STAGING QUEER TEMPORALITIES

A Look at Miss Gay Western Cape

By: Olivia Bronson

Miss Gay Western Cape is a beauty pageant that takes place once a year in Cape Town. Though the event began during apartheid, it is only recently that it has gained visibility and emerged as the largest gay pageant in South Africa. This project considers the ways in which different queer communities in Cape Town strive to be seen in spaces that remain governed by the logics of racialized segregation. As evidenced with this event, queer communities in Cape Town bare the wounds of the colonial and apartheid mechanism of informing and controlling groups on the basis of race. "Queer" as a politics, aesthetic, and movement takes many shapes within different contemporary contexts and serves as a necessary axis of conflict in relation to the imported, Westernized gay rights discourse. By representing an imagined world—a haven for oppressed, queer individuals to bear tiaras and six-inch heels to freely express their sexualities through feminized gender identities—the pageant becomes a space in which queer practices supersede dominant gay rights discourse. It articulates an untold history through performance. I thus understand the pageant as both an archive and an act of resistance, in which participants enact a fragmented freedom and declare their existence in South Africa, the supposed rainbow nation.

FIGURE 1.1

**PAST WINNER OF MISS GAY
WESTERN CAPE**
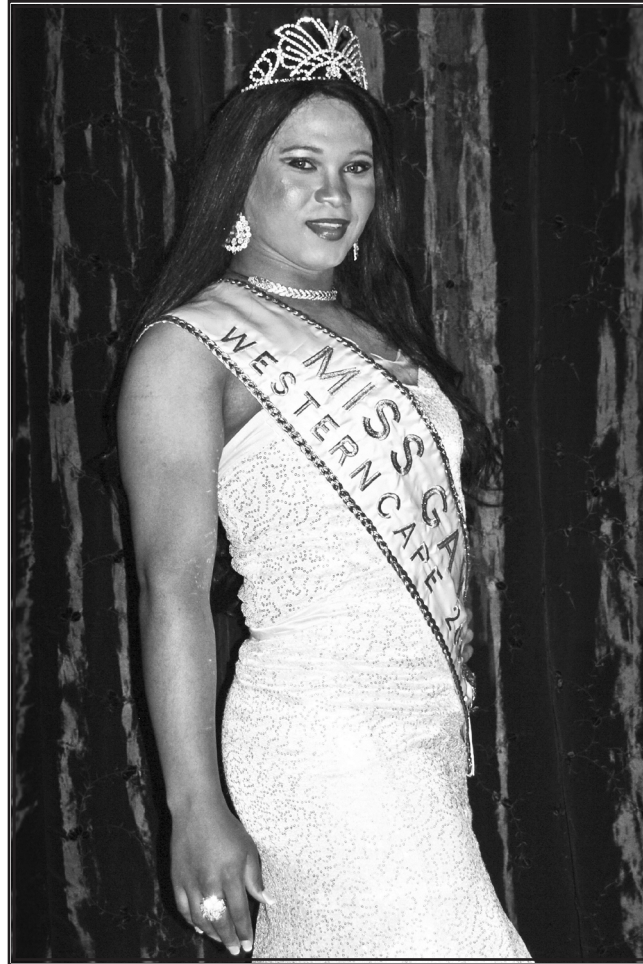
I. Introduction to Topic

This is what I say to my comrades in the struggle when they ask why I waste time fighting for 'moffies,' this is what I say to gay men and lesbians who ask me why I spend so much time struggling against apartheid when I should be fighting for gay rights. I am black and I am gay. I cannot separate the two parts of me into secondary or primary struggles. In South Africa, I am oppressed because I am a black man and I am oppressed because I am gay. So when I fight for my freedom I must fight against both oppressions. All those who believe in a democratic South Africa must fight against all oppression, all intolerance, all injustice.

—Simon Nkoli

When apartheid ended in 1994, the South African gay community was the first in the world to receive constitutional protection based on sexual orientation. The inclusion of sexual orientation in a legal framework created a legitimized discursive space, and the opportunity to normalize and celebrate diversity.[1] Despite these progressive steps forward, hate crimes and acts of violence against certain sexual minorities continue to occur. During my work investigating the Miss Gay Western Cape pageants, I learned about the routinized discrimination and spatial segregation that persists today. Because substantive freedom has not followed formal equality, resistance has had to find its way, particularly among groups that reject the "official" civil gay rights framework. In this paper, I aim to explore the marginalized positions of sexual identities that deviate from the "gay" norm, in a country whose body politik includes the right to sexual self-determination.

This project is divided into three parts. In the first, I present an overview of the history of gay discrimination across the three largest racial categories during apartheid. Secondly, I contribute to a theoretical foundation of queer temporality, disidentification, and discursive performativity as a means of representing stories untold in dominant historiography. In this, I look at identity formulation in the process of re-imagining the nation, and explore the systems of power within the post-apartheid context still governed by principles of exclusion and belonging. Lastly, I discuss the topography of queer subjectivities, specifically situated in the city of Cape Town, to explore the ways in which apartheid legacies continue to shape how queer communities attain visibility.

To bring theories of temporality, identity, and equality to life, I return to Miss Gay Western Cape, a beauty pageant held once a year in Cape Town. I imply a "revisiting" of sorts because I have done extensive ethnographic work observing, and in part building, a visual archive of this event. The archive tells a story of exclusion within the city, and how queer subjectivities enact fragments of freedom.

In recent years, Miss Gay Western Cape has become widely recognized throughout Cape Town and the wider South African context. This shift is showcased in the growing diversity of the contestants and, perhaps more notably, in the respective audience. Yet despite the event's continuity and momentum therein lies a narrative of financial strain, of commercial discrimination, and of fractioning within the wider "queer" community struggling to unite across racial, class-based, and gendered divisions situated in an imported Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) framework. As evidenced with Miss Gay Western Cape, this imported framework has produced the need for queer communities to generate their own means of attaining recognition. Further, the fact that this event does not fall within the Western gay rights discourse—predicated on principals of outreach, wide-scale community organizing, and public displays of protest—renders it an important point of conflict among queer temporalities striving to be seen in Cape Town. Moreover, this event, juxtaposed with more celebratory and recognizable moments such as gay pride parades and/or marches, raises critical discussion around the question of when it is acceptable to be queer.

A.   *Methodology and Key Words*

In this work, I explore queer theory, temporality, collective memory, and archives—and where they meet. It is necessarily interdisciplinary, as it locates both the historical and contemporary factors that enable, as well as inhibit the visibility of queer communities.

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1   Steyn, M and Van Zyl, M (2005). *Performing Queer*. Roggebaai, South Africa: Kwela, Print.

Before discussing methodologies and relevant paradigms, I want to reflect on some key words. Queer theory—and related concepts of gender performativity, social categorizations in identity formation and notions of time—has been shaped by concepts and frameworks that run the risk of producing essentialized, universal truths. Owing to this effect, we must break down these constructions, not only to see how queer theory can apply in different contexts, but also make it more accessible for engagement, irrespective of sexual orientation.

