official national culture, they cohere at opposing ends of a scale of belonging that revolves around, and derives power from, the same intensely individuating event. In this, these campaigns represent the impersonal intimate habitat of Berlant's "citizen-victim." The queer victim, figured as paradigmatic type, is afforded a story of suffering that might be said to limit agency, to stereotype and to narrow the scope of citizenship.

3.2 "Remember me when I'm gone": Queer loss and the promise of return

Where Berlant's citizen-victim hinges on the production of under-described "kinds of people" that serve national interests, Zanele Muholi's photographic practice forges a brand of particularism from the same vulnerability that characterises a specific social group and typifies its needs. Muholi primarily documents queer life in South Africa, and maintains a specific focus on those subjects most susceptible to virulent misogyny, homophobia and violence: black lesbians. The bodies that populate her photographs have been historically elided⁶⁵ from a larger photographic canon. Her images testify to existence, establishing her subjects as visible and seeable. In a world that vanishes the queer black subject (Matebeni, 2013), this contribution to community visibility has understandably been central to theoretical exegeses⁶⁶ of Muholi's work.

Made visible in Muholi's images is not just the community toward whom she directs her camera but the individuals that comprise it. Typologies that describe a group collectively – say, black lesbian – endow the categorised subject with generalised meaning, as Sara Ahmed (2004) observes: a trickle-down process in which assumptions settle on the shoulders of individuals. This can be dangerous. "Hate may respond to the particular, but it tends to do so by aligning the particular with the general," writes Ahmed (Ibid, 49). We say, "[...] 'I hate you because you are this or that', where the 'this' or 'that' evokes a group that the individual comes to stand for or stand in for." The hate-crime, Ahmed suggests, is spawned from friction at the boundary of self and threatening other, levelled against that which the other body has come to mean discursively.

Muholi, Kylie Thomas (2010: 434) notes, confronts these dangerously generalised classificatory impulses by insisting on the particularity of the people she portrays, while still acknowledging the group memberships they share. Following a similar interpretive trajectory, Andrew van der Vlies (2012: 146) marks the tension between the singularity of Muholi's subjects and their figuration as type. Taking these observations as a point of departure, I argue here that Muholi's archive is more than just a becoming-visible of black queers as a "kind of people" – a homogenous, vulnerable (and homogeneously vulnerable) typology. I hope to suggest that by particularising her subjects, Muholi's images evade a formulaic narrative of suffering assigned to a collective identity – for example, the vulnerable black lesbian featured in the campaigns discussed previously – and stake out a compelling claim to citizenship. To do this, I maintain that the artist exposes the historical, social

⁶⁵ In an essay accompanying the survey *Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography*, Tamar Garb (2011) remarks upon photography's potential to other its subject, made evident in a regional pictorial tradition. In the service of anthropology and ethnography, photography has a great deal to answer for. More than merely ignoring those cast to the social margins, as Desiree Lewis (2005:13) observes before Garb, the camera has also "functioned as a powerful instrument of masculine and colonial domination" capable of withholding and bestowing agency on a whim.

⁶⁶ See Lewis, D (2005); Ngcobo, G (2006); Munro, B (2012); Baderoon, G (2014)

and political precarity of her community⁶⁷ as it is embodied in individuals neither to fetishize the wounded nor to valorise victimhood, but to register an ethical demand addressed to her viewer. After Judith Butler (2004) I call this a demand for a "livable life," a flipping of the script from a story of survival earned to one of survival deserved.⁶⁸ While building my case I read for a "visibilising" project that rises to meet this demand, allegorising the personal into the political and perhaps eluding even the inevitable erasure of death.

"Anything living can be expunged at will or by accident," Butler (2009: ii) reminds us in *Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics*. The nation-state may contribute to the minimisation of this state of constant vulnerability, termed "precarity" by Butler, but it also plays a role in exacerbating its impact. As the theorist conceives it, the neologism precarity is more than just a general human complaint. It describes a "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Ibid). It is a state of heightened risk, of immanent injury, bound up in race, gender, class and sexual norms. Just by being bodies in the world we risk violence, Butler suggests, but some bodies inevitably attract more violence than others. "This means that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies – as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed," she adds.

An awareness of this state of social vulnerability, both in its assertiveness and its intimacy, wends its way through the oeuvre of Zanele Muholi. Tellingly, the artist's first published monograph, *Zanele Muholi: Only Half the Picture* (2006), opens with blood. The book elaborated on a show of the same name at Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, and its cover is an untitled image from the series *Period* [Figure 25]. Although it ushers in the works that follow, this image appears nowhere else in the text and is anchored neither by time nor space. In this it acquires a quality of persistent presence. Pictured is a single drop of the artist's own menstrual blood thrown into bright relief on a grey background that could be carpet, tile or bedding. There is nothing else on which the gaze can alight, and no hint of the unimag(in)ed body from which the blood originates.

The title could refer to menstruation, to a punctuation mark or to a period of time. It thus designates the end of cycle and sentence, but also delineates a temporal space in which Muholi can stage her image-making. She opens with an ending, if you like. This strategy seems in keeping with the rubric of "queer time" as laid out by Jack Halberstam (2005). Proximity to death, implicit risk and a status outside the hegemonic structures that govern reproductive time characterise this mode. It resists linear, teleological or chronological comprehensiveness and interferes with the schedule of normativity. I note this only to introduce the strange time in some of Muholi's images, an idea I return to later in this section.

The series *Period* (2004), of which this untitled image forms part, takes menstruation as its primary focus. No bodily event is loaded with as much anxiety (Guthrie, 2007: 21). Women are encouraged to celebrate the reproductive adulthood signalled by monthly bleeding but also to do fierce and private battle with its effects and its affects. Writing on Muholi's series, theorist Pumla Dineo Gqola (2006: 86) suggests that "a menstruating woman is a useless woman: under patriarchy she has failed to marshal her body parts in accordance with the rules that govern how such a society replicates."

Taking Gqola at her word, there is a psycho-social insubordination in Muholi's image, too. She aestheticises this "uselessness" and makes visible the messiness of menstruation without deferring

⁶⁷ I use the word community as James Baldwin does, entailing an experience of group membership which in its simplest form "means our endless connection with, and responsibility for, each other" (1986: 122).

⁶⁸ "When we ask what makes a life livable, we are asking about certain normative conditions that must be fulfilled for life to become life," according to Butler (2004: 39).



Figure 25: The cover of Zanele Muholi's *Only Half the Picture*. 2006. Stevenson Gallery: Cape Town



Figure 26: Zanele Muholi. 2004. *Aftermath*. Silver Gelatin Print. 60 x 39.5cm.



Figure 27: Zanele Muholi. 2004. *What don't you see when you look at me I*. Lambda Print. 34.5 x 50cm

to the rules that regulate its representation. Like it or not, blood will be shed. In *Period I* through *V* (2005) of the same series, this unapologetic attitude is apportioned to the menstruating body in the world. Blood is spilled on the earth, on sanitary pads, on underwear and spattered against the bowl of a bath.

As the sequence is fleshed out the line between menstruation and injury begins to blur.⁶⁹ Although sanitary pads recur, confirmation that menstruation is still at the heart of *Period*, the violence of blood-spilling seems increasingly to exceed that bodily event. Inferred is the possibility of another, bigger bleeding, accounting for the uncomfortable quantity, frequency and force of bloodshed. Blood signifies wounding as well as fertility, Muholi reminds her viewer, and the aftermath of one bleeding may be interchangeable with another to those ignorant to the circumstances of its shedding. But perhaps more importantly, the blood spilled in *Period* does not mark the bodies of women. Instead, it soils their material life, their belongings and their surroundings. In Muholi's early envisioning of hurt, the bodies-that-bleed are not subject to a physical and metaphorical wounding that leaves them devoid of agency. Those to whom injury happens with greater frequency, those who lead precarious lives - women, queers, people of colour, the marginalised and the underclasses - also imprint the mark of that injury on the world.

I do not want to misrepresent this collection of photographs. *Only Half the Picture* also makes brutally apparent the violation that precarious lives invite. Included is the series *Hate Crime Survivors* (2004) which documents the suffering of those who live through assault as a consequence of their sexuality and/or gender expression. *Aftermath* (2004), amongst Muholi's most celebrated photographs, is also prominently featured in this monograph, anticipating later critical attention from theorists like Henriette Gunkel (2011) and Kylie Thomas (2014).

In *Aftermath* [Figure 26] the subject is cropped from the waist down and naked but for Jockey brand underwear. Her body visually recedes in relation to a vicious scar that runs the length of her thigh. She is a survivor of a recent rape (Muholi, 2014) but her long-healed wound testifies to other, older traumas. Truncated by the photographer's cropping, emphasis is placed on her hands, which are cupped to shield her genitals. "They are hands that speak a history of defeat," Thomas says (2014: 49). This simple gesture also guards the subject from the viewer's gaze, positioning that gaze as another violation and making us uncomfortably complicit in her injury.⁷⁰ The subject is not simply a victim of violence or the gaze, though. We cannot see her face, van der Vlies notes (2012), allowing her a modicum of privacy even from the viewer's prying eye. Some degree of access, of power, is withheld.

Another scar, this time in *What don't you see when you look at me I* (2004), once more uses evidence of injury to command the gaze, but on terms strictly determined by photographer and subject. A hip and arm dominate this image, which terminates above the subject's crotch [Figure 27]. It's a painfully intimate crop, paralleled in the eye's passage over the photographic surface. The gaze is roughly interrupted by a patchwork of scar tissue that scores the topography of the arm. Her skin, that protective boundary between self and world, bears permanent witness to violation.

The function of broken skin in these particular works deserves attention. Skin is more than just a cloak for the body, as Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (2001) affirm in *Thinking through the Skin*.

⁶⁹ This is a correlation reinforced by Muholi's own framing of her practice. An early photographic exploration for *Period* dating from 2003 depicts a sanitary pad on a plate. It is accompanied by an artist's text, reading "The same blood that defines us as women is the same blood which we shed in the attacks against us, while some make a meal of their hatred of us as women, as lesbians" (in Gunkel, 2011: 2).

⁷⁰ Vision itself, when refracted through a lens of imbalanced power, can be an act of violence. "Vision is always a question of the power to see," as Donna Haraway (1991: 195) tells us, "and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices." We must ask with more frequency and rhetorical force, she insists, "with whose blood were my eyes crafted?"

It has a meaning and a logic of its own. It testifies to biography, is marked by race and age and sexual identity, is made a privileged site of irreducible difference and is taken to signify interiority. We project a great deal of significance onto the surface of skin but “skin is not a mirror” (Ibid, 7). Emphasising scarred skin and its implied biography while withholding the identity of her subject, Muholi does something curious. She places an intimate and subjective incident within reach of the viewer but does not allow us to assume that we understand its embodiment. No matter how many truths the skin⁷¹ may appear to tell, they are only ever half-truths; the truths of surfaces, not depths.

With this in mind, the titular question (or is it a statement?) becomes more ambiguous than it seems at face value. Muholi could be referring to the manifold violences inscribed on a body outside mainstream South African visuality including unseen psychological wounds. She could be suggesting a complex lifeworld sublimated by injury – the subject’s experiences enveloped in this one terrifying truth, which affords only a narrative of victimhood with little room for detail or nuance. Or perhaps she hints at the many other bodies that remain unseen beyond the photographic frame, where violence continues unabated. Via the testimonial function of skin and scar tissue, Muholi allows for all these possibilities simultaneously. She enables an intimate encounter with the traumatised body, made hyper-visible by queerness and blackness and woundedness, but controls the limits of that encounter. *Aftermath* and *What don’t you see when you look at me* foreground the wound without fetishizing it, making way for the subjectivities that emanate from and through its imaging.

“Muholi’s work,” Gqola (2006: 84) writes, “is less about making Black lesbians visible than it is engaging with the regimes that have used these women’s hypervisibility as a way to violate them.” Much as the cupped hands in *Aftermath* resist the gaze, Muholi forecloses the possibility of a secondary violation of her subjects. The skin, our most visible and vulnerable part, resists the intruding eye. In a world in which black women’s images (and bodies) are frequently instrumentalised for others’ self-definition and gratification (Lewis, 2005: 13), Muholi reclaims the black female body as an autonomous agent. The suffering of this body becomes not an object of aesthetic interest but a usable resource. Blood – the present injury – or scar tissue – the historic injury – are used to position the viewer in immediate but contained proximity to the subject, establishing the conditions by which they can be seen.

The anonymity of her subjects, particularly in her *Hate Crimes* series, is afforded another meaning in this reading. In uniting the specificity of the crime and its more generalised impact on a community, Muholi extrapolates the political potency of the injury beyond the limits of a single body. This skin is not just skin, these scars not simply scars – they are our scars and our lives, she attests. Each scarred surface invokes a range of possible bodies, all exposed to the gaze and to touch and to violence. By becoming visible in such a way, by asking “what don’t you see when you look at [us],” Muholi’s subjects exercise the right to appear on their own terms. Even though their bodies may lie outside the bounds of conventional representation, they demand recognition as they are. And such recognition, as Butler (2004) suggests, is a crucial component for leading a livable life. “If we are not recognizable, if there are no norms of recognition by which we are recognizable, then it is not possible to persist in one’s own being, and we are not possible beings; we have been foreclosed from possibility” (Ibid, 31).

Becoming recognisable is to gain a kind of independent ontological status, born of, but no longer simply subject to, regulatory power.

⁷¹ An etymological connection between skin and photography exists. The French word “pellicule” (used consciously by Barthes in *Camera Lucida*) translates to membrane, referring to both skin and photographic film (Cadava and Cortes-Rocca, 2011: 136). This imbues the photographic process (and perhaps the writing it elicits) with a kind of carnality (Ibid).

Thus far I have suggested that the imaging of injury in Muholi’s work is mediated to generate specific effect, but it is necessary to consider, too, the artist’s placement in facilitating this power relation between viewer and subject. Her ambition to grant recognition to those whom society has cast to its margins parallels her work as an activist. Before working as a photographer, Muholi was cofounder of FEW, the Forum for the Empowerment of Women. She continues to conceive of herself as an “activist artist,” a point made under the subheading “Artist as Ethnographer” in her essay “(Un)Imagined Bodies and Identities” (2008). There Muholi describes herself as an “insider” documentarian, adding that this position extends to her work as an activist. It provides the basis for the reciprocity in her photographs that Tamar Garb calls “an encounter of equals” (2011: 25). Given this balance of power, it is unsurprising that suffering and its reprieve are conceived as an exchange in Muholi’s work. “My photography is therapy to me,” she writes later (2014: 7), hinting at the manner in which an identification through shared experience might work to alleviate the hurt of both photographer and subject.

