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## Narrating Defiance: Carnival and the Queering of the Normative

### BIOGRAPHIES

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→ **The visual** constitution of multiple gay/queer identities during carnival is commonly regarded as transgressive of the normative order that is ideologically and physically imbedded in the structure of city. Our contribution to this publication however, suggests that the various local narrations and visualisations of homosexuality that are mobilised during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* can be interpreted as simultaneous reinforcements and contestations of sexual stereotypes. We demonstrate how this carnival both transgresses and bolsters heteronormativity.

Contemporary renegotiations of sexuality within the context of carnival in post-apartheid South African spaces (such as the city) are explored for their potential to open up multiple discursive accounts of sexuality. The fluidity of identity is emphasised in a bid to divert from essentialist reductions of highly complex identity formations. Without reducing South Africa's multifaceted history to a teleological account of progression, and thereby presenting the change from apartheid to a post-apartheid state as being uncomplicated and resolved in any way, the impact of this move in narrating the politics of identity and its influence on conceptions of sexuality is investigated. We explore how race and gender play decisive roles in the constitution of a homonormative gay identity, and investigate how, simultaneously, these male, white homonormative assumptions are challenged by a minority of black and lesbian participants. In addition, we investigate how the interaction between spectator and carnival participant blurs binary constructs of stasis versus mobility, subject versus object and 'normal' versus 'abnormal'.

## Visualisations of defiance, vocabularies of compliance: Carnival and the queering of the normative

In this paper, we explore the phenomenon of carnival for its corporeal and spatial expressions of sexual identity. In a post-apartheid context, the visual constitution of multiple *lbgtq* (lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgendered, queer) identities during South African carnivals, and in particular the *Cape Town Pride Parade*,<sup>1</sup> is commonly regarded as a platform for participants to perform their transgression of the city's normative order. The *Cape Town Pride Parade* plays itself out as a festival that has the capacity to reverse social hierarchies and cross various boundaries for a limited period of time, and thus presents itself as disruptive of normative order and social stability.

Being often contradictory in nature, the carnivalesque is not only a force that can impose its own set of regulations and provide coherency for its own structures, but is also a phenomenon with the capacity to disrupt the hegemony of city space.<sup>2</sup> Cape Town – as a city shaped by prejudice, racism, and slavery – bears the scars of (hetero)normative oppression, especially as this hegemony was inflicted during apartheid on the non-white, non-straight society. *Lbgtq* identities were largely controlled and repressed by the apartheid regime in South Africa – racist legislation and specifically (homo)sexual policing were sites for political struggle for *lbgtq* individuals and subcultures during the rule of the Nationalist Government (Retief 1994:100). *Lbgtq* spaces in Cape Town were prone to normative restriction, and with homosexual identities often visually repressed or erased in order to avoid persecution, the latter identities were often pervaded by feelings of insecurity. The appropriation of city space through the carnivalesque can be seen as a way for the members of Cape Town's *lbgtq* subcultures to temporarily reclaim parts of the city as their own – an act that constitutes an important shift in agency when considering the marginal status that has been historically ascribed to them.

Incorporating both ideologically centred spaces and marginalised identities, carnival acts as a disruptive force by mobilising transgression – the queer<sup>3</sup> – within the domain of the (hetero)normative. Carnivalesque visualisations of *lbgtq* identity encompass a range of diverse participants that celebrate alternative sexuality (sexuality that does not play itself out as straight) as a

point of connection within the new (and still fragile) democratic sphere of South Africa. Multiple identity constructions are drawn upon during carnival to enunciate a marginalised sexual and/or racial status. Within the context of the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, this agenda is manifested in imagery that celebrates carnival as a phenomenon geared towards *Uniting Cultures of Cape Town* and as a space of *Ubuntu* (a Xhosa term denoting interconnectedness and unity) – for example, two logos that were created for the *Cape Town Pride Parade* (Figs. 1 & 2).