"Queer" is perhaps one of the most elusive words that circulates in political, social, and cultural spheres. The idea of "queer" is challenging in that it is based, fundamentally, on ideas of problematizing social constructions that comprise the basis of every "modern" identity. Consequently, queer is often understood through "disidentification," a term coined by queer theorist José Eteban Muñoz. Disidentification suggests a dis-identity that contests defined categorizations while enacting a universal grammar of fluid, non-essential identity, available to one and all.[2] And so while queer on the one hand, is an umbrella term that holds to the range of sexual identities that are not straight, it also undoes the "naturalness" of these constructed sexual identities.[3,4]

Queer is active disidentification, an ongoing and ever-changing process. It is an act; a strategy, a politics and a movement. It's dynamism lies in its contradictions. Indeed queer takes many forms across different settings—particularly in post-colonial contexts where identity formation remains a contested process.

As Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron articulate in *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Voices in South Africa*:

> Asserting a lesbian or gay identity in South Africa is thus more than a necessary act of self-expression [as it often is in the West]. It is a defiance of the fixed identities—of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality—that the apartheid system attempted to impose.[5]

As apartheid itself was based on placing people, without remainder, in fixed identities, any politics that is based on, and further ensconces marginal identities, is highly contested in light of South African history. It is here we can connect the role of public spaces and fulfilling fixed gender and sexuality identity categories, and how the ability for minority subjects to be "seen" is severely compromised if they do not fit, or feel comfortable identifying with, demarcated categories aligned on a Western axis. The disconnect between fixed identities and politics of visibility and recognition has prompted theorists like Mark Simpson to formulate "anti-gay" politics.[6] This line of thinking complicates events like Gay Pride Marches by illustrating how exposure in public contexts not only leads to, but also produces further marginalization through exclusion.

Throughout this project, I often refer to the queer "community." While using the term community can be an effective tactic to attain greater unity and visibility, I also want to honor how it can generalize experiences, and in the process fail to encompass the specific histories and realities that inform different queer narratives. Many scholars reconceptualize "community" by

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2 Muñoz, José Esteban. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Print.

3   Spurlin, William J. (2000). *Lesbian and Gay Studies and the Teaching of English: Positions, Pedagogies, and Cultural Politics*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, Print.

4 ibid

5 ibid

6 Simpson, Mark. (1996). *Anti-Gay (Sexual Politics)*. London: Freedom Editions, Print.

demarcating it as "a space of difference and exposure to alterity."[7] This understanding is especially resonant in the case of South Africa, which remains typified by unprecedented stratification and racial segregation. In this context, it is impossible to claim that members of the same "community," based solely on sharing sexual orientation, have similar experiences of oppression or the same capability to meet collective needs and interests. It therefore becomes imperative to interrogate how, for example, a black lesbian woman living in a township and a white gay man living in an urban city-center could be seen as belonging to the same "community." For that matter, even a black lesbian woman living in a rural area and one living in an urban setting most likely experience their shared identity category in vastly different ways. We can problematize sexual orientation as a sufficient means of creating community by looking at these examples and questioning the ways that different groups are made visible.

For a stronger mapping of the queer topography of South Africa, and Cape Town specifically, I rely on the work of Andrew Tucker, author of *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity, and Interaction in Cape Town*.[8] In this piece, Tucker establishes the relationship between critical race theory and development in post-colonial settings. His work delineates the racialized, class-based, and gendered dimensions of queer sexualities in Cape Town, and has been vital to my own interpretation of the queer topography of the city.

B.   *On Learning the Interior of the Space*

In addition to molding a theoretical framework, my methodologies are rooted in the ethnographic work I began in Cape Town. From July–November, 2012, I entered the world of the Miss Gay Western Cape by way of meeting people, recording their stories, and taking photographs.

With consent of the community, including sixteen competitors, two directors, three choreographers and past participants, I collected stories and experiences that constitute this collective memory. My archive consists of over 750 photographs, five interviews, and many informal conversations. Along with the growing digital archive, I created a photo essay, a working attempt at curating this archive. This essay includes verbatim excerpts from my interviews and conversations held in the space. These untold stories contribute to a narrative memory that has been systematically ignored in the sphere of gay Cape Town.

This project, which I began in July 2012, is also contextualized by the theft of acclaimed South African photographer Zanele Muholi's life's work on gays and lesbians in South Africa on April 12, 2012. This act was an intentional destruction of one of the only existing archives of an already neglected and severely underrepresented community. It signifies persisting oppression in contemporary South Africa—oppression through the erasure of images, vital building blocks of collective memory. It also highlights that there is turbulence still around projects of representation, especially of queer communities striving to be seen.

The visual archive that accompanies this essay is itself a political act, as it subverts the intentions of those who have sought to manipulate and heteronormalize collective memory. This is by no means a final product, but rather one of infinite ways of selecting, omitting, ordering images and words, to contribute to the creation of collective memory. There is power in curation, as there is power in inscribing written narratives.

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7   Joseph, Miranda. (2007) "Community." *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. New York: New York UP. N. pag. Print.

8   Tucker, Andrew. (2009). *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*.

When I began this project, I was seduced by the idea of interrogating performance as archive—a mechanism for superseding material conditions and enacting freedom through imagination and embodiment. I intended to apply the "fragment of freedom" framework that Dr. Siona O'Connell articulates through her existing work on the Spring Queen pageant. However, I found that while there are elements of this that resonate within the space of Miss Gay Western Cape, it does not always hold true amidst the pageant's contradictions. For some, drag performance in the pageant space marks an isolated moment of freedom where they can be seen. And for others, it is a continuation of every day, not necessarily an expression of queer identity. These dialectical meanings of drag performance—and drag as a representation of sexual identity—added complexity to the process of conceptualizing freedom between two contestants, let alone for this community as a whole.

As a researcher in this space I confronted the social and political constructs that form my personal identity. Through interacting with these drag performers who practice disidentification—that is, defying mainstream Westernized identifications of "man" or "woman," "gay" or "straight"—I was challenged in understanding my own queer identification and overcoming barriers of language, class, race and gender. I also experienced difficulty, and at times paralysis, in not knowing if this is my story to tell. Indeed I am drawn toward minority subjectivities that are continually mis-and under-represented, just as I am drawn to the power of storytelling—and providing a forum for those stories. Yet how could I embody my positionality without re-inscribing existing power relations and perpetuating already "disenfranchised" subjectivities, at least from my perspective that stems from a Western ideology? This question informed my research, and speaks to the greater act of understanding subcultures through gaps in historiography.

C.   The History of Gay Discrimination in South Africa

Following Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech in the wake of apartheid, South Africa became known as the "rainbow nation." Despite the fact that the collective wounds of many were yet to be addressed, South Africa, and particularly Cape Town, advanced a set of progressive legislative acts that protected the freedom of those previously disenfranchised under the apartheid state, including minority sexualities and gender identities.

This next section focuses on the history of gay discrimination in South Africa for the three largest ethnic categories defined during apartheid—"White," "Black," and "Coloured"—and how this liberal proclamation impacted each demographic. It then shifts to the gay rights movement that surfaced toward the end of the regime, specially focusing on Western tactics as a means of resistance. Given the country's political backdrop and the select group of individuals fighting for protection against discrimination based on their sexual orientation, I argue that South Africa was, in many ways, too splintered to accept, let alone receive, a gay rights framework. As a result, this juridical progression, situated in the process of building a re-imagined nation, has generated further fractioning within the queer community.