A by-product of this therapeutic drive is a deep and lasting intimacy embedded in the images themselves. Each disclosure enters the public domain with this intimacy intact, but all do not invite the viewer to meet them on equal footing. Liz Kotz (in Doyle, 2006: 117) suggests that documentary photographers may deploy intimacy in multiple ways. One school of practice is exemplified by Nan Goldin, amounting to “visual tourism” dependant on the artist’s insider status to authorise the spectator’s voyeurism. The other, *à la* Jack Pierson, uses “the legitimizing values of subcultural documentary – ‘immediacy’, ‘honesty’, ‘intimacy’ and the like [...] as effects of photographic codes, rather than as spontaneous intersubjective performances communicated neutrally via the photograph” (Ibid).

Muholi’s work muddles these poles. The artist quotes from an anthropological vocabulary – a pictorial tradition that gives itself up all too easily to voyeurism – but remains scrupulously ethical with a vested interest in the well-being of her subjects. She obtains permission and consent, working to prevent the camera from becoming a further violation (van der Vlies, 2012). Tamar Garb remarks upon this too, holding that projects which bring “hidden lives to visibility” do so through a process of consent and collaboration between photographer and subject (2011: 29). The viewer is noticeable absent from this equation – Muholi achieves intimacy and honesty without deferring to voyeurism.

Each of her photographs is coded to encourage an affective proximity neither neutral nor unequivocal, as I have already suggested. Emotional relations do not exist in a void. They reflect existing power differentials.⁷² Muholi’s closeness to her subjects produces the viewer as an outsider in this exchange of intimacies. In the case of *Aftermath* (2004), say, spectators are compelled to acknowledge their culpability in the victimisation of queer bodies. Using this strategy Muholi’s photographs recast a power imbalance in broader social operation by calling attention to its presence in the first place.

To be clear, I am not claiming that Muholi’s photography acquires its power by alienating the viewer. Rather I am suggesting that the artist is sensitive to who views, the gaze directed at (or implicated in) her images. Her writing on the subject substantiates this. Musing on her audience in *Art South Africa* (2010), Muholi singles out those who might experience shock as the target of her work. And that necessitates the question: if generating shock is the goal, whom does the artist intend to shock? Who is doing the looking here? Van der Vlies (2012: 147) speculates about Muholi’s implied

⁷² This holds true in ways not always conscious or visible. A recent study by the University of Toronto-Scarborough, as an example, suggests the existence of an empathy colour line. “Observing someone of a different race produced significantly less motor-cortex activity than observing a person of one’s own race,” according to the study, suggesting that “same-race” empathy is conditioned to be the default position over “other-race” empathy (Kemick, 2010: n.p).

viewer, inferring a metropolitan and probably heterosexual eye. These photographs may therefore be said to solicit the gaze of hegemonic power, directing their charge toward viewers who are, for the most part, not the subject of the images themselves.

What are the consequences of displaying a vulnerable body in full view of power? In *Enraged by a Picture* (2005), a short film produced in collaboration with the Out in Africa Film Festival, Muholi documents responses to her images. Some are positive – her work is described as “eye-opening” – but many reject it vehemently. It’s a slippery slope, it seems, from “this is not art” to “you need a smack” to “you must be hung.” In encountering an image they did not elect to see, these viewers experience Muholi’s work as an imposition.

Judith Butler (2012: 137) describes “what is unchosen” as part of the force of an image. Comfort and consent are not sufficient grounds for delimiting ethical obligation, she determines, “We only act when we are moved to act, and we are moved by something that affects us from the outside, from elsewhere, from the lives of others, imposing a surfeit that we act from and upon” (Ibid, 136). Subscribing to this, I would suggest that the spectrum of responses these images elicit equates to their political potency. In imposing itself upon a viewer, pictured suffering can no longer remain remote. Muholi’s subjects assert themselves, as identities and as bodies. They too impose. In this, I’d argue, lies her works most definitively national dimension – from a position of precarity these queer bodies lay demands on power.

An etymology might be instructive here. Precarious derives from the Latin *precare* or prayer. In its oldest usage the word means to beseech or to acquire something by entreaty (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). *Precaire*, then, could be to speak about the experience of suffering in the hope that suffering might end. In taking this action, precarity names a desire to live otherwise; to keep living despite and perhaps because of vulnerability. There is an emancipatory potential at work in that sentiment. To be precarious is to exist on a continuum with “the eradication of our being” on one end and “the physical support of our lives” on the other (Butler, 2004: 24). In that, the outsider to Muholi’s exchange of intimacies – the viewer who chooses to partially see or to look away – is always already implicated. Someone must hear the plea. Someone is accountable.

In writing about Muholi’s work, I am that viewer now. The most powerful component of a photograph is an addition; as Barthes suggests, “I add to the photograph what is nonetheless already there” (1984: 55). More than that, a viewer can change the things she encounters (Ibid, 20). Barthes’ starting point for this argument is that images animate us in turn. Briefly, I want to give up the emotional distance so often posed as a foundation of criticality and speak for a moment about how Muholi’s images act upon me.

When she died in 2007 Busi Sigasa was the age I am now. Hers is the first face in Zanele Muholi’s *Faces and Phases* series (2006 - Present), an introductory chord that sets the pace and pitch for all to follow [Figure 28]. I did not know her. I know something about being her age, I suppose, and I think it’s very young. By the time she was 25, Busi Sigasa had survived curative rape, contracted and fought HIV/AIDS and become a poet, an activist and an important figure in the larger Johannesburg lesbian community (Muholi, 2014: 6-7). She lived large and she is dead now. The body is a cultural fact, as Baudrillard (1998) would say, but here it is an affective fact⁷³ as well. The knowledge of Busi’s death is a seismic shift that moves me somewhere deeper than the sentimental and I want to think about why that is the case.

Muholi sets Busi against the background of the old Women’s Gaol at Constitution Hill in Braamfontein. Unlike later portraits in the same series, Busi does not meet the viewer’s gaze.

⁷³ I mean this in Brian Massumi’s (2005) sense, not as an “actual fact” but as something more “superlatively real”; something felt into being.



Figure 28: Zanele Muholi. 2006. *Busi Sigasa*. *Faces and Phases* series. Silver gelatin print. 76.5 x 50.5 cm.

She looks far to the right at a distant point somewhere just above the horizon. There is tension in her eyes but her mouth is relaxed. The image does not feel staged in any meaningful way. Perhaps it is less a portrait and more a snapshot, something snatched in passing and lost soon after.

The year is 2006, the same year that South Africa's current President Jacob Zuma - then Deputy President - announced to an audience during Heritage Day celebrations that as a younger man, "an *ungqingil*⁷⁴ would not have stood in front of me. I would knock him out" (quoted in Tremblay, Paternotte and Johnson, 2011: 163). The crowd cheered. Busi Sigasa will be dead a year later.

Beyond this portrait there are few other images of Busi in the public domain. When I import her name into several search engines the only photographs returned are from her memorial, and a handful of more recent portraits in various media painted by those who loved and knew her or wished they did. These tributes include a mural by Ziyanda Majozi [Figure 29] and an oil painting by Pauline N'Gouala [Figure 30].

Curiously, the works routinely take Muholi's photograph as a reference point. Representations of a representation, they speak perhaps not to Busi-in-memory but to her image as it has been made memory by Muholi's lens. The photograph memorialises, undoubtedly, but it can also replace and produce memory. In *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss*, Jay Prosser (2005: 1) considers taking a photograph as an act of failed memorialisation; a shadow-death that always involves the loss of the subject:

Herein lies photography's hidden truth. Photographs are not signs of presence but evidence of absence. Or rather the presence of a photograph indicates its subject's absence. Photographs contains a realization of loss. [...] It is a myth that photographs bring back memories. Photographs show not the presence of the past but the passing of the present. They show the irreversible passing of time.

The photograph is a strangely anomalous space, both temporally and in how it constitutes its subject. A token of time past, it contains a moment of life that is already over. In this respect photographs are more than just the realisation of loss, as Prosser describes them, but produce loss themselves. They are, following Edouardo Cadava's more absolutist metaphor, a cemetery: a place where the subject goes to die. "In photographing someone, we know that the photograph will survive him [sic]. It begins, even in his life, to circulate without him, figuring and anticipating his death each time it is looked at" (1997: 13). But what happens to a subject who is no longer in the here and now, like Busi? Her image has survived her, but what does that do to the experience of her loss?

In *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes (in a reference Kylie Thomas has made before me but which I hope to unpack) demonstrates how acutely loss can manifest in an image. Alexander Gardner's *Portrait of Lewis Payne* (1865) allows the critic (1984) to articulate the peculiar temporality of a photograph: its seamless marriage of the past perfect - this has been - and the future present - this will be. Gardner captures Lewis Payne in his cell, awaiting execution for the assassination of US Secretary of State W.H. Seward. "The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the studium," writes Barthes. "But the punctum is: he is going to die" (Ibid, 96).

Barthes's punctum is that component of a photograph which strikes the viewer most deeply; the truest thing about an image and also the most subjective. It is interesting that the words Barthes uses to describe this function rely on the language of injury. The punctum is that which "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow and pierces [the viewer];" "this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument;" a "sting, speck, cut, little hole," and that which "also bruises [and]

⁷⁴ A derogatory isiZulu word for a homosexual man.



Figure 29, left: Ziyanda Majozi. 2013. *Busi Sigasa*. Mixed Medium Mosaic.



Figure 30, right: Pauline N'Gouala. 2013. *Busi Sigasa*. Oil on Board.

is poignant" (1984: 26-27). In Payne's portrait the punctum is a dawning consciousness of his impending death as inevitable and already over. A shadow of his suffering is inflicted upon Barthes in turn, quickening him to his own mortality.

The camera makes subject and viewer alike a "subject becoming object," as Barthes puts it, anticipating the loss of personhood that death brings. A photograph of the dead can therefore act upon the viewer, and require a necessarily personal confrontation with death. Following this logic a photograph emanates from the past but also complicates a tidy chronology that claims "the past is passed" and thus complete. I would not conclude as Barthes might that the power of Busi's image derives solely from signalling my own eventual death, or from my confusion over its nebulous temporality. Yes, a proximity to death is produced by the photograph. But Busi's grave, the cemetery of the image and the funerary moment it contains, is not my grave - not yet, at least - and the reasons for that distinction are crucial to Muholi's ongoing project.

To illustrate this point it might be productive to turn to another image taken the year Busi died. *Nomonde Mbusi, Berea, Johannesburg, 2007* depicts a bare-shouldered black woman (out television actress Nomonde Mbusi) who meets the viewer's gaze with cool directness [Figure 31]. For Kylie Thomas (2014) the power of this particular photograph lies in the erotic encounter it stages between viewer and subject. "To reveal the ways in which I am affected by this photograph is to be exposed, describing what I see is an act that 'outs' me, one that positions my intimate self in a public sphere" (2014: 41). Desire, cued by the veiled invitation in Nomonde's gaze, forces the viewer into a confessional role. As a white woman, Thomas's stance could be said to draw on Audre Lorde's figure of the erotic (in Munt, 1998: 24): the "longing for the other, not to colonize, but to understand"; a yearning to connect across subjectivities.

I introduce Thomas's reading not to mark the difference between the portraits of Nomonde and Busi but to suggest similarities in their operation. I am outed equally by Busi Sigasa, but by her death more than (but surely not at the expense of - is it ever?) desire.



Figure 31: Zanele Muholi. 2007. *Nomonde Mbusi, Berea, Johannesburg, 2007*. Silver Gelatin Print. 50.5 x 76.5 cm

With Busi's gaze directed over my right shoulder, I cannot meet her eyes. Positioned as an outsider to her interior and external worlds, I cannot find myself in the intimacy Muholi seems to share with her subject. That would necessitate an intrusion into a space that is not available to me, and the claiming of a loss that is not mine. I am outed not as queer, then, although undoubtedly that particular identification contributes to the depth of my feeling. Instead I experience myself suddenly and vividly as white, as safe, as seeing and (perhaps most emphatically) as living. These are not private selves in the sense of Kylie Thomas's revelation but surely they require recognition of the limits of self and subject. I am reminded where I begin and end. I am alive and Busi is dead because I wear my whiteness like chainmail. And although her portrait might lacerate me, waking to that reality does not mean closing the chasm between us.

"To be empathetic is to suffer, it is to be made unhappy by other people's unhappiness," writes Sara Ahmed (2010: 95), but empathy does not necessitate action. Empathising with Busi, or with Muholi's many subjects, is not enough. Empathy arrives under the guise of boundary-breaking cross-identification but it is just as often uncritical unidirectional feeling. Doris Sommer (1999: 22) condemns the empathy of white liberals as a "violation by sentimentality" in her polemic *Proceed with Caution When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas*. Sommer, championing ethics, urges majoritarian subjects to rethink the responsibilities of reading. She insists on the particularity of certain texts, concluding that the empathy such texts evoke is burdened by historic power and should not come easily, out of cultural and contextual ignorance and without critique. Kenyan writer and academic Keguro Macharia (2014) brings home a similar point in its implications for African queerness:

As Audre Lorde and Frantz Fanon teach, guilt is a useless emotion and a certain white liberalism is inherently masochistic: make me cry, it demands, make me produce feeling, it insists, beat me up with your words.

Catharsis: narcissism

Vulnerability is not victimhood, Macharia maintains, and emotional catharsis is indulgent and selfish.

Muholi offers no easy identifications that might prompt such catharsis, much as she does not grant the viewer entry into the emotional life of her subjects. While positioning themselves toward the picture surface and thus revealing their awareness of having been posed, the bodies that inhabit her photographs resist a hungry viewer in pursuit of emotional sustenance. None of the portraits in *Faces and Phases*, Busi's included, are smiling. Muholi (2013: 172) elaborates on this stylistic choice: "...there is an intensity, a piercing of stance and of eyes. There is almost an accusation- where are YOU? What have YOU been doing? You look but you are always silent. Nothing but a gaze." She's speaking to an audience at *Dokumenta* in Kassel, Germany, where the earliest version of *Faces and Phases* was exhibited. She could be speaking equally to any viewer not positioned as an insider: to the straight, the white, the cisgendered⁷⁵ and the indifferent. To me. This is the plea - *precare*, "Where are you?" - that is also an accusation, a demand for more and for better.