The translation of identity constructions in corporeal and spatial terms is facilitated within the loaded domain of post-colonial and post-apartheid Cape Town since the body and the city provide a map of changing narrations of self. Judging from its visualisation, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* can be recognised as a force that apparently underscores cultural diversity because its invitation to perform identity is open towards all identities. Putatively, a cohesive space is created that facilitates various carnivalesque identities to be acted upon and reconstructed in a self-reflexive manner. The *Cape Town Pride Parade's* endeavour for cultural interchange and collective performances of identity within an uncensored, all-inclusive realm can thus be highly useful to the South African landscape that is still in need of a textual and visual paradigm of cultural and sexual tolerance.

By bringing the private, the (homo)sexual, into the public gaze, this carnival demands negotiation with normative authority as it creates a space in which transgressive identities can be visualised in relation to one another. During the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, the body and the regulation of its exposure is particularly used to visualise multiple sexual identities and to transgress public discourses of the normative. The presence of *lbgtq* sexuality in Cape Town puts into question the so-called public respectability of this city as a predominantly heteronormative space. This is evident in Fig. 3, where the participants use clothing and performance to transgress notions of respectability and defy the moral censorship of the public sphere by drawing attention to the begetting and disclosing nature of corporeality. In this context, the participants of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* specifically use the body as a vehicle for placing their sexuality in the forefront of public attention. The physical, virile homosexual body – largely erased from the heteronormative cityscape – is cited during this carnival to bring those properties of



**Fig 1:** Cape Town Pride 2008. Logo. (Cape Town Pride). [Sa]



**Fig 2:** Pink Ubuntu 2009. Logo. (Cape Town Pride) [Sa].

homosexuality that would ‘normally’ be consigned to the private realm (for the sake of ‘decency’), into the public sphere. Those expressions of homosexual identity that are often silenced through normative discourse, and those body parts or sexual actions that can only be hinted at in public, are increasingly enunciated during queer carnival to bring homosexuality to the surface of South Africa’s sexual palimpsest. In this manner, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* reflects changing configurations of self in the local visualisation of sexual identity.

The transformation from an apartheid to a post-apartheid state is often theorised in both local and global media as a dialectic phenomenon, as the sexual, racial and political liberation of the present is persistently enunciated to create a distance from a problematic past. This is also true for the carnivalesque and in particular the *Cape Town Pride Parade* that often draws on western, *Stonewall*-inspired accounts of liberation<sup>4</sup> to articulate the South African gay community as singular, universal, and enlightened. However, we suggest that the various local performances of homosexuality that are mobilised during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* can be interpreted as simultaneous contestations and reinforcements of normative restriction and sexual stereotypes. By tracing discursive and visual shifts that have occurred within the South African sexual landscape, we demonstrate in this paper how queer carnival both transgresses and bolsters heteronormative and homonormative assumptions alike.

### **Gay commodity culture and the rise of the homonormative**

The opening up of the discursive space of South African identities and sexualities after the fall of apartheid has led to multiple visualisations of sexual identity, yet it has also led to an increase in sex consumerism and an awareness of the pleasures of consumption (Van Zyl 2005:20). The

urge to consume sexuality and its products, which is often treated as a growing global phenomenon in contemporary discourse (Van Zyl 2005:20-21), can now be traced in local narrations of sexuality. As particularly ‘gayness’ is targeted as a broad category of alternative sexuality by global commodity cultures, people are increasingly urged to consume certain discourses and products, all claiming to be prerequisites for ‘authentic’ expressions of gay identity.

Global structures of commodification therefore have tremendous bearing on the local visualisation of sexual identity as discourses of consumption are increasingly directed to gay markets. In contemporary western society, the apparent tolerance of sexual diversity in global markets has led to the development of gay culture as a niche market with gay identity increasingly narrated in terms of its power to consume (see Hennessy 1995; Joseph 2002; Rand 2002). As the visibility of gay identity is intricately linked to its value in commodity culture, the gay market is presented in the global arena as a universal community of consumers. Global gay subjects are conceptualised in terms of their engagement in supposedly universal, western discourses, and the validity of gay identity is narrated in terms of a subject’s willingness to define himself/herself socially, commercially and politically in the “gay world” (Altman 1996:77, 84).