D.   White Discrimination During Apartheid

Though the experience of white gay men was more tolerable than their minority counterparts due to their elevated economic standing, they were nonetheless subjected to harsh homophobic

policies throughout the apartheid regimes.[9] Their oppression correlates to the manufacturing of a white Christian nationalist state when the National Party (NP) assumed power in 1948. Through the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church, the government established "white superiority" and "protectionism" in order to manifest spatial and ideological control over black Africans. The power of these Christian, nationalist and conservative values not only played a role in racial discrimination, but also on regulating white gender and sexuality.[10] White women who began working in the industrial sector were seen as "threatening" to national security and the reproduction of their regime, and the NP became increasingly paranoid about white men engaging in homosexual activities, for this was also perceived to be threatening to the nation's survival. Consequently, they associated queers with the most marginalized subsets of the population, including black Africans, communities, and Jewish and English conspiracies, and mandated that the police force condemn queer activities or visible displays of same-sex desires.[11] As Andrew Tucker illustrates:

> The forcefulness and effectiveness of such control [during Apartheid] meant that, unlike their contemporaries in Western Europe and North America, white queer men in Cape Town were unable, for the majority of the century, to begin confronting the binds of state and societal homophobia. This legacy means that many white queer men today, while remarkably successful at becoming visible within the city, are freeing themselves spatially of decades of direct heteronormative oppression, have not been able or willing to see beyond superficial renderings of a particular Western commodified queer culture towards wider social and political unity.[12]

In the case of most nation building projects in Western and colonial contexts, heterosexuality and the establishment of nuclear family structures were imperative to their survival.[13] South Africa was no exception. The policing of homosexuality through the Immortality and Sexual Offenses Acts, as well as daily social stigmas and pressures, undoubtedly impacted the mobility and freedom of white gay men. However, despite their marginalization under apartheid, white men who identified as "gay" were privileged above black "natives" and coloureds, and were therefore in a more strategic position to lead gay liberation efforts beginning in the 1970s.[14] Yet it is important to note that their subsequent successes in being "seen," as I explore in the following chapters, was achieved through a Western rights model based on public protest and the ability to *consume* in order to belong.[15]

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9   Tucker, Andrew. (2009). *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*.

10   Tucker, Andrew. (2009). Pg. 35-45. *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*.

11   ibid

12   ibid

13   Anderson, Warwick. *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. Print.

14   Spurlin, William J. (2000). *Lesbian and Gay Studies and the Teaching of English: Positions, Pedagogies, and Cultural Politics*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, Print.

15   Simpson, Mark. (1996). *Anti-Gay (Sexual Politics)*. London: Freedom Editions, Print.

E.   Black Discrimination During Apartheid

The apartheid strategy targeted black Natives not only in controlling labor but also manipulating their sexuality. This is perhaps best exemplified in how the police force targeted female husbands and boy wives in the context of mining schemas. As South Africa emerged as a leading industrial nation, the demand for labor increased exponentially. This, in turn, placed a heavy reliance on "Native" men who were pushed out of city centers, which had been demarcated as white spaces, to compounds. Most compounds were established around mines to ensure that these men were confined to living and working in isolation without access to familial ties or other forms of freedom.

In this context, apartheid officials seized the opportunity to manipulate and exploit sexuality as a further extension of labor control. As Stephen Murray et. al outline in *Boywives and Female Husbands*, this tactic is embedded in natalist tenets and centered on using homosexuality to further deny the ability to reproduce and become a recognized member of the state. Apartheid officials orchestrated "mine marriages" among men living in the compounds: "Black same sex-sexuality…was supported by the apartheid government to the extent that it facilitated control over black labor."[16] The fact that homosexuality was perceived as undermining to Afrikaner nationalism and the strict racial categories enforced during Apartheid—and then coercively against the black population to further demean their existence—laid the groundwork for pervasive homophobia entrenched within contemporary black African contexts.

F.   Coloured Discrimination During Apartheid

The "Coloured" racial category was initially created in the apartheid schema as a "buffer" between black Africans and Europeans.[17] From the start, this racial construct included the offspring of slaves and their white owners, to ensure a predominantly white nation by limiting contact with black Africans whenever possible. Through legislation such as the Population Registration Act (1950), "Coloured," in addition to "White," "Indian," and "Native" (black African) became imprinted in the country's political, economic and social fabric. And yet even with this legalized demarcation, this identity category remained blurred and largely undefined, a factor that undoubtedly contributes to its ambiguity in present-day South Africa.

To silence the unrest around coloured people living in South Africa—and to curtail attempts made by "Natives" to pass as coloured—the apartheid regime attempted to instill greater divisions between the demarcated racial categories by enforcing economic policies that granted economic opportunities to coloured workers than black workers, yet still positioned them below their white counterparts.[18]

The coloured ethnicity continues to be a blurred category. In Cape Town in particular, the acute tension that surrounds this majority demographic raises uncomfortable questions of inequality and invisibility in the post-apartheid context.

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16 Swarr, Amanda Lock. (2004). "Moffies, Artists, and Queens: Race and the Production of South African Gay Male Drag." *Feminist Studies University of Minnesota*: n. pag. *The Haworth Press, Inc.* Web.

17 Tucker, Andrew. (2009). Pg. 89-100. *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*.

18 Tucker, Andrew. (2009). Pg. 61-75. *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*.

G.   The Face of South Africa's Gay Liberation

South Africa does not boast an extensive history of solidarity and struggle across marginalized queer communities. Conversely, their past trajectory of gay activism begins in the 1970s, and even then it is hardly considered a cornerstone for gay identity politics or the source of radical social change. Well-educated white gay men spearheaded the gay rights movement in country. While limited in their degree of sexual liberation, white gay males had greater social mobility based on their ethnic superiority.[19] As a result, they were in a more strategic position to lead gay liberation efforts employing resistance methods from that had proven to be most successful for African American and feminist activists in the U.S.[20]

Early examples, such as the Homophile Movement in the late 1950s and the Gay Liberation Front in the 1970s formed on the basis of a social movement committed to ending homophobia in society.[21] The establishment of bounded social groups fighting for a broader more inclusive rights framework was indispensable to their efforts and those to follow. Yet these earlier models differ from those that surfaced later in the Apartheid era in that they not seek to challenge terms like "gay" or "homosexual," the ideology of "the closet," or artificial boundaries between hetero- and homonormativity. Instead, their main objective was to gain acceptance within wider, hetero-normative society.

With Western liberation underpinnings, white gay men in Cape Town in the early 70s created an "ethnic identity model" in which they emphasized the recognition of cultural difference and the re-imagining of a "gay" social and political identity.[22] In theory, their desired identity creation contested the hetero/homosexual binary fueled by the "coming out of the closest" ideology and the highly medicalized understanding of what it meant to be gay.