Muholi could even be speaking to those who experience her work as an imposition (thankfully I do not count myself among their number) like former Minister of Arts and Culture Lulu Xingwana. In August 2009 Xingwana stormed out of the exhibition *Innovative Women*, curated by Dr. Bongzi Dhlomo, which featured Muholi alongside nine other women artists. Ironically the show was located

⁷⁵ The comparatively new descriptor "cisgender" was incorporated into the lexicon of sexuality and gender studies to designate those individuals whose gender identity or expression corresponds to their birth assignment. Typically credited to writings by biologist Dana Leland DeFosse in 1994, the term is not without its critics. Its addition to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2015, however, evidences its increased popularity and usage (Ennis, 2015: n.p).

on Constitution Hill where Busi Sigasa had sat for her photograph three years earlier. Deeming a number of images on display – specifically, those by Muholi and artist Nandipha Mntambo – “pornographic” and “crude misrepresentations of women,” the Minister abandoned her post and left an aide to read her speech on her behalf (Pillay, 2010: n.p.). In a press statement issued some months after the event, Xingwana explained her decision: “Our mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation building. I left the exhibition because it expressed the very opposite of this. It was immoral, offensive and going against nation-building” (Evans, 2010: n.p). In the nation imagined by Xingwana the black queer body has no role to play and is essentially detrimental to national harmony. Muholi, speaking to the *Times*, slammed the Minister’s reaction, “There is nothing pornographic [...] Where else can we express ourselves if not in our democratic country. [...] A lot of people who have no understanding of sexual orientation, people are suffering in silence” (Ibid). In an interview with the *Mail and Guardian* the artist expanded this point, arguing that, “I don’t need someone to tell me my work is nice. But such callousness from someone who happens to hold a position of power is a violation of human rights” (in van Wyk, 2010: n.p).

Zanele Muholi invokes the language of inclusion to muster her defence. She appeals to human rights (Ibid), to the constitution (Ibid) and to the ideal of democracy (Evans, 2010). For the suffering of her community to end, or at least to enter consciousness, the artist maintains that their experiences must be made public and political. The nation as a democratic entity actually depends on this conjuncture. “People from outside of South Africa envy us for our Constitution. But in South Africa there is so much homophobia. We are given the platform to speak, but there is no action to match the words. It is a betrayal,” Muholi despairs (in van Wyk, 2010: n.p).

For Xingwana to have betrayed the ideals of the Constitution, those ideals – and the nation founded upon them – must have a life independent of homophobic ministers and the dispensation for which they stand. In effect, Muholi mounts an inversion of Xingwana’s argument grounded in the same conviction that South Africa is a work-in-progress. She conceives of her project as a nation-building endeavour. By making visible a stigmatised community, the artist participates in implementing the ideals of the Constitution and calling attention to its shortcomings, claiming the (threatened) citizenship to which her subjects are entitled.

A poem by Busi Sigasa accompanies her photograph in the latest edition of the *Faces and Phases* publication (2014). “Remember me when I am gone,” writes Sigasa, “For I...wrote stories for the nations to read.” Like the peculiar temporality of her portrait, her words vacillate between present and past tense: I showed, I say, I had, I fell, I loved, I am. Neither time nor tense is taken for granted. “SO...REMEMBER ME WHEN I’M GONE!” she closes, “For...without no doubt/ I am in peace with my maker and creator.” The imperative, capitalized in-text and punctuated by rhythmic ellipses that mimic breath, is followed by a double negative. “Without no doubt” is a negation of a negation, a space in which, perhaps, new positives can come into being.

It is worth pointing out that Busi’s final published sentence is drafted in the perfect tense. “To be ‘into the perfect tense,’” Tamar Garb writes (2011: 11), quoting poet Antjie Krog, “is to inhabit a moment in the ‘now,’ made possible by an awareness of what has been before, and to imagine a future which will have been through (if not surpassed) its effects.” Temporalities collide in this tense and the singular and the plural forms collapse their clear boundaries. In the unspecified time frame of the present perfect – and its implications for a project that is always both completing and incomplete – Barthes’ definitive categories of “this has been” and “this will be” lose their sway.

Perhaps, in countering static ontologies and chronologies, Busi’s anachronistic vernacular holds death itself briefly at bay.⁷⁶

A recent touring show of Muholi’s was *Mo(u)rning*, slim parentheses tearing the title in two. In *Precarious Life*, her collection of essays best described as a phenomenology of mourning, Judith Butler devotes a chapter – “Violence, mourning, politics” – to reimagining the basis of community as a response to the experience of loss. “Loss makes a tenuous ‘we’ of us all,” she insists (2006: 20). Like collective identity, the experience of loss can simultaneously unite and divide. There are those who have lost, those to whom loss is differentially distributed and those who still stand to lose. Everybody loses. A future in which we are dead is the only guaranteed future, and it is no future at all (Smith, 2013: n.p). A focus on loss need not be read solely as negativity, though, or at least not simply as a future curtailed. The word mo(u)rning itself testifies to this. As David Eng and David Kazanjian (2003: 2) maintain in *Loss: A Politics of Mourning*, “[W]e might say that as soon as the question ‘What is lost?’ is posed, it invariably slips into the question, ‘What remains?’” Perhaps in loss something else may dawn.

3.3 Threatening bodies: The child and the citizen-pervert

When former Arts and Culture Minister Lulu Xingwana staged her walk-out of the exhibition *Innovative Women*, a show partially funded by her department, she fell back on a gold standard of nationalist rhetoric to justify her actions. She was, she claimed, acting in the best interests of the children. Her spokesperson Lisa Combrinck (quoted in Evans, 2010: n.p) conveyed this agenda in crystal clear terms: “Minister Xingwana was also concerned that there were children present at the event and that children should not be exposed to some of the images on exhibit.” Xingwana’s own press release (reprinted in Pillay, 2010: n.p) foregrounds “the rights of children” as they are entrenched in the Constitution and the associated responsibilities of the nation to protect its children from “exposure to pornographic material.”

In subsequent interviews revolving around her reaction, the figure of the innocent child is the touchstone to which Xingwana returns again and again, explaining to the *Mail and Guardian*,

Contrary to media reports, I was not even aware as to whether the “bodies” in the images were of men or women or both for that matter. My reaction was guided by the view that these “artworks” were not suitable for a family audience. I noticed that there were children as young as three-years-old in the room (in van Wyk, 2010: n.p).

Looking beyond the dramatic scare quotes that bracket “artworks”, this sentiment calls to mind an old political rallying cry that Lee Edelman calls “fighting for the children” (2004: 3). To Edelman the Child, with a capital letter indicating its position as figuration and not as person, is the preeminent emblem of national futurity, an invocation of the heterosexual citizen to come. Its placement in Xingwana’s nation-building vision is thus understandable – the Child, and with it a future South Africa, needs protection from the dangerously non-reproductive sexualities pictured by Zanele Muholi. The defence of the innocent Child, as Edelman proceeds to point out in *No Future*, is often summoned to ward off an encroaching queerness (and in Muholi’s case, also gender non-

⁷⁶ Maybe there is a missed opportunity here to draw out possible connections to Achille Mbembe’s (2001) notion of an African emerging time, a “time that is appearing”, passing, non-linear and imbued with a sense of political urgency. “This time is not a series but an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures,” according to Mbembe (Ibid, 16), and in this might share common ground with the ebbing and flowing time encapsulated in Busi’s text and Muholi’s photographs.

conformity – those neither/nor, either/or “bodies” Xingwana considers illegible) conceived as threatening. The nation must rise up to protect

the Child who might witness lewd or inappropriately intimate behaviour; the Child who might find information about dangerous ‘lifestyles’ on the internet; the Child who might choose a provocative book from the shelves of the public library; the Child, in short, who would find an enjoyment that would nullify the figural value, itself imposed by adult desire, of the Child as unmarked by the adult’s adulterating implication in desire itself [...] (Edelman, 2004: 19).

Read through Edelman, the anonymous children that apparently frequent *Innovative Women* are at risk of seeing something that could contaminate their perceived symbolic value. “The Child” as idea is conveniently conjured to preserve an institutionalised adult vision. Perhaps it is unsurprising, given her determined allegiance to the nation’s children and a future pregnant with the possibilities they represent, that Lulu Xingwana currently holds the position of Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities.

More than ten years before *Innovative Women* provoked the Minister’s moral outrage, the figure of the vulnerable Child had been put to work to equally sensational effect. The artist Steven Cohen marched in the 1996 Johannesburg Pride parade under a homemade banner bearing only the phrase, “Give us your children. What we don’t fuck we eat” [Figure 32]. This was one of several banners⁷⁷ that Cohen produced specifically for display at Pride events, and its goal was to confront misconceptions⁷⁸ about a correlation between homosexuality and paedophilia. “He intended it to be read as a send-up of the fear of the child-molesting fag,” reflects journalist Charl Blignaut, who covered the event (1997: n.p).

Like Zanele Muholi’s photographs, Steven Cohen’s performance-based practice challenges the refusal of the nation to admit those bodies excluded from the resources of social life. Where Muholi demands cultural intelligibility and the equal protections of citizenship for her subjects and herself, Cohen opts instead to intervene in the hierarchies that structure an inhospitable national culture in the first place. He ascribes, I argue here, to a practice of citizenship that stretches the boundaries of belonging to encompass queer and gender non-conforming citizens. To accomplish this Cohen utilises a body made both vulnerable and dangerous, threatened and threatening, to transform a narrow definition of national membership and the rights and obligations that trail behind it.

I begin with Cohen’s 1996 Pride intervention – the banner was subsequently exhibited as part of a larger installation that included the preserved head of a human foetus on a dinner plate⁷⁹ – to mark what the artist calls a “formative moment” in his developing oeuvre⁸⁰ and to unpack what politics formed within it. The sentiment “Give us your children, what we don’t fuck we eat” is intentionally controversial. Even as it critiques the conflation of non-normative sexual practices, the work expresses a disreputable subjectivity. Blignaut recalls why this stance could be understood as subversive: “[Cohen’s performance] demonstrated, to me, that we had gays (who tended towards assimilation and showing the world ‘we’re not so bad’) and we had queers (who demanded that

77 According to Cohen these included a banner-sized portrait of Nelson Mandela in a Marie Antoinette wig bearing the slogan “Let them eat cock,” and a composite image of fellatio cribbed from various porn magazines and overlaid by the text “Sucking for equal rights” (Cohen, S, Email communication with the author, 1 September 2015).

78 “Members of disliked minority groups are often stereotyped as representing a danger to the majority’s most vulnerable members,” as Herek (2013) reminds us, but empirical research demonstrates no increased likelihood of molestation from homosexual or bisexual persons.

79 This took place at “The Body Politic” conference at the University of Witwatersrand in late 1996.

80 Cohen, S. Email communication with the author, 11 August 2015.

homosexuality and genderplay in all its forms be acknowledged and respected on our own terms, not hetero[sexual] society’s.”⁸¹ Cohen’s intervention, then, raises a metaphorical middle finger to the respectability politics that have characterised some queer human rights advocacy.⁸² He challenges efforts to frame homosexuality as normal – “we’re just like you, only different” – in a space of heightened visibility, Pride. In so doing the artist baits (and evidently risks affirming) moral panic around the dangers posed by non-normative sexualities.

He succeeded. For months after the event, Cohen was “roundly condemned” for his performance by public figures in both gay and straight communities (Blignaut, 1997: n.p). Even among fellow Pride marchers on the day, “few understood and many were unamused” by his banner with an official attempting to confiscate the work and forcibly remove the artist from the event (Ibid). “Coming out of censorship and banning I simply couldn’t believe the self-censorship and self-banning,” Blignaut, who helped Cohen resist pressure from event marshals, remembers, adding, “[...] I call them the pink police – the white gays who want to monitor the entire community, who never put [a] foot in a township except in a bus group to the annual Miss Glow Vaal drag competition.”⁸³ In his status as an outsider to an abruptly assimilationist queer community, Cohen’s reception indicates blossoming fissures in the broader LGBTIQ movement along economic, racial and political lines. The idea of banning him was floated. In a very real way, his politics made him a pariah. The following year, Gary Bath, chair of Johannesburg’s Pride committee, arranged for a soft toy drive. Pride participants were encouraged to bring donatables intended for child abuse funds, orphanages and other charities to Pride 1997. The move was in retaliation to Cohen’s banner: “We want to say we’re not really that bad,” Bath explained (in Blignaut, 1997: n.p).

Coming to his own defence, Cohen published a letter in queer magazine *Exit* headed “An open letter to the closed community” (Cohen, 1996: 4). The text is worth reproducing in its entirety:

My name is Steven Cohen and I made the banner “Give us your children- what we can’t fuck we eat” which Vasili [his partner at the time] and I carried in the ‘96 Pride Parade. And which gave you prissy queens and p.c. lesbians such a wobbly. I believe it raised issues other than your temperatures.

I am a queer at home on the streets. Some gays are so surprised to be out there that they have to saccharine their image – they buy into the demands that heterosexual society make of us freaks – they try to be better than straights, beyond reproach. Well, fuck you girls, why march? Stay home and lobby the media for your right to watch it on TV. Mincing on the march, Vasili and I were confronted with a horrible truth about beautiful moffiedom – some of us have already become what we despise: judgmental moralists and finger-pointing accusers. I believe the banner was easier to understand than why the country is littered with dead people – the unimaginable happens here...some puzzle. And I’ve got nothing but scorn for you bitches on a cleansing sweep, shrieking “You don’t represent us!” No, sweetie, I represent myself. You find that intolerable. And so you tell me not to represent myself but to represent you in a way you approve of. Let’s leave it to the Christians to be intolerant, humourless and oppressive. Or should that be persecutory? The queer voice is a chorus which must include activists, drags, drugged dead-heads, freaks, perverts and fucked-shut sluts. You see, as for that “You’re bringing us down routine”...sisters, you ARE down, now relax or it’s gonna hurt.

81 Blignaut, C. Email communication with the author. 23 September 2015.

82 In nations with a legally protected queer community, LGBTIQI lives are, as I attempted to show in Chapter 2, increasingly determined by a strategic reconciliation with a neoliberal national body.