However, even though the commodification of gay identity may be problematic insofar as it reduces identity to mere consumption, a far bigger problem, we would argue, is the exclusion and privilege that processes of identity consumption may entail. If gayness is sold, who can afford to consume this identity, and in which currency does it trade? The imagination and embodiment of global, consumable gayness is problematic in its assumption that everybody, everywhere has the means (and the desire) to buy into the discourses and products associated with western gay identity. The danger of consuming a global gay

identity is that it could lead to homonormative prescriptions and self-disciplining regimes that determine the visual presentation of gay bodies and identities in countries that have access to western discourses, which practice would inevitably entail the radical exclusion of non-commodified *lgbtq* identities.

Commodified gay identity can also act as a barrier that determines who is allowed to consume global gayness. Gay identity is particularly stratified along class, race and gender lines, and a gay consumer identity can “exclude, and render invisible, people who struggle economically, a process that disproportionately marginalises *lgbtq* people who are of colour and/or female, since institutional sexism and racism affect economic status” (Rand 2002). The global gay is often imagined as white, middle-class, urban and male, and (to a lesser extent) female (Altman 1996; Johnson 2004; Pellegrini 2002; Skover & Testy 2002). This also holds sway in South Africa where economic and discursive

empowerment has long been synonymous with white identity, and where the traces of old hierarchies are still visible because the ability to consume gayness is privileged in terms of class, income, race, and gender.

### City space and carnivalesque transgressions of commodified gayness

The consumption of sexuality can be visually manifested in both corporeal and spatial terms. Not only is identity physically embodied in the city space, but the city is also shaped by the marketing and consumption of sexual identities. Cities can act as commodities to the extent that they are often sold to both a local and global market in terms of certain values (such as pleasure, sexual freedom, gay friendliness, and so on) that make them more consumable. Cape Town is one such city that is often marketed to gay consumers as a space of sexual leisure<sup>5</sup> – the *Queer Capital* or *Gay Mecca* of Africa – with the press playing a fundamental part in branding this city as a space of gay consumption (see for example *Die Burger* 1998; *Gay Pages* 2003; *The Mail and Guardian* 1999).

Cape Town, and specifically the De Waterkant area (also called the ‘Gay Village’), is promoted not only as a safe-haven for its own gay inhabitants, but also marketed as a centre of gay leisure consumption to global gay tourists in international media. The Gay Village is largely promoted as the ‘safe’ place in Cape Town to have a gay holiday. However, the construction of the Gay Village’s safeness as a gay tourist destination reveals certain problematic assumptions of what form the protection of gay identity should take. Narrations of safeness in global and local consumer cultures perpetuate certain hierarchies and stereotypes in the demarcation of space. The Gay Village is most prominently marketed as a homogenous, sanitised gay male leisure space to a (global) gay market.<sup>6</sup> The safeness of the Gay Village is formulated partly in terms of its relative freedom from homophobia, but more specifically its relative freedom from crime. As it is a predominantly white area, it is generally perceived as a safe and therefore more up-market space.

With the emphasis of the South African Constitution on racial, sexual and gender equality, exclusively white areas appear to be an anomaly in the democratic space of South Africa. With the Gay Village perpetuating the classist, racist and sexist principles of heteronormative society by creating a new marginal group within a sexual minority (Valdes 2002:977), white patriarchy is transferred to a homonormative centre. While the



**Fig 3:** Cape Town Pride Parade, 2008. Photograph by Ernst Van der Wal, 2008.

Gay Village is not overtly marketed as ‘safely white’, it is not unlikely that its popularity among the largely white tourists who frequent it is due in part to the absence of people of colour. The ideals of a heteronormative society as it was articulated and officiated in apartheid South Africa, privileging white, heterosexual males (Visser 2003:123), are thus reconstructed in the post-apartheid context without critical engagement in the problematic enunciation of hegemony.