While seemingly more progressive than past approaches, Western tactics in South Africa fueled essentialist understandings of gay culture that excluded both women and already severely disenfranchised ethnic minorities.[23] Gay liberation leaders were ill-equipped and ultimately unable to facilitate solidarity across the diverse racialized and class-based landscape of South Africa, and specifically Cape Town, manipulated by apartheid governance—partially because these men were not marked as a group that needed special political attention.[24]

Gay rights activism that surfaced during apartheid asserted public demonstration as a fundamental strategy to attain visibility. Yet, while this had proven to be a successful strategy in North America, demonstrating resistance in public settings in South Africa inherently excluded groups who felt marginalized on the basis of sexual orientation but did not identify in strict categories such as "gay" or "bisexual", and further who did not have the economic or political ability to safely partake in that form of demonstration. Consequently, instead of rectifying the invisibility of marginalized queer subjectivities that were not white and/or belonging to the upper middle class, fighting for equal rights in public forums dramatically enhanced them. As Mark Simpson states:

> The homogenization and essentializing of queer culture, begun with political
> projects in the 1970s based around gay identity politics and furthered by subsequent

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19   ibid
20   ibid
21   ibid
22   Tucker, Andrew. (2009). Pg. 60-65. *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*.
23   ibid
24   ibid

commercialization, has helped make one of the most visible forms of queer culture today an exclusively white and middle-class phenomenon.[25]

With this in mind, the celebratory and highly commercialized nature of gay pride parades leads to the de-politization of struggles belonging to non-white individuals, and in some cases produce harmful ramifications.

H.   Johannesburg Pride 2012

In the most recent pride parade in South Africa, which took place in Johannesburg in October 2012, a group of self-identified lesbians belonging to the One-in-Nine campaign, attempted to politicize the event as a means of commemorating members of the South African queer community who were victims of hate crimes and rapes based on their sexual orientation or gender expression. To accomplish this, they passed out leaflets with victims' names and planned to establish a moment of silence. The response was unsettling. As Rebecca Davis from *The Guardian* recounts: "Video footage shows an aggressive altercation between the activists and those parading, with the activists being pushed, sworn at, threatened with being driven over, and being told to 'go back to your loshkins (townships).'"[26] Ultimately, police escorted the activists from the premises.

In the case of South Africa, the accepting nature of the most recent pride parade was contested by a multitude of factors. First, there is the fact that the event was a site of freedom for many individuals and groups who feel that the state's gay rights framework has permitted greater protection and visibility for queer subjects. Because the majority of people display this satisfaction publicly, it is more difficult for those who do not feel as liberated or protected to be themselves on a daily basis. The One-in-Nine campaign members acted on behalf of individuals and communities who still do not feel seen or safe. Their desire to politicize the parade was an attempt to expose the shortcomings of gay rights action and politics, and to highlight the need to further establish a more inclusive queer politics.

The police's response to shut down and ultimately remove the protesters from the parade reveals the greater positionality of the state. Despite operating under a progressive juridical framework, South Africa remains selective of when it is "acceptable" to be gay and when is not. In many ways, allowing the protesters to call attention to the pervasive sexual violence and hate crimes against queer individuals that continue to unfold throughout the country exposes the disparities between legality and daily realities, and what remains invisible in the name of "progress." The immediate response to curtail the efforts of the One-in-Nine campaign represents the state's commitment to upholding neoliberal policies and "fitting" within a larger global context, where hate crimes and sexual violence against queer minorities are not as visibly apparent.

The pride parade in Joburg has been a tradition for the past seven years, and politics aside, it has been integral to raising awareness of queer communities and experiences. Board member Samantha Durkin recently commented:

It's been our way to try to help unite a very diverse LGBTI community, while building an annual event designed to have far-reaching, positive impact on Johannesburg's

25 Simpson, Mark. (1996). *Anti-Gay (Sexual Politics)*. London: Freedom Editions, Print.
26 Davis, Angela. Lectures on Liberation. Retrieved on 20 October 2012

tourism, and entertainment industries and showcasing the ground-breaking work by South Africa's burgeoning NGO, arts and cultural sectors.[27]

However on March 13, 2013, the organizers of the parade in Joburg voted to cease the production of the event due to concerns over security, the waning support by the South African Police Services, and the loss of two of two local ward councilors who have been integral to its production for the past seven years.

II.   Queer Temporalities in Contemporary Cape Town

For this next section, I once more draw upon the work of Andrew Tucker and the body of research conducted by Amanda Lock Swarr, who has evaluated drag and its varying forms through a racialized, gendered, and class-based lens.

The city's neighborhoods and attractions, such as the De Waterkant "gay village," a historically white segregated part of the city, reflect Cape Town as a progressive and accepting gay-friendly hot spot. In the words of former head of Cape Town tourism, Sheryl Ozinski:

> It's about Cape Town being a hip and happening city. One wants to create the impression, which I think is real as well, that there are lots of things that are happening…If you come to Cape Town you will experience a lifestyle [that] is much perhaps like your own, in terms of the night life and the ability to meet people…[queer tourists] like to do other things that most people like to do, but they also like to enjoy clubs. We have plenty of those. They enjoy meeting people and I think we can offer that opportunity in the clubs for example. We have great music here…So it is really about Cape Town as a lifestyle choice…Cape Town as a lifestyle destination.[28]

The "lifestyle" articulated above characterizes Cape Town amidst larger projects of re-imagination and belonging within a wider global context. It is based on power and privilege, and does not extend to those who cannot afford it. And due to the ways in which class is materially tied to race in South Africa, this rarely includes sexual minorities who are categorized, still, as black or coloured.

As evidenced with a project started in 2008 by the Commission for Gender Equality, many coloured and black African queers living in the city have shared experiences that expose how racialized legacies continue to dictate who has access to certain clubs and social spaces. In "Framing Exclusion in Cape Town's Gay Village: The Discursive and Material Perpetration of Inequitable Queer Subjects," Andrew Tucker outlines how and why exclusion can occur within "gay spaces" in Cape Town. Utilizing an incident that occurred in October 2003, whereby a coloured man was denied entry to *Silver* nightclub located in the gay village, while his white partner was allowed in. The claim was that Pillay, the coloured man, was "inappropriately dressed"—however this was later revoked and the nightclub openly admitted to having a racially

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27 Pride of Africa

28   Tucker, Andrew (2008). "Framing Exclusion in Cape Town's Gay Village: the discursive and material perpetration of inequitable queer subjects." Wiley Online Library Vol. 41, Issue 2, pages 186-197, June 2009.

discriminatory door policy.[29] This story underscores the endemic racial discrimination in the "gay village" and the mechanisms that shape the exclusion of coloured queer men.

A.   Mechanism for Exclusion: The Queer White Patriarch

In order to delve further into the politics of exclusion that contribute to the disenfranchisement of minority subjects, I turn to what scholar Heidi Nast describes as the "white queer patriarch." According to her definition, in select post-industrial societies the white gay patriarch co-exists with, and in some cases displaces, heteropatriarchies, shoring up pre-existing racialized and politically and economically conservative processes of profit-accumulation."[30] This does not eradicate white masculine heteronormativity, but rather stands as a "queered" version, shaped by similar historical and nationalistic factors. What Nast adds to this argument is a reconsideration of the historical and nationalistic processes that dictate contemporary perceptions of difference and class-based exclusion.