83 Blignaut, C. Email communication with the author. 23 September 2015.

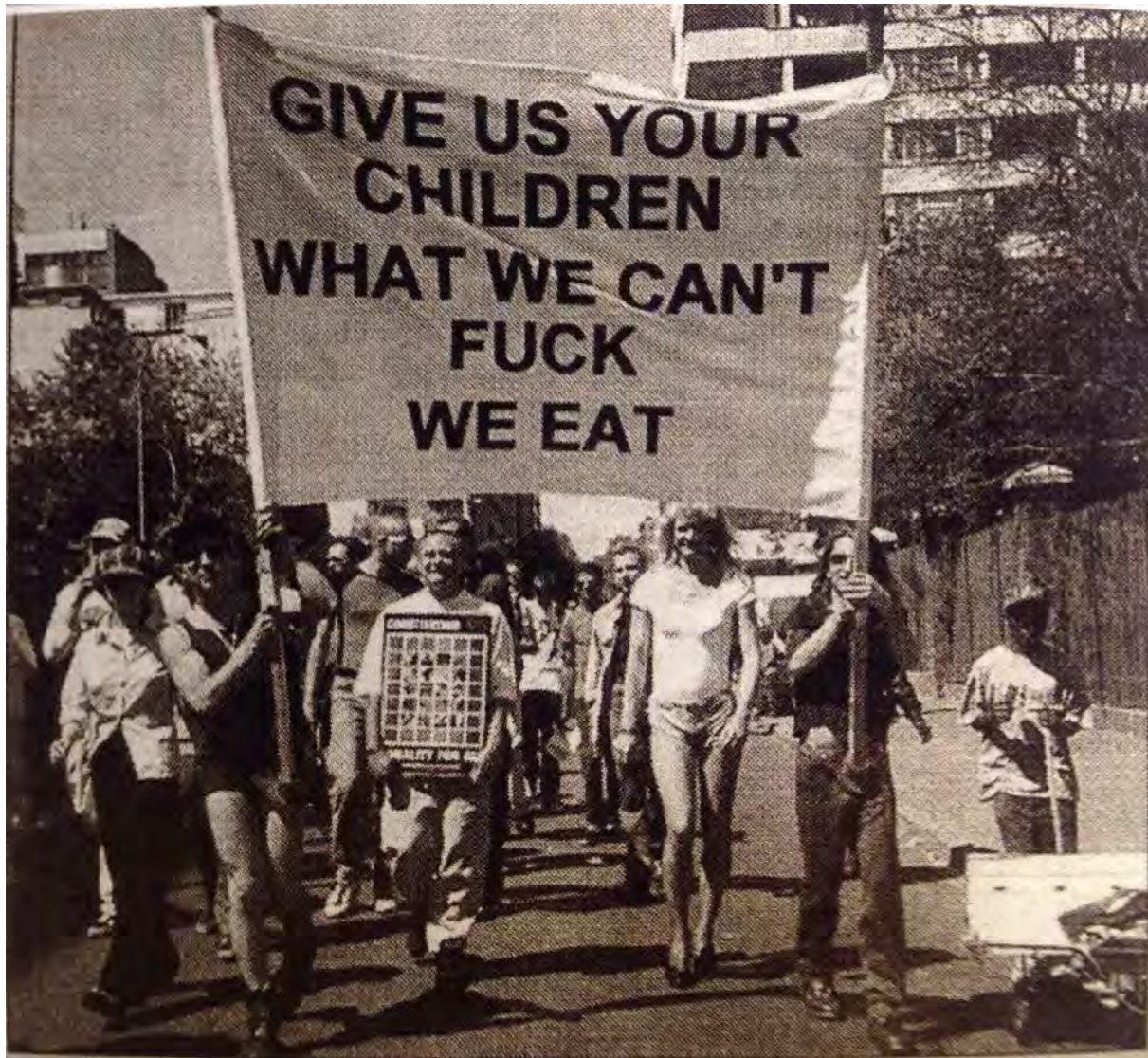


Figure 32: Steven Cohen carries a banner in the 1996 Johannesburg Gay Pride parade. Reproduced from S. de Waal and A. Manion (eds.) *Pride: Protest and Celebration*. 2006. Johannesburg: Fanele books.



Figure 33: Steven Cohen. 1999. *Voting*. Documentation of performance.

Cohen holds no punches in reproaching those who would attempt to either silence or normalise him. Positioning himself in opposition to the mainstream allows the artist to retain a subversive identity, resisting the erasure of a queer, violent history. As Heather Love suggests, in what seems like an echo of Cohen's words, "Resisting the call of gay normalization means refusing to write off the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead" (2007: 30).

Two things emerge from Cohen's text that inform how I intend to read his work, besides his strident resistance to assimilation. First, the artist's flirtation with persecution - making of himself the object of accusatory finger-pointing - from queer contemporaries and Christians alike. At odds with a dominant political agenda, Cohen insists upon the right to speak and with it the right to move in the city, whatever the cost. In fact, the idea that there might be a cost is central to the work itself. Its radicalism is premised on some degree of resistance from those who encounter it; Cohen intends to shock. Second, the innuendo contained within the final line of his letter correlates sex and suffering and presents them as causal, foreshadowing the artist's methods in years to come.

The courting of risk (mostly by making himself hugely vulnerable to hurt, anticipated or otherwise) is at the heart of much of Cohen's oeuvre. In *Voting* (1999), for example, he participates in another grand-scale civic performance and one with potentially higher stakes. Clad in a black evening dress, diamante neckwear and drag make-up, the artist crawls on hands and knees to a voting station [Figure 33]. His feet are trapped in impossibly high fetish heels, made higher still by the addition of metre-long gemsbok horns. Walking is impossible. The process - journey, queue, registration and voting itself - takes more than five hours. By its end Cohen is exhausted and in pain, his visible fatigue making his limp body even more abject.⁸⁴

Shaun de Waal and Robyn Sassen read *Voting* as "an amusing comment on the long slow [election] queues themselves, as well as South Africa's painful long walk (crawl?) to democracy" (2003: 24). Overlooking the oddly trivialising "amusing," it is interesting that the authors place emphasis on the artist's physical strain as the conceptual force of the work. Through this interpretation both personal experience - the queue - and integrated national experience - the election - are understood as acts of endurance; twin pains that overlap and reinforce each other. Cohen's suffering mimics a larger national struggle. Barbara Biesecker (in Rice, 2012: 81-82) points to this association between individual and national hurt as producing a baseline for ideal citizenship. Examining the figure of the traumatised soldier in war narratives, she describes an idealised male "body in pain" scripted to disregard its own comfort and even give up life for a national cause. Building on Biesecker's argument, Jenny Rice (Ibid, 82) suggests that "this narrative calls for us too to put aside our indulgent differences and claims (race, gender, class, ability) and become true citizens, unmarked by public claims about the now. The true citizen is willing to suffer a private wound without public remark."

Suffering reifies citizenship. One is a good citizen not just because one votes but because one fights to vote; the nation is a successful nation because it overcomes obstacles and attains redemption. Off the back of this observation, Cohen's *Voting* could be reduced to a mere endorsement of South Africa's young democracy in its second term of office. Dragging his immobile legs behind him, he interfaces with and suffers alongside a national body.

His brand of "virtuous" citizenship departs from Rice's "true citizen", however, in that Cohen suffers indiscreetly. While enacting his allegiance to the nation and claiming his place as a "legitimate citizen" (MacKenny, 2004: 96), he anchors his vote to his own legibly queer body. Cohen is in exaggerated costume - "avant-garde drag", as he describes it (in Powell, 2010: 14) - which sets him

⁸⁴ The abject is all that is repulsive and fascinating at once: those practices, forces, people and things which abruptly throw the conscious ego off its routine axis (Kristeva, 1982: 3).

apart from the queue in which he inserts himself. His eroticism disrupts (and corrupts) the crowd's politically pure purpose. In this, *Voting* is perhaps a sequel to Cohen's role in '96 Pride. Visibly if not politically different, crawling on his hands and knees, the artist cannot be absorbed into a public sphere characterised by a rigidly conceived, self-abstracting disinterestedness, which Michael Warner (1993: 239) calls a rhetoric of disincorporation. That phrase describes the ability to become "bodiless" in the manner of straight, white, literate, affluent men. Cohen's citizenship is tied to a body that is as queer as it is resolutely national. Cohen hyperbolises his enfranchisement.

I like David Bell's (1995) term "citizen-pervert" as a descriptor for Cohen. The figure of the citizen-pervert, poised between sexual transgression and national participation, is always precarious. As sexual outlaws such individuals are subject to discipline and vulnerable to harm, but "society needs its citizen-perverts to act as markers of the limits of the moral economy of citizenship" (Ibid, 144). The instability of Cohen's position, his vulnerability, is what equips him to test the state of the nation. In doing so he exposes the inherently performative nature of citizenship itself and reveals the theatrical national participation that produces an electorate. Isin and Nyers make this point more clearly. "Citizenship (through raced, gendered and sexual modes) is performative, in the sense of constituting the identity it purports to be: in claiming to be a citizen one is enacting citizenship, and only in acting as a citizen can one become a citizen" (2014: 287).

Citizenship is processually constituted, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1. It is established through (and pre-empted by) a series of autonomous actions. However outrageously he does so, Cohen - by voting, claiming patriotism, and appealing to the right to freedom of expression - performs his citizenship and makes its borders visible.

Enactment does not always necessitate inclusion. As Cohen's intervention in the public ritual of voting reveals, unusual performances can cause discomfort if certain normative expectations of the category "citizen" (or "woman" or "human", etc.) are not met. Zanele Muholi's *Enraged by a Picture* makes this abundantly apparent, as do the responses elicited by Cohen's endurance ordeal in *Voting*. "As the artist waits in line for his turn to vote, people pass by posing questions such as 'What is it? Is that a person or...?'" Alvaro Lima (2012: 46) notes. He understates things. Cohen (in Powell, 2010: 14) remembers the comments as even more extreme: "I was called 'It, shit, that thing, freak, creature' within half an hour of arriving. I wasn't called art once..." This pattern continues in later work, with the artist (Ibid, 13) detailing the extent to which his practice leaves him open to emotional and physical injury:

I know what unsafe is because I have been there - in high heels and a wig. I have danced uninvited at an obedience dog show with a dildo up my arse. I have been removed from public space by the South Africa Police for indecency. I have been evicted from an AWB rally for looking beautiful. I have had a butt-plug (lit with sparklers) pulled out of my arse and been carried off a ramp by a bouncer at a bridal fashion show in a mall [...]

How does name-calling and the threat of violence come to constitute his relationship to citizenship, though, if indeed they can be said to do so? If, as Van der Watt (2004: 5) maintains, Cohen's strategy is to "occup[y] the 'injurious' terms of his subjectification," it is worth thinking about how those same terms have been used to constitute a public subjecthood in the first place. "It all begins with an insult," Didier Eribon (in Munt, 2012) points out, and an insult

is more than a word that describes. It is not satisfied with simply telling me what I am. If someone calls me a 'dirty faggot' (or 'dirty nigger' or 'dirty kike') that person is not trying to tell me something about myself. That person is letting me know that he or she has something on me, has power over me. First and foremost the power to hurt me, to mark my consciousness with that hurt [...]



Figure 34: Steven Cohen. 1998. *Pieces of You (Faggot)*. Documentation of performance at FNB Vita Dance Theatre, Johannesburg. Digital print on paper.

An insult is an assertion of power encoded with a relationship of dominance and submission. Like more material forms of violence, it takes on gendered, raced, classed and sexual meanings in accordance with the social work a user intends his or her name-calling to do. In Cohen's case the insult - "you freak" - takes as its object the contravener of norms, and attempts to regulate perceived deviance from those norms such as gender ambiguity, indeterminate "humanness" and public displays of sexuality. "When norms feel like laws, they constitute a social pedagogy of the rules for belonging and intelligibility whose narrowness threatens people's capacity to invent ways to attach to the world," Lauren Berlant contends (2011: 182). Exclusionary practices do not need to be mandated by law. If norms act as laws, they mediate belonging all by themselves.

Whatever terms it utilises, hate speech makes evident the power balance between listener and hearer. Injurious speech gains a foothold on the psyche not from the immediate impact of the words themselves but from repetition over time (Butler, 1997). Words become embodied through iteration.

For Cohen, the repetitious performance of an embodied injurious speech act is also a critique of the act itself. In later works, the artist resignifies the insult by occupying it anew. His alter ego Princess Menorah plays off, and revels in, anti-Semitic clichés. She bedazzles the Star of David on her skin, wears a graveyard on her skull, and makes of herself an outrageous caricature. *Pieces of you (Faggot)* (1998) [Figure 34] and the many sexually provocative performances that followed in its wake invoke the worst fears about homosexuality. Nominating himself a "faggot" and thereby reclaiming the word used to crush him, Cohen inserts a firecracker into his anus and rollerblades

around stage, guided by a rope that binds his arms together.⁸⁵ “The sparkler is because people are always saying, ‘Gay boys are like that, they should have firecrackers up their arses,’” says Cohen (Artthrob, 1998: n.p). Homophobic violence becomes the butt of the joke, so to speak.

Excessive physical discomfort and threats to his safety, both verbal and physical, are the common thread in Cohen’s performances. In seeking such experiences out, he names his own vulnerability as a habitable space, activating a liberatory politics of victimhood. He also chooses to inhabit this space as a monster, an outsider, a citizen-pervert. Cohen says (in Artthrob, 1998: n.p),

I’m messing with a society that is more shocked by the violence of my self-presentation as monster/queer/unrepresentable or whatever than by the actual violence they live with every day. It’s almost as if, because I’m alive and present – I’m more threatening than reality.

We inherit the term “monster” from the Latin *monere*, meaning “to warn” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). Monsters show us the worst in ourselves but in so doing they also help us to choose differently. “In seeking confirmation of our own secure subjecthood in what we are not, what we see mirrored in the monster are the leaks and flows, the vulnerabilities in our own embodied being” (Shildrick, 2001: 4). The monster is a window and a mirror.



Figure 35: Steven Cohen. 1997. *Altered ID Book*. Manipulated found object.

To conclude, I want to turn to another work by Cohen that has garnered comparatively little critical attention. Beneath the heading “Photograph of bearer” in his old identity document, the artist has fixed two photographs side by side. On the left is his serious sixteen year old schoolboy self; on the right, Princess Menora leers at the camera in full drag with blonde wig askew. The work is titled *Altered ID Book* [Figure 35]. It was first publically exhibited on the show *Camp Concentration* in 1997.

Two related things happen side by side in this work, one personal and one public. Cohen explicitly identifies himself, the bearer, as positioned multiply. He is his younger self (affirmed by later works that directly correlate the artist with his childhood image, such as *The Artist as Miss Margate*, 1997 [1968]) and he is also, if only because his ID document claims him to be, Princess Menorah. More

⁸⁵ In this wild performative self-hyperbole, there is a connection worth making to a shadowy (and often sublimated) sexual impulse Leo Bersani has termed “self-shattering” (1995). The word designates the void between exaggerated self-knowledge and a loss of conscious selfhood; a seductive imbalance found for Bersani in S/M scenes. Keguro Macharia’s (2011) is perhaps my favourite interpretation of the term. He imagines it as the sensation of “public sex on poppers”, all risk and mess. To me, Cohen’s work encapsulates this state.

significant for this argument is that Cohen chooses to bring these two selves together within the confines of national identification. He queers a primary signifier of belonging, thus figuring the possibility of self-transformation in the sphere of citizenship.

If subjectivities are, as Foucault (1983) argues, constituted by and rendered instrumental to power, Cohen subverts one of the many mechanisms by which that power is experienced. He does not reject the document on principle. Instead the artist remakes it in his own transgressive image.

Embodying the dyadic citizen-pervert, Cohen’s body is both within and outside the nation, threatened and threatening. Like Zanele Muholi he recognises the power gained by politicising this polyvalent position. Queer affect aliens, “those who are alienated by happiness,” can be creative: “Not only do we embrace possibilities that we are asked to give up, but we can create life worlds around these wants. Whilst we might insist on the freedom to be unhappy, we would not leave happiness behind us,” writes Sara Ahmed (2010: 218).