Though it offers an alternative to hegemonic inscriptions, the white queer patriarch is also flawed: it acts as a placeholder that fails to rattle hegemonic structure. Glen Elder argues that this substitutive nature further essentializes queerness and contributes to the homonormalization of diverse queer identities removed from the rest of society. Another critique suggests that the white queer patriarch is harmful because it signifies "a colonization and regurgitation of hetero-patriarchal norms."[31] This example pronounces the need to target underlying structures that produce difference, rather than generate new representations that can in fact serve to reify notions of difference.

For coloured men living in Cape Town, the symbol of the white queer patriarch does little to dispel the perception that coloured is "less" than white—a discourse that has proliferated into spaces such as the gay village and other venues supposedly "friendly" for the queer community living in Cape Town. Coloureds face heightened exclusion not only because of these ensconced racial markers, but also because of the ways that race is both theoretically and materially tied to class.[32] The material reality of the different opportunities extended to whites and coloureds during apartheid has manifested in an overall economic privileging of the white population living in Cape Town. This is to say that while there are occasional exceptions, on the whole "non-white" queer men are undoubtedly limited in the physical spaces they can access due to their lack of adequate financial means and mobility.

B.   Drag Performance Through a Racialized Lens

With the assertion that "gay spaces" differ in inclusivity based on enduring racial discrimination, I now jump to drag performance's varying connotations across time and space in Cape Town. To make this leap, I draw upon the work of Amanda Swarr, who has done extensive work on the

29   Tucker, Andrew (2008). "Framing Exclusion in Cape Town's Gay Village: the discursive and material perpetration of inequitable queer subjects. " Wiley Online Library Vol. 41, Issue 2, pages 186-197, June 2009.

30   Nast, Heidi J. (2002). "Queer Patriarchies, Queer Racisms." Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography. Volume 34, Issue 5, pg. 874-909.

31   Oswin, Natalie. (2005). "Towards Radical Geographies of Complicit Queer Futures." An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies 3 (2), pp. 79-86.

32   Tucker, Andrew. (2009). *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, Print.

queer topography of South Africa, specifically mapping drag across racial demographics and revealing how it is perceived in and around the city.

C.   *The Artist vs. The Queen*

Drag takes many shapes within contemporary Cape Town. Most gay men, according to Swar, drag. However where they do, and what form it takes, are determined by race and class and must be understood through an intersectional lens that honors historicized processes and the current interior of different spaces throughout the city.[33]

For white gay men, performances are confined to bounded spaces such as urban bars and clubs. These venues attract largely white audiences. Within the city of Cape Town, most of these venues are located in Greenpoint and Seapoint—two neighborhoods along the Atlantic seaboard that are difficult to reach without a vehicle or the means to afford transportation. Often these performances are enacted not by "drag queens," but "drag artists."[34] The difference between the two lies in the fact that most white drag artists are paid to perform, whereas drag queens, typically black and coloured, perform primarily in pageants and in many cases, in their daily lives.

Drag performances within queer communities are further marked by the racialized "sex-gender-sexuality systems" within which most South Africans operate.[35] In terms of gender the majority of white men who identify as "gay" dress and act masculine. While there is some malleability of gender in social settings, transgender identities—that is, men performing femininity—are largely scorned upon and discouraged within white gay communities: "For South African urban whites, drag is an aestheticized form of self-expression confined to bars and clubs…"[36] Because drag is seen as a choice, practiced by some men in contained settings, it is not as imperative in defining what it means to be "gay" and thus accepted within the white queer community.

The meaning of drag in black and coloured communities, however, is a stark departure from that in white contexts. As Swarr again highlights, to be seen as "gay" in the context of townships, a black or coloured male must have both same-sex desire and feminine gender.[37] Drag performances therefore represent more than mere personal expressions exercised for recreational purposes, but rather serve as a key mechanism to attain visibility within respective township communities. Similarly, dragging in pageant spaces is a forum in which "drag queens" can affirm their feminine genders by attracting the attention of more masculine men. As I animate with contestant's interviews in following sections, this maintains a culturally intelligible relationship within the heteronormative gender binary of male/female.

These two sex-gender-sexuality systems—the first being white gay masculine men and black and coloured men who perform femininity to assert same-sex desire—are inseparable from national and local histories of South Africa. First, drag within black and coloured communities has historically served greater purpose than an aesthetic, face-value practice. As evidenced

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33 Swarr, Amanda Lock. (2004). "Moffies, Artists, and Queens: Race and the Production of South African Gay Male Drag." *Feminist Studies University of Minnesota*: n. pag. *The Haworth Press, Inc.* Web.

34 ibid

35 ibid

36 ibid

37 ibid

FIGURE 1.2

**Contestants learn choreography
during pageant rehearsal**

with the annual Coon Carnival that began in the 1930s featuring gay coloured men, commonly referred to as "moffies," drag has symbolized a sport and lifestyle. The early incarnations of this event have raised the question of whether "moffies" play a role in undoing gender and sexuality roles or if they typify the sex-gender-sexuality system enmeshed in coloured township culture.[38]

The apartheid state used drag as another mechanism of control over black South Africans. For instance, apartheid officials permitted and often coerced "mine marriages" among men living in the compounds surrounding South Africa's gold and diamond mines: "Black same sex-sexuality," Swarr states, "and by associated drag was supported by the apartheid government

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38 Tucker, Andrew. (2009). *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, Print.

to the extent that it facilitated control over black labor."[39] The fact that homosexuality was perceived as undermining to Afrikaner nationalism and to the strict racial categories enforced during apartheid—and then coercively used against the black population to further demean their existence—is a legacy that remains entrenched within contemporary Black African contexts.

"Drag," according to Judith Butler, "offers one means of examining the performativity of gender and race; the specificity of drag performances simply call attention to this quality."[40] Because of the ways they challenge the naturalness of social constructions, drag and performativity/ female impersonation remain largely incoherent. Yet it is precisely this lack of clarity that enables us to consider the persisting challenges queer subjects face, respectively, in attaining visibility— and how performance in the context of a beauty pageant can denote an act of resistance and re-imagination of the framework that governs the most visible social worlds.

D. *"Disidentification" and Resistance*

Can a self or a personality be crafted without proper identifications?

The term "disidentification" is principal to understanding queer as a politics, an aesthetic, and as a movement. In rhetoric and discursive practice, disidentification goes beyond counter-arguments of social constructions and anti-essentialism by working to re-code gender and sexuality norms in both hetero and homo-normativity:

> Disidentification is a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology.[41]

Disidentification is a simultaneous undoing and creating. Rather than simply countering dominant ideology and constructions, it uses them to contest and then re-incorporate into self-formation within the mainstream. In this, disidentification allows for—and in fact depends on— contradiction between what is dominant and what has been rendered inferior.

Additionally, disidentification as a survival strategy for minority subjectivities takes many forms. One of Muñoz's examples, a "terrorist" drag artist Vaginal Creme Davis, illustrates performance as integral to the process of disidentification, and going beyond the point of simply critiquing essentialism and the negatives of heteronormative social constructions. Through Davis' transgressive performative acts and CD titled *The White to Be Angry*, she "leaps" into the imagined, not only demonstrating that identities are fictitious, but laying a foundation for activating senses of self that are detached from the "social" body. With her disregard for "passing" as feminine through her blatant and grandiose plays on embodying the "white supremacist" as the object of her own affection and the "black queen" she instills a disruptive, entertaining,

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39 Swarr, Amanda Lock. (2004). "Moffies, Artists, and Queens: Race and the Production of South African Gay Male Drag." *Feminist Studies University of Minnesota*: n. pag. *The Haworth Press, Inc.* Web.