In very different ways Muholi and Cohen explore unhappiness, set it loose on the world and allow for its end.

Chapter 4_Passports to Elsewhere: Imaginative Citizenship and Utopian Futurity

May we not say then that imagination itself – through its utopian function – has a constitutive role in helping us rethink the nature of our social life? Is not utopia – this leap outside – the way in which we radically rethink what is family, what is consumption, what is authority, what is religion and so on? Does not the fantasy of the alternative society and its exteriorization “nowhere” work as one of the most formidable contestations of what is?

Paul Ricouer, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1987: 17)

They teased the Tanzanian about his interest in jewellery and perhaps he was gay, too? He laughed and said his possibilities were limitless.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “Jumping Monkey Hill” (2009: 113)

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s semi-autobiographical short story “Jumping Monkey Hill” (2009), a group of young African writers attend an elite writing workshop at a Cape Town resort. The Nigerian narrator Ujunwa reflects upon the experiences of her fellow authors as they navigate the patriarchal presence of the group’s leader Edward Campbell, an “Oxford-trained Africanist” (2009: 107). She is made increasingly uncomfortable by the way texts are received by Campbell, and finds herself on edge by the time a Senegalese writer mourning the death of her girlfriend takes the stage. Adichie describes a painful moment in which the speaker’s accent thickens as she becomes more emotional, “each t sounding like a z” (2009: 107). In the silence that follows,

Edward chewed at his pipe thoughtfully before he said that homosexual stories of this sort weren’t reflective of Africa, really.

‘Which Africa?’ Ujunwa blurted out (Ibid).

Her outburst is prompted by Campbell’s attempt to cast Africa as homogenous, knowable and in this case, ambiently heterosexual. It is a familiar refrain, serving the dual purpose of excluding sexual non-conformity from social life and valorising a dangerously essentialist notion of “authentic Africanness”. By rejecting this attempt to impose limits on the category “African,” Ujunwa introduces the possibility of multiple African stories and more radically, multiple Africas to house them. Real or imagined, emerging or immanent, possible or otherwise – to allow for these Africas is to allow for the telling of history in multiple voices and to invest in them is to consider, if only briefly, the prospect of somewhere beyond the spatial and temporal fixity of Campbell’s political present.

In deference to Ujunwa, I intend in this chapter to propose a cultural logic that hinges upon that utopian investment in possibility. Attending specifically to the role of utopia in nation-building and its place in the practice of citizenship, I begin by thinking through the failings of totalizing national utopias to represent difference. I specifically use this optic to examine a “utopian” moment in South Africa’s recent history, the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Having traced this particular trajectory I proceed to examine which Africa is hailed in the work of two contemporary cultural practitioners, artist Athi-Patra Ruga and performer and musician Umlilo (Siya Ngcobo). After theorist José E. Muñoz, I

predicate these other Africas not on a straight here and now but on a queer there and then. In an earlier published version of this text I looked with this aim in mind toward a broader notion of queer African futurity that transcends national and cultural boundaries (Stielau, 2015), but here I refine the scope of that attention and gesture in the direction of a South Africa-that-should-be, a South-Africa-not-yet-here and a South Africa to come. I ultimately intend to ask, like Kenyan literary critic Simon Gikandi before me, “How does one inscribe oneself between here and there?” (1996: 203).

4.1 Who inhabits utopia? The use-value of elsewheres and a South Africa-that-should-be

“Nations,” as Lauren Berlant puts it, “provoke fantasy” (1991: 1). Among these fantasies lies an ideal form of the association between national identity and more local and personal forms of intimacy. Via Nathaniel Hawthorne’s reading of American political history, Berlant terms this interaction “utopia” (Ibid, 7). She sets up a paradigm in which the nation splices the political to the utopian and binds both to a body marked by their meeting: for her, the figure of the citizen. It is a union I have called upon before in this text, although perhaps never as explicitly, and it runs through my attempts to describe a model South African citizenship and to map the perimeters of its embodiment. Before engaging local projects in a utopian vein, I want to more closely examine this crucial interface between the personal, the national and the utopian.

It is no accident that utopianism as a genre emerges alongside the birth of the modern nation-state. In fact, if Eric Hobsbawm (1990) is taken at his word, utopian states predate the contemporary nation⁸⁶ as a political configuration. Lyman Tower Sargent (1976) estimates that 1500 textual utopias have been drafted from 1516 to 1975, appearing in the oeuvres of authors as far apart as Francis Bacon and Ursula Le Guin. So popular is the thought and so profound its political impact that in *Imaginary Communities*, Phillip Wegner (2002) chooses to call narrative utopias the quintessential genre of modernity. To Wegner these “cultural lures” play a vital role in constituting the nation-state as a social, cultural and spatial entity; one imaginary community underscoring the manifestation of another. In its capacity to script political experience, Wegner thus suggests that utopian thought consolidates the nation in the autonomous, regulative shape it takes today. But according to what imperatives, and with what national community in mind?

Inaugurating the genre, Sir Thomas More’s⁸⁷ fictional island of Utopia⁸⁸ provides insight into the nation-building imperatives of early utopianism. Conceived in socio-political and spatial terms More’s Utopia is inhabited by a citizenry defined by their exteriority and bounded political

⁸⁶ Hobsbawm (1990: 15-25) remarks that the word “nation” is a relative newcomer to a political lexicon. Its referent, the product of a specific and localised conjuncture, is equally young, and its equation of “the people” with “the state” in collective sovereignty is most likely bound up in the economic development of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

⁸⁷ More coined the word “Utopia” in a 1516 tract on the subject originally titled *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, de optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula Utopia*. This translates rather wonderfully as “A truly golden little book, no less beneficial than entertaining, of a republic’s best state and of the new island Utopia” (Fortunati, 2000: 152). Classical antecedents appear to have originated with the Roman writer Virgil and the Greek philosopher Plato, among others (Sargent, 2010: 16).

⁸⁸ Etymologically the word ‘Utopia’ marries the negative prefix “ou” to the Greek *topos*, or land, to mean nowhere or no place. Although fictional, this nowhere has the capacity to texture or abraid the here and now, posing the possibility of “everyday life as transformed” in order to enable transformation of the everyday (Sargent, 2010: 4). Bearing this in mind, I capitalise those Utopias that functions as fictional states, but otherwise refer to small-u utopia and utopianism to indicate the idea as genre and as method.

collectivity. The author describes radically sovereign subjects (in Jagose, 1994: 2) that “exist in a state of independence with respect to the culture [...] live in a position free from institutions and existing laws and [...] circumscribe a separate space that benefits from its external, independent position”. Equality, cultivated through distance from a world deemed inadequate, is the central social dogma of this hypothetical society. This has been presented as foundational to many subsequent utopian projects (Claeys, 2011: 8).

With deep roots in economic egalitarianism and revolutionary coalition, utopian thought in More’s wake is understandably bound up in the history of socialism. Both are world-making projects which converge in their social and political orientations and share demands. Jameson (1977: 3) goes so far as to argue that utopia becomes “a transparent synonym for socialism itself, and the enemies of Utopia sooner or later turn out to be the enemies of socialism.” This is not always an easy or comfortable alliance, as evidenced in Marx and Engels infamous critique⁸⁹ of Utopian Socialism, but there can be no doubt that the notion of Utopia, like socialism, poses a threat to the fabric of political life as it is. Even its earliest forms offer a vision of national equality.

More’s perfect social order is only obtainable through the sublimation of individual desire for the greater good, in this case taken (in keeping with the author’s quasi-religious humanism) to be the good of the collective. Individualism, privacy and vice⁹⁰ are threats to this way of being and the state that enforces it, and homogeneity is paramount. By dismantling subnational definitions of community, More volunteers a singular notion of belonging that relies upon dis-incarnating the citizen-subject. Citizenship often depends on inhibiting the production of identifications beyond the national – Chantal Mouffe famously argues that “an active conception of citizenship [...] should be] prior to and independent of individual desires and interests” (1992: 377) – but in Utopia, difference (racial, sexual or political) verges on inconceivable.

The transgressive potential of identities “free from [...] existing laws” in More’s original text is further complicated by the author’s dependence on an old social standard. Male primacy is guaranteed, with each household under the guardianship of an older man. Utopia itself is ruled by a wise and elderly all-male council. In this, More’s Utopia is not alone. Mapping utopianism of the age Sargent points out in *Themes in Utopian Fiction before Wells* (1976) that, “There is a particular concern that women in general and wives in particular be obedient” and “[...] a good society will result if each person knows and keeps his or her place. And punishment is right and sure for those who violate the rules.” The perfect commonwealth seemingly depends on a patriarchal elective state, strictly policed.

Accusations of authoritarianism have justifiably amassed around ensuing utopias. Zygmunt Bauman writes of modern utopias as *necessitating* extreme social control. “Utopia is a vision of a closely watched, monitored, administered and daily managed world. Above all, it is a vision of a pre-designed world, a world in which prediction and planning stave off the play of chance,” he asserts (1976: 230). Jill Dolan takes this point further still, arguing that “fascism and utopia can skirt dangerously close to each other” (2001: 457), and charting the extent to which authoritarian

⁸⁹ Marx is at most ambivalent about the role of utopianism. On the one hand, he and Engels argue that within utopia lies the raw, imaginative material of change. On the other, the pair hold that utopian thought has no real bearing upon present conditions. By its nature utopia is a world resting upon hope rather than a blueprint for social reform. The pair’s oft-quoted (and decidedly utopian) conclusion is: “The working class... have no ready-made utopias to introduce. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing society is pregnant” (in Jacoby, 2007: 189).

⁹⁰ The price to be paid for More’s version of equality is the renunciation of vice, enforced by a regime that borders on the autocratic. Subversive elements are contained and drinking (“the alehouse”), promiscuous non-reproductive sex (“the brothel”), laziness and “indecent leisure” are verboten. Slavery and war, and the moral and social authority both assume, are necessities (Claeys, 2011: 65).

political regimes fall within the ambit of utopian thought experiments.⁹¹ For Dolan, a universal social consensus is only achievable by restricting personal freedoms.

If I take seriously Dolan’s concern around the regulative social and cultural standards of Utopia, it becomes necessary to query whose utopia is at stake, whose freedoms risk compromise, and what “ideal” nation-citizen relation is ratified between the two poles. Ash Amin (2009: 27) highlights the danger of a utopia that replicates hegemonic social relations. He speaks to a side-effect of today’s globally uncertain future: a melancholic longing for a White Utopia⁹², before, outside and beyond today’s plural society. Resisting the manifold challenges of globalism, this attachment “expresses a longing for the unambiguous sense of place that imperial and colonial supremacy secured”. It is a yearning for the times when national belonging meant “White security, certainty, community and confidence, propped up by the rituals of green and pleasant land, regal tradition, discipline, manners, deference, and the honesty and innocence of industry, working-class humour, cheeky urchins [and] cohesive neighbourhoods” (Ibid).

Amin critiques a propensity to re-centre whiteness by dividing societies along religious, ethno-national and civilizational lines. He sees this at work in an international politics of vigilance and paranoia that is gaining popularity, resulting in increasingly ossified national borders. For the author, the longing for a pre-multicultural Utopia breeds, even demands, belligerent nationalism. Authoritarianism is not its risk but its effect.

As I have presented the idea thus far, Utopia appears to be an exclusionary political community that, like the nation-state in whose history it is entangled, opens its borders only to those in possession of an appropriate passport. None of the aforementioned characteristics fully impart the political potential of utopian thought, however. That is a conclusion I draw, at least in part, from Paul Ricouer’s (1987) reading of Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia*, an extract of which opened this chapter. Following Mannheim, Ricouer maintains that by operating in a dialectical relationship with ideology, or the world as it is, utopia defamiliarises that which we take for granted. “From ‘nowhere’ springs the most formidable question of what is,” he contends (Ibid, 19). From an external position the utopian is equipped to remain subversive and critique existing authority structures. Even as they may reproduce or magnify existing systems, then, utopias can also provide the tools for their undoing.

Let me offer a local example to better illustrate this operation and to mark its convergence with the other properties of utopia. The 1995 Rugby World Cup in South Africa is perhaps the closest this country has come in recent years to a utopian event in the sense that Ricouer uses the term. With South Africa’s democracy still very much in its infancy, the success of the Rugby World Cup bid heralded the possibility of a nation-as-it-might be: a becoming-nation⁹³ in which a new political landscape could be surveyed and eventually traversed.

The World Cup was the first major international sporting event hosted in post-apartheid South Africa and its culmination in victory for the South African team represented “an irrevocable break with the apartheid past and a positive vision of the future” (Rees, 1996: 22). That is, the success of the South African team functioned symbolically to announce the success of the shiny new

⁹¹ See Andrew Roberts’ *Postcards from Utopia: the Art of Political Propaganda* (2009) for visual examples of the fascist-utopic coupling in national culture.

⁹² Amin does not use this exact phrase but it is strongly implied in his essay.

⁹³ The Deleuzian formulation becoming-nation can be imagined as a “dynamic, inclusive and heterogeneous multiplicity of subjectivities immanently constituted not by any unity or identity but by the consistency of their attributes,” writes Elmo Gonzanga (2009: 64) of this compound term. To become-nation is to recognise the qualities shared by a society but not at the expense of erasing those that continue to divide it.



Figure 36: "One Team, One Country." The Springbok Rugby Team, Newlands Stadium, 1995.



Figure 37: "Still One Team, Still One Country." The 1995 South African Springbok Team reunite, 2015. Newlands Stadium. Photo credit to the South African Rugby Union.

national body for which they stood. Yet never before (and never since, perhaps with the exception of moments in the 2010 FIFA World Cup) has South African identity been stage-managed so aggressively or on such a scale; our heterogeneous society construed so emphatically as unified or our national future positioned quite so tantalizingly just over the horizon.

In the era of their mass media dissemination - what Jhally (1989) terms the sports/media complex - sporting events have been instilled with enormous cultural capital. The sports team has long been an emblem of civic pride, but the heightened prominence of competition in a televisual era ("the world is watching") has amplified athletic victories and failures many times over and afforded them national resonance. Wary of politicised sport in the age of world wars, George Orwell (1945) envisages sports fields as the playground of militaristic nationalism - as he puts it, war minus the shooting. To Orwell the major sports event, much like the nation, demands "the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige" (Ibid). It is for this same reason - the fostering of a collective consciousness through fealty to a "larger unit" - that displays of athletic prowess amount to a festival of nation-building, exerting vast symbolically unifying power (Rowe, 2004: 22-3).

On June 24, 1995, the South African rugby team, the Springboks,⁹⁴ beat New Zealand 15-12 in a final played to massive crowds at Ellis Park stadium. They won in overtime. Current South African Rugby Union President Oregan Hoskins describes it as "the greatest day in Rugby History" and "a moment that astonished a nation and provided one of the foundation stones for the country we were to become" (Sports24, 2015). That significance is not awarded to the event retrospectively; quite the opposite. If its wildly optimistic media reception is any indication, the Rugby World Cup was presented as an opportunity to overhaul the nation from the ground up.

First, it would reinvent the game of rugby itself. When newly-elected president Nelson Mandela donned a Number 6 Springbok jersey⁹⁵ to shake the hand of white Captain Francois Pienaar, "[t]his unique statesman's gesture [...] overturned a former hated bastille of racist privilege and created a talismanic club of equality" (David Miller in Desai and Nabbi, 2007: 403). Then, having purged rugby of its segregated past, the event would heal a nation fractured along racial lines. As *The Cape Times* (in Farquharson and Marjoribanks, 2003) gushes,

The final whistle of the Rugby World Cup on Saturday which established the Springboks as the rugby champions unleashed a night of celebration that united South Africans across the country [...] 'Forget about the old South Africa,' said Mr Morena Kgosana of Soweto. 'This is the new South Africa. We are united now.'

Invested with the promise of a better future and with it, a present that could (and would) undergo reconstruction, World Cup discourse is charged with fierce utopian sentiment. Chasms would be bridged and wounds healed, while the past would be put firmly behind us.

In keeping with this agenda, the Springbok squad played under the new nationalist slogan "One Team, One Country" [Figure 36]. In part this may have been an attempt to counteract the Apartheid era connotations of their logo, which had come to symbolise a White Supremacist form of bounded citizenship (Farquharson and Marjoribanks, 2003: 30). Although debates around the value of the Springbok brand would rage for years to come (Merrit, 2003), the merging of team and nation was initially effective. On either side of that comma, the Springboks briefly *became* South Africa.

⁹⁴ In a curious facsimile of Orwell's sentiment, the team have been described as "Rainbow Warriors" linking the discourses of rainbowism, sport and war (Farquharson and Marjoribanks, 2003: 34).

⁹⁵ Six was Pienaar's number, visually analogising the two men and also forging a connection between Pienaar's leadership of the team and Mandela's guardianship of the nation.

Spectacularised on the field was not just a rugby match but SA's triumphant exit from a long interregnum and return to a global fold. The utopian theme of "One Team, One Country" is categorical enforced in the opening ceremony. White singer PJ Powers delivers the following lines to backing provided by choral group Ladysmith Black Mambazo:

There's a dream I feel
So rare, so real
All the world in union
The world as one
Gathering together
One mind, one heart
Every creed, every colour
Once joined, never apart

"The World in Union" was the official anthem of the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Although the song is themed around global harmony, contextual emphasis fell strongly on a South Africa united by a common purpose (Evans, 2010: 321). "One mind, one heart" approximates "one team, one country" in a very literal fashion. Significantly, the framing device of the lyrics is a utopian dream and not a reality.

On closer examination the utopian façade of the World Cup is flaking and fragile. The racial homogeneity of the team (all white but for one player of colour, Chester Williams) seems a strange counterpoint to the non-racialism espoused in the discourse that buoyed them along. This could not be excused as a hangover from the Apartheid era, either. By 1996 the team would be momentarily restored to a uniform complexion when an injured Williams was replaced by hooker Henry Tromp, convicted in 1993 of beating a sixteen-year-old black employee to death (Desai and Nabbi, 2007: 404). Today's 31-man squad includes only eight players of colour (Godwin, 2015). The 1995 team also presented a poignant logistical issue to team manager Morné du Plessis, tasked with ensuring that the squad could pronounce the Xhosa, Sotho and Zulu components of the new national anthem (Carlin, 2007).

The opening ceremony was rife with further contradiction. Diverging from the claim made in "The World in Union" that "we must take our place in history / and live with dignity," the televised spectacle was fervently ahistorical. Author J.M. Coetzee (in Evans, 2010: 321) describes it as an amalgamation of tourist tropes and patriotic pastiche. Emphasis was placed on ethnic cultural performances that bordered on the stereotypical, featuring "contented tribesfolk and happy mineworkers, as in the Old South Africa, but purified and sanctified by the Rainbow" (Ibid). The bodies of performers become props in a grand public relations pantomime of rainbowism staged for local and international audiences, which included a scene of black children clad in mine overalls and helmets streaming onto the field. A symbol of (heterosexual) national futurity, the child is here also produced as the symbol of a non-threatening black citizenry equipped for labour (Evans, 2010: 321-2). Raced and acculturated subjects are thus transformed into orderly national subjects, and remain "national" only inasmuch as they perform the predetermined difference ascribed to them.

A highly-visible sporting event also serves the interests of hegemonic masculinities. Contact sports like rugby reinforce, promote and legitimise a set of traditionally masculine values: strength, agility, competition, aggression and so on (Connell, 1995). This in turn generates a masculine subjectivity reliant on keeping femininity, or the failed masculinity it represents in this equation, at bay.

Jacqueline Maingard (1997) describes two noteworthy incidents in the 1995 World Cup in which New Zealand Player Jonah Lomu was singled out for homophobic abuse due to lagging energy, equated with effeminacy. Seen in close-up during the televised New Zealand v. South Africa final, a fan's banner reads "Rather be small⁹⁶ than Homu," while at the end of the match a South African player shouts audibly from the locker-room, "Lomo is a homo" (Ibid, 23). Each incident puns on Lomu's surname to homophobic effect. As Maingard suggests, these are moments in which the newly capacious nation suddenly shrinks (Ibid, 23 - 4) to become an unambiguously heterosexual utopia.

And how capacious was this new nation, really? Of the World Cup victory, cleric Cosmos Desmond argues that it merely "enabled White People to feel good, their white chauvinism having been legitimated by the GNU [Government of National Unity]" but offered little by way of lasting change for an historically oppressed majority (in Merrett, 2003: 41). The nation-building agenda of the World Cup could, and did, veil the particularities of individual experience and the histories that informed their difference in circumstance. When the crowds dispersed and the euphoria waned, chauvinism, heterosexuality and white supremacy endured. Acknowledging this, Crawford (1999: 134) calls the event "a fragment of transcendent time." It was utopian, sure, but it was brief. It passed.

Karl Mannheim's (2013: 179) description of a utopian mentality suggests the ways in which the Rugby World Cup blueprinted a failed utopia. For Mannheim a utopian drive must necessarily fray the bonds of what is. This should not be an ahistorical gesture. Rather, an existing order will "giv[e] birth to utopias which in turn break the bonds of [that] existing order, leaving it free to develop in the direction of the next order of existence" (Ibid). Within this chain of succession every new social order, and every new nation, insists upon belief in a better future that is nonetheless governed by, and in response to, the past. Mannheim's is an observation that grants pathos to the 2015 reunion of the 1995 squad. The team pose for a photograph on the Newlands Rugby Field in an echo of their original publicity image [Figure 37]. At their feet a banner reads "Still One Team, Still One Country". The addition of the word "still" optimistically assumes a continuation from 1995 to the present - a utopian dream that retains its potency - but it could equally imply arrested motion. A "still...nation" is a South Africa held immobile by a past that has yet to give way to a future.

Clint Eastwood's "inspiring true story" *Invictus* (2009), based on events leading up to the 1995 Rugby World Cup, illustrates how time can influence the exchange value of utopia's affective currency. Nelson Mandela (Morgan Freeman) turns to address Francois Pienaar (Matt Damon):

Mandela: How do you inspire your team to do their best?

Pienaar: By example. I've always thought to lead by example, sir...

Mandela: Well, that is right. That is exactly right. But how do we get them to be better than they think they can be? That is very difficult, I find. Inspiration, perhaps. How do we inspire ourselves to greatness when nothing less will do? How do we inspire everyone around us?

In this case "everyone around us" entails the entire South African nation and the global community of which it forms part. Acknowledging his influence as expansive, Freeman's Mandela muses rhetorically on bettering not just current circumstances but our conviction in their ideal expression. His is a utopian question to ask of the political present: how do we move beyond not just that which is, but the best we believe it can be?

⁹⁶ A reference to South African Player James Small, whose presence on the field is thus taken to be the opposite of "homu" or homosexual.

Filmed nearly a decade and a half after the events it describes, *Invictus* received criticism for its commercialised idealism. Critic Xan Brooks writes, “The implication is that, by the time our hero [Mandela] takes his seat at the world cup finals, none of [South Africa’s past tensions] was ever a problem again” (2010). Sukhdev Sandhu (2010) asks another question the film leaves unaddressed: “Why is [director, Clint] Eastwood, whose films have always been keener on the drama of revenge than on reconciliation, making this now?” To Sandhu, the film belongs to a moment that has passed. The accompanying accusation, of an ignoble reality that dates both film and sentiment, marks the World Cup as an unrealised utopia.

Utopianism certainly holds within itself the potential for entirely new ways of developing and belonging to a community. In opening the very project of belonging to critique, a utopian impulse has the ability to look beyond the here and now and activate change. Wegner puts this succinctly: while “[utopias] are not real in that they portray actual places in the world”, they “are real [...] in that they have material, pedagogical, and ultimately political effects, shaping the ways people understand and, as a consequence, act in their worlds” (2006: xvi). But utopias can fall short, and when they do, the betrayal is all the greater. The first comment underneath a Media24 news article publicising the 2015 reunion of the Springbok squad encapsulates this consequence [Figure 38]. Quoting from the article above, Deon Kruger writes, “We proudly celebrate this day as a rugby family, as the day Nelson Mandela helped unite a nation.” Below it, he has added only one disparaging word that utterly rejects 1995’s utopian dream: “Really.”



Figure 38: Deon Kruger’s comment on the story, “1995 Rugby World Cup Squad honoured for greatest day in SA rugby history”. 2015. *Sports24*. Available www.sport24.co.za/Rugby?Springbok-Heritage/1995-RWC-squad-honoured-for-greatest-day-in-SA-rugby-history-20150624 [2015, 12 October]

Is the dismissal of a poorly realised utopia all that remains for the nation, though? And can a utopian society only be imagined within the confines of an existing patriarchal, racist, heteronormative order? What of possible utopias that operate within (and are imagined by) those who find themselves on the margins of society already? What new vantage point might that position grant?

4.2 Onward to Azania: The not-yet-here South Africa

In what I consider a utopian project, Athi-Patra Ruga shrugs off the ontological certitude of Deon Kruger’s dismissal. Rather than dwell on the spectral nation we have yet to expel from memories of the 1995 Rugby World Cup, a South-Africa-that-should-have-been, the artist chooses to expand the horizon of what is imaginable as a nation. His land of Azania is not “uncontaminated” by difference

or characterised by stable membership. Instead, Ruga’s critical utopianism heeds the material and identity-based claims of gendered, raced and sexual citizen-subjects, to pose what I read here as the possibility of a hopeful South-Africa-that-might-be.

In an inversion of Thomas More’s vision, Azania is a matriarchy under the authority of a “pantheon of ladies.” The nation’s leader, her Majesty the Versatile Queen and Autocrat of all Azania, Ivy, is a “semi-absolute monarch” resembling a cross between Rhianna and Lady Godiva (Ruga, 2013: n.p.). Queen Ivy’s full title speaks to the fluidity of her social role and is also a contradiction in terms. An autocrat retains full social power, which the Queen evidently does not exercise. In name alone, Ivy destabilises the definition of authoritarian rule.

Azania is a similarly complex and contradictory space. Although employed as a fiction to contextualise work produced since 2010, Ruga’s is not the first Azania. Theories about the origin of the name abound, but among the most common is that Azania is a Greek transcription of the Arabic word *Ajam* in reference to the East African shore, incorporating the Iranian *zanj* meaning black or possibly the Zulu *zanzi*, or South (Wauchope, 2013: n.p.). While it had cropped up in loose relation to sub-Saharan Africa before, the Pan-African Congress claimed the word as a struggle name for South Africa in the late 1960s. In 2014 their annual newsletter is still called *The Azanian Brief*.⁹⁷

It is worth mentioning that in several academic articles emerging out of the Black Consciousness movement in the late 1980s and early 90s, Azania is used as a textual device to directly index futurity. In the case of Buzan and Nazareth’s study “South Africa vs Azania: the Implication of Who Rules,” for example, the name operates as “a shorthand to distinguish between the current, minority ruled [Apartheid] government and a future, majority- rule one” (1986: 25). By connecting the signifier Azania to the referent of a better nation, Buzan and Nazareth summon the possibility of that nation into being. The word Azania stands not for South Africa, then, but perhaps more truly for a not-yet-here South Africa.

The not-yet-here, a node of meaning adopted by Jose Muñoz from the work of philosopher Ernst Bloch, acts as a beacon for mobilizing queer utopian thought. It represents an inventive and improvisational horizon of possibility, at once just out of reach and up for grabs. In light of this Muñoz opens his compelling book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* with the thought,

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. To put it another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality (2009: 1).

Having joined “the not yet here” and the queer, Muñoz follows Heidegger in arguing that futurity is history’s dominant organising principle, and presents queerness as interfacing with that standard by appropriating and reimagining the conditions of the future. His thesis formulates queer identity as a mode of becoming amounting to “a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity” (2009: 16). Within this rubric, the queer “not-yet-here” is an attack on stultifying pragmatism, a break with what is and a striving for what could be.

How does the not-yet-here of Ruga’s Azania work in the service of Muñoz’s queer futurity, then?

⁹⁷ See http://www.pac.org.za/docs/AZANIAN_BRIEF_JAN_2014.pdf for details.



Figure 39: Athi-Patra Ruga. 2013. *Lands of Azania (2014- 2094)*. Thread on Tapestry Canvas. 200 x 180cm.

Lands of Azania (2014-2094) [Figure 39] sees Ruga map his fictional topography, his utopia, for the first time. By demarcating Africa's easternmost horizons in a re-imagin[ing] of colonial borders, he remakes the continent in his own image. Nation-states like Azania, Trans-Sabal, Zwartheid and Sodom infringe upon the real-world landscape of Somalia and Eritrea. There is a clear homage here to conceptual artist Alighiero e Boetti's vast world map tapestries, but where Boetti (in Schwabsky, 2012: n.p) maintains that "the world is as it is (I didn't draw it) and the national flags are as they are (I didn't design them) [...] in short, I did absolutely nothing," Ruga conceives of an Africa not as it is nor as it should be but as it might be; as a utopian no/where.