40 Butler, Judith. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, Print.

41 Muñoz, José Esteban. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Print.

FIGURE 1.3

Contestant poses during pageant rehearsal

and formative space for re-imagination. Disidentification and performance go hand in hand. While they do not operate uniformly, they work in ways that highlight the conventions that they ultimately seek to undermine.[42]

Disidentification is far from being a conclusive strategy in that it is comprised of subordinated ideologies that are necessarily and inherently contradictory.[43] But it is this lack of conclusion that creates the fragments of freedom for identity creation; it holds the dominant/inferior, progressive/reactionary, old/new, feminine/masculine.[44] It is the undoing and renegotiating of the dichotomies that govern our social world, and where strategies and conceptualizations of "selfhood" can be elaborated and take formation.

III. The Interior of an Archive: Miss Gay Western Cape

This is about showing Cape Town we're here.
—Gary, Co-Director of Miss Gay Western Cape

The iconic images that propagate Cape Town as a gay-friendly capitol are no different from any Planet Guidebooks and travel blogs; snapshots of drag queens with gaudy eye make-up, replete

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42 Butler, Judith. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, Print.

43 Simpson, Mark. (1996). *Anti-Gay (Sexual Politics)*. London: Freedom Editions, Print.

44 Muñoz, José Esteban. (1997). "The White to Be Angry": Vaginal Davis's Terrorist Drag. Social Text, No. 52/53, Queer Transexions of Race, Nation, and Gender. (Autumn - Winter, 1997), pp. 80-103.

FIGURE 1.4

**Contestants rehearse a
dance for the pageant**

other globally recognized city. We see the familiar bombardment of rainbow flags in Lonely with fake eyelashes and eye shadow that matches their bedazzled ballroom gowns; wigs that reach the sky. Clubs flagged as "gay friendly" blast dubstep Rihanna disco-beats, inviting both fans and the intrepid to dive into the sweaty inferno stereotypically populated by chiseled hunky men.

Yet these universalized, celebratory images spark the question: what is it we're not seeing? More importantly, *who* is it that we're not seeing, and how much remains entangled in cemented apartheid legacies?

Miss Gay Western Cape is a beauty pageant that takes place once a year in Cape Town. It in no way "fits" the Westernized archetype of the gay-friendly city. Nor does it align with the dominant de Waterkant, the supposed gay epicenter of the Cape Town. Despite attracting greater attention in recent years, it occurs largely beyond the public gaze. At most, it is regarded as a tradition that serves the cultural interests of the *coloureds*.

And so while Miss Gay Western Cape is a beauty pageant, it also tells a story: a story of people belonging to the coloured community who have continually put themselves at risk to be seen and accepted. The event, and the subsequent rehearsals leading up to it, signifies collective efforts to avow their existence in spaces that have persistently kept them out.

FIGURE 1.5

CONTESTANT ENJOYS MOMENT
DURING REHEARSAL

There are some places you should be afraid to go to because you don't know if you are going to be attacked because of being gay...in [black] communities where its...very crowded...it's not like you will find a community like this. Especially where there is poverty and hardships.

—Savannah, Miss Gay Western Cape Contestant 2012

Savannah has always seen herself self-confident and fearlessly independent. After enduring counseling with social workers and seeing a series of priests once she came out to her devout Muslim parents, Savannah continued to transition to female identification in her everyday life. Savannah began entering pageants at the age of 14. She is now 31, and a first-time contestant in Miss Gay Western Cape.

No one taught her how to put on make-up or pick out dresses or cook elaborate meals that her mother forbid her from helping with. Instead, she learned through observing. In terms of living her life openly as female, she remarked that she doesn't mind "going" in drag. Whether she's at work or doing activities like shopping or going out, she walks freely: "If you want to look at me, look at me….Some people give me compliments and some people look at me and say 'oh my word' like they are seeing one for the first time…You either accept me or you don't."[45]

Savannah believes in being herself, and yet she also recognizes that this privilege does not extend to all depending on which community you are from. In relation to the wider African

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45 Personal Communication.

FIGURE 1.6

**PAST WINNERS OF MISS GAY WESTERN
CAPE POSE FOR PHOTO SHOOT**

context, she articulated feeling lucky to live in South Africa, and specifically Cape Town, where Nelson Mandela provided a framework of democracy that supported gay rights. She is grateful for the number of gay clubs and the openness of the coloured community in particular that make her feel more "normal." However when I asked her if there are times when she feels compromised in being herself, she explained that there are still suburbs (namely black townships) where she feels afraid to go for her personal safety. From her perspective, masculinity is the cornerstone of black culture, and because of this, black lesbians and other minority subjectivities are perceived as threatening:

> Black people have got their culture: a woman has to be submissive to a man and a man has to be a man so if you are a gay man its difficult. . . in their communities it is very crowded; its not like you will find a community like this. Especially where there is poverty and hardships. Many [gay] people living in townships are oppressed and murdered…they live in fear.[46]

Savannah's observations of black culture support the queer topography inserted above. Cape Town is a gay-friendly city insofar as members belonging to different communities understand and *embody* this liberal framework. In this same vein, drag performance is a mechanism for visibility only if that visibility does not engender further hate crimes in the form of sexual assaults and murders of minority subjectivities. The fact that Savannah chooses to avoid many black

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46 ibid.

townships speaks to the fragmentation of queer communities in Cape Town and the ways that gay rights fail to transcend contexts in which constructions such as masculinity are still regarded as fundamental to their survival.

Quinton, the contestant pictured above, adds to this argument by commenting on his experiences growing up with a particular idea of who could be gay. In our interview, he remarked: "Anyone can be, even my neighbor…just a normal, regular guy, can be gay…I didn't know that from growing up." Today, Quinton rarely dresses in drag beyond the pageant context. For him, dragging is something he does for fun when he wants to embrace his more feminine side. However, he grew up believing that it was only acceptable to be gay if you performed drag on a daily basis to fulfill a certain role in his community. These gay men, typically from coloured communities, were commonly referred to as "moffies"—a term that now has derogatory connotations but was once the primary descriptor for gay coloured men. On the whole, moffies were widely accepted throughout their communities as long as they prescribed to a certain set of behaviors and ascetic markers. Consequently, they fulfilled—and continue to satisfy—a nonthreatening niche. While gay acceptance has broadened within coloured communities since the time that Quinton was growing up, he still believes that moffies are stereotypically associated with coloured culture and consequently, queer men still believe that drag is the only mechanism of recognition.

> He can be gay, he can be bi, as long as he looks like a man and behaves like one…
> —Savannah, Age 31

While there is no one marker of successful drag, "passing" is often solidified when men in drag are able to attract more masculine men. As I conducted interviews, I learned that the desire to fulfill a heteronormative binary between men/women was a consistent theme. By appealing to self-identifying men who are more masculine in behavior and/or appearance, drag performers are regarded as more "successful" in enacting their femininity. This holds true regardless of whether dragging is an activity confined to the pageant space or if it is an everyday lifestyle. The overarching goal is not merely to be accepted as "queer," however the performers define this, but to assimilate into hegemonic society that subscribes to a working heteronormative binary. Performing drag therefore becomes a tangible point of entry into dominant social spheres.

Cat, featured in the middle of the above photo and former Miss Gay Western Cape of 2010, best exemplifies this paradigm. Cat first became famous in the documentary film Glitterboys and Ganglands, produced by filmmaker Lauren Buekes. In the film, we get to know Cat's endearing spirit, and the confidence that has enabled her to be a drag performer known well throughout South Africa. Yet something else contributes to Cat's fame: the fact that her, and her white partner, are referred to as "Posh and Beckham of the Cape Flats." (Posh as Victoria Beckham from the former Spice Girls and world renowned football player David Beckham.)

Throughout my interviews, Cat and her partner were consistently cited as the "ideal" couple. Though the explanations were not always explicit, Cat's idealized reputation is indelibly tied to her ability perform femininity well enough to attract a white masculine male as her partner. This sparks pertinent questions about the relationship between race and class—particularly how is the drag performer's status is elevated in relation to his or her proximity whiteness:

> It is very rare that you would find two drag queens dating…there is a masculine and a feminine…Race is not much of an issue. But sometimes it is about status. Some girls are

looking for a man who is independent and [who] can provide…

—Denise, Miss Gay Western Cape Contestant 2009

Even though we are a new South Africa—and even though we are run by a black government—you will still get a lot of the CEOS and directors etc are white dominant. So when you are looking for independence and status most of that lies in white culture. They're the wealthy ones…the independent butch guys are very much looking for a queen, a lady, a trophy….a Miss Gay Western Cape…it's like Victoria and Beckham, all about the status.

—Quinton, Miss Gay Western Cape Contestant 2012

Each of these excerpts underscore that dominant role of white culture in the post apartheid context. While not always the case, white butch men add validity to the drag queen persona and lifestyle. Both whiteness and masculinity are constant, unmarked categories while the coloured drag queen relies on performance to attract outside attention and feel seen. Drag performance for white urban gay men is seen as not necessary to reaffirm their masculine gender identity. With one gender performance being more "normalized" over the other, we have to evaluate how drag can act as a mechanism for exclusion for coloured and black subjectivities.

Returning to Savannah's initial quote above, it is worth noting how she views labels as secondary to behavior. My findings revealed that this was the case not just for Savannah but also for many of the other contestants in terms of their own and others' self-identification. Very few contestants outwardly identified as "gay" or "bi" and certainly not "queer." These identity categorizations were obsolete in relation to behavior, and how they were consequently perceived based on their appearance and lifestyle. While not necessarily critical within the pageant space, this de-emphasis on labels is relevant in relation to Westernized LGBTI categorizations implicit in South Africa's gay rights framework.

A.   *Revisiting Queer Theory*

The discursive proliferation of queer has been enabled in part by the knowledge that identities are fictitious—that is, produced by and productive of material effects but nevertheless arbitrary, contingent and ideologically motivated.[47]

Queer as a movement, a politics, an aesthetic—includes all those who are critically examining their desires in order to challenge systems of supremacy, neocolonialism, and patriarchy. It is a multi-sited strategy to contest dominant power.

Over the past two decades, poststructuralist, feminist and queer theory have overturned the fixity and stability of gendered, sexual and racial identities by introducing ideas of social constructions.[48] Biological determinations like "straight" and "gay" are products of historical and cultural practices rather than being fixed, universal and objective traits. Making "[identities] multiple (…) with literally an infinite number of ways in which identity components (...) can

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47 Jagose, Annamarie. (1996). "Queer Theory." Australian Humanities Review, 1996. Web.

48 Craven, E (2010). Racial identity and racism in the gay and lesbian community in post-apartheid South Africa.

intersect or combine."[49] As put by Steyn and Van Zyl, "critical queer scholarship has unearthed a variety of cultural permutations of sexual and (trans) gender subjectivities and identities that perform as dissident sexualities beyond the boundaries of normativity."[50] In recognizing the socially constructed nature of sexuality and gender categories, we begin to see the fragility in power structures that rely on these constructed identity constructions—and the subsequent ways they can be contested.

Scholars argue that queer politics have yet to instigate a truly radical or transformative politics that successfully defies gendered and racialized categorizations of identity. For this Cathy Cohen, author of "Punks Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens" argues that rather than deconstructing gender binaries, queer theory has, in effect, re-inscribed the dichotomy between "heterosexual" and everything "queer."[51] And so despite the fact that "queer" appears more nuanced and thus less constricting than the "homosexual" categorization, it is almost synonymous with the ways that "gay" historically opposed the ideology and practice of heteronormativity.

In adhering to a heterosexual/homosexual—or what is now a heterosexual/queer binary—gays and lesbians delegitimize desires and models of relating that diverge from this narrative. It is precisely this shortcoming of the gay rights framework, and more recent queer discourse that has generated an imperative to create a new dialectic capable of renegotiating the way that historicism re-inscribes minority subjectivities.

B.   On Queer Temporality

> Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. [It] is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.[52]

Jose Esteban Muñoz, a leading contributor to the queer theory archive, describes this transgression as "queerness as horizon."[53] In *Cruising Utopia,* Munoz defines queerness as an ideality—an intangible, not-yet conscious, yet knowable entity recognized through a utopian feeling. He uses Ernst Bloch's formulation of abstract and concrete utopias to better define the essence of queerness. In contrast to "abstract utopias," which are according to Muñoz, detached from historical consciousness and temporality, "concrete utopias" are situated in historical struggles and in part are conceptualized by the "hopes of a collective."[54]

This discourse holds promise in rectifying the narrowness of the gay rights framework, predicated upon Westernized understandings of LGBTI identities. But it is also problematic. For one, it can change how queerness is recognized beyond the confines of designated queer spaces.

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49 Seidman, S (1996), Introduction, in Seidman (ed), Queer Theory/Sociology, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge Massachusetts, pp. 1-30

50 Steyn, M and Van Zyl, M (2009). *The Prize and the Price: Shaping sexualities in South Africa*, HSRC Press, Cape Town. p. 7

51 Cohen, Cathy J. (1997). Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics? GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies May 1997

52 Muñoz, José Esteban. (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York UP, Print.

53 ibid

54 ibid

This further unhinges it from present-day sexual identities and in part ignores its functionality that opposes heterosexuality and other institutions such as the family and reproduction.[55] Secondly, it fails to acknowledge the bounds of material conditions. And in what is sometimes referred to as "straight" time, one's capacity to supersede these conditions lies in having superior economic and cultural capital.

The idea of "queerness as horizon" offers an important aberration from earlier formulations of queer temporalities that surface perhaps most prominently in Lee Edelman's work in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Using classical Freudian psychoanalytical theory, Edelman argues that the reproductive futurism—that is the drive for life through procreation and survival—is continually positioned over and against those who are read as queers. The logic of repetition, therefore, and the demand to understand time in historicizing terms, inherently negates the ability to consider queerness as self-sustaining; queerness cannot exist in the future without the means of reproduction and therefore is destined for destruction.