In shrugging off the limits of the "is" in favour of crafting another world, the artist also dismisses the established cultural systems for which that fixed present has come to stand: capitalism and heteronormativity (Muñoz, 2009: 12). Whereas queerness is regularly lost in the straight mind's mapping of space (Ibid), *Lands* offers a world in which it might be found afresh. Ruga actively privileges queer space, with sexualised or sexually suggestive nations like Sodom and Trans-Sabal⁹⁸ allowing him to simultaneously eroticise cartography and purge the epistemic violence of imperial land claims. His world-making project thereby subverts straight space, in the sense that it modifies geographies zoned for primarily heterosexual lives and experiences. And that same straight space is undeniably colonial space too. Laid like a transparency over the borders that divided Africa and made it possessable, Ruga's Azania reclaims as it resurfaces.

The artist's inclusion of familiar locations like Somalia warrants further consideration. Why (re)turn to an Africa that is still recognisable? By choosing incorporation over annexation, Ruga's mapping of existing nations arguably presents the territory of Azania as an in-between space stretching from known to unknown. In this sense, Azania's landscape - and the nations that constitute her commonwealth, bearing Ruga's mark and his chosen names - bump up against the here and now. Azania is a borderland between the two.

Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (1999), describes borderlands (her borderlands, in this case, stretching through the desert between the States and Mexico) as indeterminate spaces. They demarcate the line between "us and them" but are not themselves oppositional. Instead these thresholds are a rupture in the everyday world, a scar that multiplies the possibilities on either side. Neither one thing nor the other, they become "a third element which is greater than the sum of its parts" (1999: 101). For Anzaldúa that third element is a source of transformative power, the fraught but creative space of *mestiza* or hybrid consciousness. It is also a space in which, utopically, new identities and futures might be born. In its status as the frontier between an Africa of today and a queer, unfamiliar landscape of who-knows-when, Ruga's *Lands of Azania* resonates with Anzaldúa's borderlands. It is not merely a destination and certainly not a place of residence. It is a bridge.

Temporally the imagined landscape is no less ambitious in scope. Utopia encompasses not only a not-yet-here but a not-yet-now. Ruga gestures to this by adding, like an afterthought, a time frame to his Azania project. Although the exhibition "Future White Women of Azania" (of which *Lands of Azania* forms part) took place in 2013 at WhatiftheWorld Gallery in Woodstock, Cape Town, a parenthesised date "(2014-2094)" delineates an empire that begins as that chapter of the artist's production ends. For Ruga, Azania extends beyond the temporal and spatial margins of the present and into the future. That future is a destination defined by visual excess, by syncretic colour and by wild and excessive gesture.

⁹⁸ In geographic terms, "trans" derives from the Latin meaning across or beyond. It has more recently been used as an abbreviation for transgender, or the state of gender identity not aligning to biological sex. "Sabal" is also phonetically similar to "sable," or black.

A unifying thread in this sweeping oeuvre is a utopic imperative I aim to call (after Theodore Adorno) a determined negation. Adorno, in dialogue with Ernst Bloch, defines utopia as existing “essentially in [...] the determined negation of that which merely is.” He goes on to explain that by concretising itself as something forcefully false, “[utopia] always points at the same time to that which should be” (1988: 12). Something of that negation beats in the conceptual heart of *Performa Obscura* (2012), Ruga’s collaboration with artist Mikhael Subotzky. Staged for the first time as part of the exhibition “Making Way: Contemporary Art from South Africa and China” in Grahamstown, the work sees Ruga, dressed as “The Future White Woman of Azania” in a cluster of multi-coloured balloons, tights and high heels, stride through the city. His circuitous journey takes him via back routes and side streets, leaving behind the city centre to navigate the surrounding townships [Figure 40]. In a final climactic scene, Ruga arrives at “The Winged Figure of Peace”⁹⁹ statue on a traffic island in the middle of High Street. He rubs his balloons against the statue until they burst, releasing fluid. When the artist departs, the stain remains.

There is something deeply autoerotic about this series of actions. Though he performs in public Ruga appears oblivious to his surroundings. He provokes responses from his audience that he does not actively solicit. His journey culminates in destroying the Future White Woman he has conjured into being in an act of frottage against a symbol of Empire. Here, the artist’s determined negation demands the sacrifice of his own elaborate creation, amounting to a becoming in space and in time that is unbecoming, and un-becomes. Ruga’s post-exertion exhaustion is the dominant mood as *Performa* concludes and he exits, expression ecstatic.

In the walk through Grahamstown Ruga negates again. He is an alien in the orderly urban landscape of the city laid out by long dead colonial city planners. Although not made with his body in mind, he makes the space his own in his role as artist-*flâneur*. To walk in the city is to claim a right of passage, demanding access to the full breadth of metropolitan public life that passage represents. In this sense walking unimpeded is a political act, allowing Ruga to occupy the terrain and reject its historic exclusion of queer black subjects. His presence, in turn, changes the space. Crowds attracted by the unfamiliar spectacle give way around him; cars come to a sudden halt. The dominant spatial and temporal organisation of the Grahamstonian world is compromised by his otherworldly figure, far removed from familiar taxonomies of race and gender. This queer reordering is suggested by the title of the show – a literal making way – contained for the length of the performance in the not-here and not-now. Ruga breathes life into the polymorphous perversity of Azania as another time and place trail in his wake. Furthermore, by bursting balloons that stain, he enacts the possibility of a permanent spatial re-inscription.

Critic Athi Mongezeleli Joja makes a convincing if ruthless case for a reading of Ruga’s work as “flirt[ing] with the crumbled but happy-clappy post-1994 mumbo jumbo” (2013: n.p.). In eviscerating “Future White Woman of Azania,” he dismisses the entire body of work as parodic nationalism with its manicured toes in colonial pedagogy. Joja finds Ruga guilty not of repressing the political but of ascribing to a brand of rainbowism. As a result, he deems this particular utopian project insufficiently radical. This idea is advanced again in another recent review of Joja’s, in which he argues that, “even the term Azania is mere hypothesis without purpose” and dismisses Ruga’s “tired reduction[ism]” accordingly (2015: n.p.).

⁹⁹ A memorial to soldiers “who died for the [British] empire” from the surrounding area, the statue was erected in 1906 to commemorate the Anglo-Boer war and includes an inscription approved by Rudyard Kipling (De Wet, 2010: n.p.). It reads, “They came of that same stubborn stock that stood / at Rannimede for freedom without fear / wherefore they gave the treasure of their blood / to stablish [sic] freedom here.”



Figure 40: Athi-Patra Ruga. 2012. *Performa Obscura*, Grahamstown. Video documentation still.

In some ways perhaps Joja is right. Ruga’s work certainly shares more ground with Alain Badiou’s (2007) injunction to live without ideals than it does the immediate demands of a politically radical present. It is less a manifesto for change than a reflection on alternatives, on other places. I would argue, though, that Ruga’s very ecstatic negation of the political present – his offer of a body apolitic, if you like – is potentially a queer gesture. It reminds us that ecstasy, so readily co-opted into the larger emotional registers of sexuality, derives from the Latin *ekstasis*, meaning to stand outside oneself (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). The ecstatic excess of *Performa Obscura* produces an unstable subjecthood, a not-me. Beside itself with excess, the discomfort the work arouses in the viewer is also the bedrock that Alexander Doty maintains upholds many queer cultural texts. “Queer positions, queer readings, and queer pleasures are part of a reception space that stands simultaneously *beside and within* that created by heterosexual and straight positions,” he explains (1993: 14, my emphasis).

This position takes shape in Ruga’s most recent instalment of The Future White Woman of Azania saga, *The Elder of Azania* (2015). I attended the first performance of this piece on South African soil at the Grahamstown National Arts festival, where it was housed in the 1820 Settlers National Monument. It goes without saying that the settlers in this case are white, and the fact that the monument resembles a sailing ship from afar is no accident. In an elegant continuation of his earlier intervention in the same city, Ruga stages his piece at the heart of another symbol of Empire: the colonising vessel.

The Elder is a strange work, representing a move from an Azania imagined along national lines to a space of near-absurdity. Although it takes place on a stage and is greeted by dimming lights, the performance bears little formal relationship to the conventions of theatre. There is no narrative, no real chronology and no clearly defined beginning or end. The work is preceded by a painfully long period without action in which Ruga monotonously recites the royal lineage of Azania over the sound-system. The audience becomes increasingly restless, perhaps unsure how to access a



Figure 41: Athi-Patra Ruga. 2015. *The Elder of Azania*. Performance documentation. Photo credit to Renée Holleman

temporal arrangement which seems out of place in the context of a theatre-centric Arts Festival. Confused and affronted, some people leave.

When student volunteers slowly march onto stage clad in the balloon-wear of Azania, they also take their time to engage one another at first [Figure 41]. Eventually, stumbling in heels, they ritualistically touch/fight/fuck (the action itself is hard to read) and mercilessly destroy each balloon costume. The balloons deposit their array of contents, from talcum powder to neon paint to Christmas lights. When the actors depart, all that remains is this psychedelic residue smeared by the passage of many feet. The work is set to a projection of remixed nature documentary images in black, white and vividly keyed-up neon; an image of an Africa uncorrupted by human presence. Ruga's opulent aesthetic, pushed to its confusing limit here, resists easy reading or the imposition of normative logics.

Rather than understand the action of *The Elder* as refusing all interpretation, however, I choose to take its ritualized engagement as emblematic of transformation and transference - from one state to another, from one body to another, from the time of the cast to the time of the audience. "Queer performance," writes Muñoz in *Disidentifications*, "[...] is about transformation, about the powerful and charged transformation of the world, about the world that is born through performance" (1999: xiv). Briefly but forcefully, Ruga offers a glimpse of an impossible world that infuses a high-fashion aesthetic with Western fears of a "dark continent". He "perform[s] a queer world" (Ibid). The artist thus calls attention to the world of the present, into which Azania stretches luminous tendrils from the stage. The Grahamstownian audience - mostly white, mostly middle-class - are made uncomfortable by a performance that is not wholly for their benefit.

Soon the lights come up and people trickle out. The lifespan of a queer world is fleeting. Utopian impulses that transform the here and now are elliptical and, as the Rugby World Cup has evidenced previously, ephemeral. Azania is "a place and a myth but somewhere in between it got lost and forgotten" (Ruga, 2014: n.p.). Such no/places, of which Ruga's is an exemplar, traffic in the fragmentary, refusing a symbolic order with immediate real world application in favour of the metaphoric and the mythic.

A utopian analysis in the same vein could too readily exert no practical bearing on social change. What, if anything, can utopia offer the present? "Utopia," Jameson says, "is not a representation but an operation calculated to disclose the limits of our own imagination of the future, the lines beyond which we do not seem able to go in imagining changes in our own society and world" (2010: 23). Epps and Katz (2007) expand upon this definition as it pertains to sexuality, proposing that future-directed though utopia may be, utopianism arises from the recognition of queer suffering in the here and now. I turn in the next section to an artist whose oeuvre takes queerness as the marker for, and the provocation to think about, a radical future with consequences for that here and now.

4.3 "There's a fire coming":¹⁰⁰ A South-Africa-to-come

In the music video for "Magic Man," the first single off his¹⁰¹ second EP *Aluta*,¹⁰² Umlilo (Siya Ngcobo) performs in two costumes that are arhythmically interspliced. These could well stand for two people, or two versions of the same person. The first is wounded to the point of becoming unrecognisable, with a face wrapped in layers of bandages but lipstick immaculately applied [Figure 42a]. The second, who never speaks, is in full drag splendour [Figure 42b]. Both bear the same crudely applied white pigment on face and chest, affording them an overall alien air enhanced by their organic yet disjointed motions. In a disorientating series of cuts, Ngcobo's injured alter ego sings:

Living in a world where you either man or woman
 Black or white
 Christian or heathen
 The road where you're supposed to walk morally upright
 with your beliefs intact
 Then comes the oppressor with his artefacts
 When you someone who's never fitted in
 I always looked beyond that road
 It ain't easy being him

The beat is slow and pulsing. The song loops back again and again to the same line: "He's not a person any more."

¹⁰⁰ I take this quote from Kimon de Greef's interview with Umlilo (2015: n.p).

¹⁰¹ Although I refer to Siya Ngcobo primarily with male pronouns in the text that follows, that is more a matter of grammatical convenience than an indication of the artist's preference. Ngcobo privileges no one pronoun set, explaining, "I love to mix it up" (Ngcobo, S, Email communication, 29 October 2015).

¹⁰² The follow up to Ngcobo's first EP *Shades of Kwaai*, *Aluta* references the Latin phrase *Aluta Continua* or "The struggle continues."



Figure 42a: Umlilo. 2014. *Magic Man*. Music video still.



Figure 42b: Umlilo. 2014. *Magic Man*. Music video still.

Like the artist through whom he speaks, Umlilo's shape-shifting Magic Man derives his political autonomy from a location beyond reductive dichotomies. He eludes hegemonic racial, sexual and gender classifications, cultivating a persona that resists intelligibility. In this section I consider Umlilo's queer-electro-pop vernacular as modelling a utopian becoming that belongs to a South Africa to come.

Subcultural production is frequently presented as a mode of resistance, particularly for young adults. In his classic study *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige (1991 [1979]) demonstrates how young people borrow and reinscribe available objects, places, ideas and symbols to manufacture a coherent subcultural identity. He emphasises the role of self-making and collective identification in this process, and argues the extent to which subcultural membership resists the imposition of a parent culture and all that culture has come to signify. While productively opening the subculture to academic attention, Hebdige's analysis is dominated by white, heterosexual male subjects engaged in leisure activity. Recognising the blind spots in his optic, subsequent scholarship has paid closer attention to the subcultural practices of women (McRobbie, 1994), people of colour (Shinew et al, 2006) and queer communities, particularly those formed in the non-West (Tucker, 2011). Hebdige himself has chimed in to this revisionism, with books like *Cut'nMix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (2003).

Of singular interest to me is José Muñoz's body of work, which accommodates both queers and people of colour to present subcultural practices that symbolically transform not just a commercial mainstream culture but also white, heteronormative cultural dominance. Muñoz writes vividly of his time in the avant-garde queer music scene of Miami, where he also lived vicariously through a Los Angeles club culture played out in the media. In LA and Miami, subcultural music (both for its producers and its audience) became equal parts stylistic resistance and utopian dream-machine:

Through my deep friendships with other disaffected Cuban queer teens who rejected both Cuban exile culture and local mainstream gringo popular culture, and through what I call the utopian critique function of punk rock, I was able to imagine a time and a place that was not yet there, a place where I tried to live. LA and its scene helped my proto-queer self, the queer child in me, imagine a stage, both temporal and physical, where I could be myself or, more nearly, imagine a self that was in process, a self that has always been in the process of becoming (Muñoz, 2009: 100).

The "utopian critique" function is the ability of certain music genres to generate a sense of possibility for an audience at the margins of, or excluded entirely from, mainstream culture. Conversely, such genres also cast into stark relief the inabilities of that wider culture to adequately represent all individuals. For Muñoz the excessive costumes, crazy beats and unconventional lifestyles of punk acquire a life-long affective charge that sparks directly off his racial and sexual marginality. He writes about the making of a queer-world on the dance floor – an anticipatory space to which his becoming-self might be directed. Fiona Buckland (2002) tethers this same experience more explicitly to place, maintaining that the music scene, and specifically dance, generates ephemeral queer lifeworlds. In her ethnographic study of queer club culture, *Impossible Dance*, she contends that while, "as a carrier of utopic imagination, the promises of freedom and egalitarianism in improvised social dancing may be impossible to realise in practice [...] [t]he gap between what we desire and what we can achieve is defined only by our imagination and is bridged by our ambition to move" (Ibid, 3). Dance, music, and club culture give rise to queer worlds and queerer futures, and promise a self-fashioning restricted only by imagination.



Figure 43: Siya Is Your Anarchist. 2010. *A Giant Leap for Anarchy*. Photo credit to David J. Williams.



Figure 44: Umlilo. 2015. *Reciprocity*. Music Video Still.

A self-described “avant-garde artist,”¹⁰³ Umlilo’s music indexes precisely this queer futurity. Even under his former stage name “Siya Is Your Anarchist” (S.I.Y.A), the artist’s interest lay in forward-propelled becoming, sometimes literally so. A 2010 publicity image shot by photographer David J. Williams and called *A Giant Leap for Anarchy* shows Ngcobo launching himself into space in a halo of radiant colour [Figure 43]. The title cannibalises Neil Armstrong’s words of July 20, 1968, as the astronaut first set foot on the moon: “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” Unlike Armstrong’s, Ngcobo’s leap takes place with both middle-fingers raised to any and all observers. As the title makes clear, this gesture is not just anarchic but *for* anarchy, replacing “mankind”. Through that small, sharp semantic annexation, S.I.Y.A uses and discards Armstrong’s words and with them all the values for which his feeling stands, from conquest to neo-liberal success to the brilliance and ingenuity of big men.

Truly queer anarchy, as Halberstam concludes in *Gaga Feminism* (2012), is the refusal of these grand narratives. It is born out of “the spirit of experimentation, cooperation, change, motility, combustibility and urgency” (2012: 140). Anarchy insists upon improvisational, un-policeable identities, enabling a revolution that we make up as we go along.

The goal of “combustibility” is incarnated in Ngcobo’s more recent alter ego, Umlilo. *Umlilo* (the isiZulu word for fire) was chosen because the word represents “exactly how [the artist] felt about [his] music, and the kind of artist [he] wanted to be” (Ngcobo, 2013: n.p). Umlilo is equal parts destructive force and purgative. Fire ruins and fire sanitizes, in the end. “Us queers know a lot about fire,” says Ngcobo in a TEDx talk titled “The *kwaai*¹⁰⁴ art of standing out”. “We’ve come under fire for all sorts of reasons: the way we dress, the way we look and who we love.” More than merely a metaphor for the manifold violences inflicted upon the sexually and gender non-conforming, flames in South Africa also hinge on a kind of futurity function. The indigenous plant genome of the Western Cape has evolved around inevitable veldfires, so much so that some seeds germinate only after fire (Mustart, 2000: n.p). Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) tie such cataclysmic but regenerative blazes to “being-and-identity” in the new South Africa. They read indigenous flora in contrast to invasive alien plants, signifying an autochthonous, and thus seemingly authentic and sovereign, South Africa. To the Comaroffs this correlation keys into anxieties around immigration and belonging. In Umlilo’s decadent music video for the single “Reciprocity” (2015), I would argue that the same flora are located in flux, as signifiers of a complex and ongoing identity struggle. The camera lingers on a single protea, South Africa’s national flower, which burns like the wick of a candle [Figure 44]. Extracted from its biome it is a beautiful but anomalous object. The blaze is contained and controlled, and its results seem unavoidable...when the flames are extinguished, something new will take root.

Beyond the aesthetic, an anarchic utopian drive carries through into Umlilo’s brand of synth-heavy electro-pop. Describing his sound as “future *kwaai*,” the artist notes that it is not simply anchored in the past but inclined toward the future:

[...] I cannot even say my work is present because it has not been fully realised at this very moment so future *kwaai* seemed appropriate because I will always look forward for answers and inspiration behind my music because I carry the past with me all the time and I live in the present so the work always has to move forward and I love the idea of being ahead of my time because I am. I see myself as one of those

103 Ngcobo, S. Email communication with the author. 29 October 2015.

104 From the Afrikaans word *kwaad*, or angry, *kwaai* is a slang term of approval whose closest translation is “cool” [Oxford English Dictionary, 2015].

people that will only make sense as an artist in the future, once I have moved on to other things.¹⁰⁵

Future *kwaai* does more than signal a future not yet here. A becoming that is also the pursuit of belonging, the one-person genre carves out a whole new musical landscape. For its maker specifically, it also conjures a future in which he will “make sense” and find a more permanent home.

To me Umlilo’s style performs a similarly utopian function. All false lashes, veils and ruffs, his spectacle of racial and gender indeterminacy theatricalises the body, producing it as a creative space and making it signify enigmatically. Here Ngcobo shares some common ground with the disruptive and fantastic subjectivity of Donna Haraway’s (1987) cyborg. In her well-known manifesto, Haraway invokes a fluid human-machine hybrid that straddles the dichotomies between “mind and body, animal and human, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized” (1987: 101). This “cyborg” – imagined but real, enfleshed yet electronic, pansexualised, asexualised and erotic – rejoices in the fusion of identities.

Additionally, the figure of the cyborg ushers in a social reality that expands the field of political possibility. She stands for as-yet unimagined forms of power and pleasure (Ibid, 89- 90). Umlilo’s persona, while not machinated in any meaningful way, lives at the fringes of taxonomic identification. His extravagant costumes draw on a wide range of visual vocabularies from haute couture in “Chain Gang” (2015) to alien-drag in “Magic Man” (2015). Oscillating between identity formations, the artist forges a new unity that also succeeds in denaturalising its points of reference.

Umlilo does not fully occupy the position of cyborg, at least not in Haraway’s sense, but he does present an answer to a question her work has posed: “Has the queer ever been human?” (Luciano and Chen, 2015). As it so often seems to be, the answer is ambivalent. Yes, Luciano and Chen decide, in that queer politics hinge on combating the dehumanising impulses of conservatives, rights discourses, states. But no, in that queer theory has demonstrated the limitations of the category “human” and its necessary constriction of queer becomings. “To say that queer transverses the human is to understand their relation as contingent rather than stable,” the two decide (Ibid, 189). Less bounded than we are accustomed to understanding the “stable” identifications of humanness, Umlilo’s queer performance pushes forward the frontiers of behaviour, identity and expression.

“Chain Gang” (2015) adapts this performance into a more immediate cultural critique. Ngcobo, again playing two roles, oversees his own funeral attended by a crowd of apathetic and beautiful hipsters. He plays the part of a Karl Lagerfeld impersonator/minister, decked out in Lady Gaga-esque gold visor shades and glowing halo [Figure 45a], and also that of “Rita,” the dame in a red dress who attends her own funeral wearing a white veil [Figures 45b]. The mourners, bored, take selfies with the coffin. In consumer studies attention has been paid to the increasingly complex connection between the exercising of individual freedoms within consumer culture and the practice of citizenship. Riley et al suggest that within consumer citizen discourse, the economically active citizen is encouraged to consume “appropriately” – that is, to purchase those products that most effectively ameliorate their burden on the state (2010: 36). Among the most insidious are those materials and goods that seemingly stand for “freely chosen” identity, from cellphones to clothes. For the authors these are in fact representative of extreme self-regulation, which I would argue is augmented in the age of social media by a secondary tier, the extreme management of image.

¹⁰⁵ Ngcobo, S. 2015. Email communication with the author. 29 October 2015.



Figure 45a: “The Minister”. Umlilo. 2015. *Chain Gang*. Music Video Still.



Figure 45b: “Rita”. Umlilo. 2015. *Chain Gang*. Music Video Still.

“Chain Gang,” with the scene of a funeral as its axis, parodies the decadence of consumer culture while revelling in its sheer silliness. If you look stylish at to your own funeral, after all, why not take a selfie?

Subcultural style is a site of both resistance and possibility. In a volume dedicated to the oeuvre of Stuart Hall, Judith Butler (2000) examines the precarious position of the self-constituting subject in relation to conditioning norms. Our recognisability as subjects and our ability to recognise others, she holds, depend equally on our embodiment of a set of pre-ordained social criteria that dictate the limits of our agency. This is not an entirely hopeless scenario, however. Style – to Umlilo the indulgent and gloriously camp gesture of attending one’s own funeral in heels – offers both the terms for the exclusion of the liminal subject and a means of resistance. Butler concludes her essay by asking a question that brings together the urgent need for survival with the question of style. Having cleared the way, “[h]ow do we read the agency of the subject when its demand for cultural and psychic and political survival makes itself known as style?” (2000: 36). In other words, how might we unfold from the aesthetic a politics of hope?

Queer subcultures find the lie in Dick Hebdige’s first study. Unlike Hebdige’s working class white youth, queers cannot slam a defiant bedroom door to a ubiquitous “parent culture.” “[Queer subcultures] tend to form in relation to place as much as in relation to a genre of cultural expression,” because that mainstream culture refuses not just their experience but their existence (Halberstam, 2005: 161). Ngcobo (in De Greef, 2015: n.p) knows that the only way to confront this absence of representation is material, revolutionary action: “Real change comes from snot, tears, broken bones, coarse throats, fire and revolt,” he says. Before that action can be taken in the present, though, there has to be a future worth fighting for. Umlilo puts it more succinctly than I could hope to do in the lyrics for “Out of My Face” (2013):

I’m here on a mission
I’m going to spread my vision
It’s a revolution

Like Adichie’s narrator Ujunwa, who finally gathers her courage to laugh in the face of contemptuous Edward Campbell and leave him behind her (2009: 114), Umlilo and Athi-Patra Ruga cut ties to a present that fails to satisfactorily house them. Instead they declare allegiance to a then and there South Africa, a queer country that lies beyond our current political horizon. And as both artists remind us, that is a land we must find for ourselves by first imagining it into existence. To return to Jameson, “futurity and the positing of alternate futures is not a political programme or even a political practice, but it is hard to see how any durable or effective political action could come into being without it” (2010: 43).

4.4. Epilogue: A South Africa that will be

Even Thomas More recognised that a utopian commonwealth was more wishful thinking than achievable goal. The last lines of his *Utopia* wistfully conclude, “I readily admit that there are very many features in the Utopian commonwealth which it is easier for me to wish for in our countries than to have any hope of seeing realised” (in Claeys, 2011: 67). As More well knew, utopias are by definition unattainable, but that does not mean that their pursuit is hopeless.

They remain a potent (and to all intents and purposes, unlimited) political and imaginative resource. We still need utopias, I think.

My writing of this chapter, adapted from an earlier article published in 2014, was interrupted by South Africa’s student-led protests of October 2015. I will not relay the events of that moment here, more because I believe that there are too many white voices chiming in already than because I feel there is nothing left to say. Suffice to say for context that the protests, largely taking place under the banner #Feesmustfall, demanded a decrease in tertiary education costs nation-wide and asked for higher wages for the lowest earning members of staff in the university system. Numbering in their tens of thousands, students marched in every major city in South Africa. In places they march still – there is always more to be done.

I introduce these events for one reason only. The leaders of this movement were (and are) young black women. Some are trans, more are queer than the press would lead the public to believe and most are so-called “born frees,” as were many of those who rallied around them. By 2019, those same born frees will make up a third of South Africa’s eligible voters (CityPress, 2014: n.p).

A popular poster carried by protestors from Cape Town to Durban to Johannesburg reads, “Our parents were sold a dream in 1994. We are just here for the refund.” With the rainbow nation ideal summarily dismissed or certainly deferred, these protests mark the beginning of something rising to replace it. If belief in a better society still has traction in this country – if we can act in the service of a national futurity that operates according to the norms we desire for ourselves, rather than those that we have now or are told we deserve – then that future is theirs to realise.



Figure 46: Nelson Mandela installation at MCQP, 1994. *ADA Magazine*. 1994. Special Issue: State of the Nation.

Conclusion

Citizenship becomes equivalent to life itself and also looms as a kind of death penalty: both activity in and exile from the political public sphere feel like cruel and unusual punishment.

Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* (1991: 4)

I have just finished reading the latest issue of the journal *differences* from cover to cover. Under the guest editorship of academics Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson, this particular volume is titled "Queer Theory without Antinormativity." It contains a diverse collection of essays responding to a question introduced in the first chapter, "What might queer theory do if its allegiance to antinormativity was rendered less secure?" (2015: 1). The "famed departure" of queer politics from the rubrics of gay and lesbian thought in the early 1990's, the editors claim, gave way to an era of canonical scholarship that has now itself acquired the status of a norm. With no small degree of pride they quote theorist Lee Edelman at a 1994 plenary on the "State of Queer Theory": "Queer theory curves endlessly toward a realization that its realization remains impossible," he argues, leading Wiegman and Wilson to call for a less tyrannical take on "engaging" and "dynamic" norms that continue to be realisable (Ibid, 4).

What is interesting about their standpoint - not new, but not without value - is the idea that queer politics are not radical by definition, and thus that claims to radicalism should be treated critically, contextually and even taken with a pinch of salt. But Wiegman and Wilson's conclusion, that norms are neither restrictive nor exclusionary and therefore need not be politically or conceptually limiting, is precisely what this dissertation has defined itself against.

In this document I have attempted to show that normative citizenship in South Africa, arising from the Apartheid era and consolidated under our new democratic dispensation, does not encompass all who require its resources or all who exercise its claims. I argue that it is *both* conceptually and politically limiting, and that those limits have felt consequences for queer sexual citizens. They are the stuff of which our communities and our intimate lives are made, and their regulative undertow continues to tug insistently (for some gently, for others forcefully) at those who step out of line. Looking across the representational politics at work in a range of visual media, I suggest that the structuring realities of local political life privilege heterosexuals, that South Africa's discourse of rainbowism is fraying, that assimilationism is the order of the day for affluent white queers, that some of us refuse to suffer in silence and that perhaps, just perhaps, there are better ways to be than this, better places to be than here, and better times to be than now. I conclude that resistance to existing political norms can be positive and productive, particularly for those who find themselves on the margins of society already.

Jack Halberstam's sharp critique of Wiegman and Wilson's position (2015) suggests that "antinormative thinking" as the pair conceive it "simply means scholarship with an urgent, complex, politically explicit agenda." To dispense with antinormative thinking, however the editors couch their ambitions, is to adhere to the status quo.

I hope they would disapprove of this research.

§

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