Edelman cautions Western society's reliance on answering questions of "how" and "why" and seeking to convert time into history:

> …The universality proclaimed by queerness lies in identifying the subject with just this repetitive performance of a death drive, with what's, quite literally, unbecoming, and so in exploding the subject of knowledge immured in stone by the "turn toward time."[56]

Because "the queer subject" does not accept or operate within linear, heteronormative notions of time, a life-and-death timeline cannot exist, and therefore subjectivities are not defined by the ability to reproduce. Moreover if the ability to reproduce constitutes who is queer/straight, the refusal of time removes queer subjectivities from definition based on the ability to reproduce. Using this indication then, it becomes evident that queerness veers outside "rational" understandings of time, characterized by capital, nationhood and family structures.

J. Halberstam also contributes to queer time by challenging determinants like reproduction and linear systems of organization:

> Queer time is the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence—early adulthood—marriage—reproduction—child rearing—retirement—death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility. It theorizes queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markets of individual development and into normativity.[57]

Through this lens, Halberstam turns to specific moments and spaces that are shaped not straight time, marked by linearity and reproduction—or even their opposition—but that are shaped by a collective imagination. This understanding hinges on re-conceptualizing time as cyclical and turning to specific moments, as well as spaces, for meaning that is less apparent in dominant time.

In *For "the Children" Dancing the Beloved Community*, Allen Jafari presents the black

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55   Halberstam, Judith. (2010). *Caring Labor: An Archive*. N.p.

56   GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies (2007). Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion. http://glq.dukejournals.org/content/13/2-3/177.full.pdf

57   ibid

FIGURE 1.7

**Contestants pose during
final rehearsal**

queer dance club as an example of the aforementioned queer temporality and a space that re-imagines questions around the child, relationality (break down) and futurity. More than a place for entertainment and social interaction, the interior of the dance club, particularly for younger generations, is also a source of community and, in a sense, home. Jafari's argument centers on understanding queer not through individuality and "coming out" of heteronormative structures, but instead "as a continual, dynamic project of constituting a collection of interstitial outsider perspectives…Getting our lives (together)." This definition is at once about individual experiences of self-creating/defining and achieving erotic autonomy and how they connect to the collective. This take on queer, which occurs in spaces like the Black dance club, is not constituted of cemented traditions shared between the same groups of people over time. Rather, it is shaped by shared moments that are fleeting, yet no less profound, in enabling social transcendence:

The transformation takes place through collective effervescence evoked by the music, the people and the safer space for spinning and spiraling…The club children are aware of the ephemeral state of their communitas and the precariousness of (our) family making…They come out to the club to 'feel the music/take you higher,' to a place of embodied well-being that extends beyond the physical place or time.[58]

The club is a space experienced not through thinking, or rationalizing, but of feeling—and establishing a heightened spiritual connection to others as well as a divine presence.[59] To this end, the club is about creating and enacting freedom through the act of surrendering, for the time being. Because these collective moments are understood as ephemeral, the focus then shifts to what is felt in the body and how it generates and holds space for re-definition through imagination and embodiment.

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58   Souls 11. 311-326. 2009. Allen, Sinclaire Jafari. For "the Children" Dancing the Beloved Community. The Trustees of Columbia University

59   ibid

It feels somehow unnatural to believe that a space like a dance club transforms the daily realities of queer subjects when, at end of the night, the material bounds of oppression still hold. Yet, the feelings that are experienced within the club are transcendent. Jafari describes this as "ephemera," which for him is "the trace, the taste, the print that lingers, most often not long enough to shower or prove, and while not concrete, that which inspires."[60] With this in mind, the dancing continues; all that is felt in the space transcends through enduring feelings of elevation, and that which is solidified in memory. Moreover, this can be understood as an archive "that remains in mourning's memory, recollected stories and the ache of yearning lodged in our bodies (and our) politics…"[61]

To further investigate how these spaces and moments hold the capacity for enacting freedom, I visit Frantz Fanon's *Black Faces, White Masks*. What is perhaps most important in this text is the emphasis on acting and "leaping" into the imagined. He describes Man's behavior not as "reactional," previously put forth by Hegel, but rather as highly "actional." In this, Man does not merely respond to the set of material conditions that he is born into, but that he interacts and in some cases overturns them with his capacity to create. The human has the innate capacity to create based on what he/she understandings through processing through and preparing to act and engage:

> …To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act.[62]

Theorizing freedom begins by considering that every human has the capacity to create. Regardless of the different ways that power circulates—whether through a sovereign framework or more modern, decentralized forms of biopower—the ability to leap into an imagined ideality serves as a profound means of attaining freedom:[63]

> I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence./In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself./I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it.[64]

The act of leaping takes place in moments that are seldom visible within the public sphere; it exists in imagination, of re-conceptualizing "the Other," of turning over what could be. Its impermanence makes it harder to *see*, let alone consider forceful enough to undo dominant constructions and conventions. However, perhaps if we think less about how these moments are readable in mainstream discourse and/or practice, and instead about the ways in which they are sacred—because of their temporality—we can learn to look to the margins and see value in what falls beyond the public gaze. Indeed, it may be enough—in fact everything—for these temporalities to exist as a sacred deviance for those who are also looking to take hold of thought and imbue invention/imagination into daily existence.

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60 ibid

61 Souls 11. 311-326. 2009. Allen, Sinclaire Jafari. For "the Children" Dancing the Beloved Community. The Trustees of Columbia University

62 Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin White Masks. 1952. Print.

63 Foucault, Michel, and Michel Senellart. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79.* Basingstoke [England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.

64 Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin White Masks. 1952. Print.

IV.   Conclusion

We live in world where rights signify equality. Negative rights protect against discrimination and injustice. Positive rights enable access. Equality imprinted into legal framework is recognizable; it implies that minorities have a voice in representation. It means that they are seen.

On March 26, 2013, gay marriage in the United States finally passed the Supreme Court decision. What is perhaps most notable about this is not this final piece of legislation, but the fact that it made sense to millions of people throughout the world. This was evidenced with red and pink equality signs that occupied Facebook profile pictures everywhere and conversations reflecting widespread awareness of this milestone in American history. For decades marriage has signified the ultimate marker of inclusion and representation, irrespective of all other conventions and human practices that may stray suggest a departure from the norm.

Yet, while the human rights discourse informs greater visibility and inclusion, it also falls short. More often than not, inscribed constitutional equality does not transcend to local contexts. This disconnect between overarching, often universalized notions of equality and the experiences of minority people and the entrenched obstacles they face calls us to turn our attention to practices—and in this case queer practices—to expand our reading on visibility when people do not fit in slotted categories or inscriptions within legal rights frameworks. We must consider the idea that freedom practices emerge with ordinary people grappling with their own realities. This less obvious approach takes time, and a necessary understanding of intersectionality. Further, it forces us to confront our own positionality and how we must be rooted in our own truths before discerning them for others.

With this assertion, we can also begin to re-negotiate the process of historiography, and look beyond historical "moments" such as the *right* to marriage or the *right* to protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation. Instead, we turn to history as a collection of practices and deposits of time that saturate our present. These sediments hold collect memory shaped by rituals and human practices, and offer the greatest hope for reshaping our beliefs of identity and belonging.

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