This enunciation of hegemony is important to consider with regard to the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, as the latter is largely determined and endorsed by the Gay Village. Since its inception in 1993, the parade has started and ended in the vicinity of the Gay Village, and most of its after-carnival celebrations occur in this space. It is financially supported by the businesses operating in this area, and it therefore has to carry the consent of these institutions to secure economic input. Being so imbedded in this space, it seems inevitable that the *Cape Town Pride Parade* would carry some of the traces of exclusion found in the Gay Village, and would also yield to the global gay proscriptions for a sanitised sexual space.

In their investigation of homonormative tourist spaces, David Bell and Jon Binnie (2004) draw attention to the manner in which the carnivalesque is employed to market a city to gay consumers. With carnivals being popular events, they are often used by gay tourism industries to tap into the pink economy, and are marketed as global gay mega-events in order to attract consumers.<sup>7</sup> The spectacle of carnivals are presented to tourists as “commodified encounters with difference” (Bell & Binnie 2004:1813), a means to gaze at other gays who share a sanitised sexual identity, yet who present it in a so-called exotic, different manner. This appeal of gay tourist spaces is in itself contradictory, as the idea of a global gay identity supposes that people from all over the world would share certain fundamental (western) sexual, cultural, economic and political traits. Yet, those very features that apparently resisted globalisation – such as cultural signifiers of ‘authentic’ Africanness – are now marketed as unique local properties that appeal to gay tourists. A careful blend of the global and the local seems to be the most popular mix for gay consumers – the Cape Town gay experience, for instance, is marketed as safe and clean enough to live up to global standards, yet it is exotic and different enough to give it a local tang. However, with Cape Town and the Gay Village specifically known for its racial and gendered exclusivity, how much of the local, of the different and of the unsafe, can actually be

displayed and mobilised within this space? And what is this carnival’s relationship to the ambiguously exotic, yet safe Gay Village?

From one point of view, the very homogeneity presented by the Gay Village is contested during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* by the display of racial, gendered, sexual and cultural heterogeneity. During the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, multiple sexual identities are mobilised by a highly diverse crowd, and people who differ in terms of gender, race, culture, religion, class, and age, are congregated within the Gay Village. They are (temporarily) granted mobility within this space, and people who would usually not be consumers within and of the Gay Village have the opportunity to express their identities in a space that does not usually condone it. Multiple ‘other’ identities (black, lesbian, transvestite, sadomasochist, and so on) are brought into the exclusionary sphere of the Gay Village during carnival, and temporarily invest it with a much needed blend of difference.

Yet, it is precisely this carnivalesque difference that attracts the tourists to the Gay Village in the first place. People who would not ordinarily be seen in this space temporarily move through it and endow it with a festive atmosphere. They provide ‘exotic’ appeal for a limited period of time, and constitute visual stimulation for the tourist gaze, yet they conveniently leave after the event is finished and thus restore the Gay Village to its putative safeness and sanctity. The local variety and difference that is actually allowed into this homonormative space is sanctioned by its temporary and spectacular nature. A zoo-like atmosphere pervades the scene as ‘other’ *lbgtq* identities are showcased in the supposedly safe environment of the Gay Village. If the *Cape Town Pride Parade* were to trade the sanctity of the Gay Village for the township, the support suddenly dwindles – personal experience revealed the ‘fringe’ *Pride Parade* of 2008 that was held in Guguletu to be attended by a very small group of white participants, a few journalists, and almost no white tourists/spectators. It seems as if the safeness of the Gay Village bestows a sense of legality and attraction on carnival while it occurs within its boundaries. The carnivalesque brings the exotic and spectacular (and black) into the Gay Village – a nice change to the year’s drab whiteness.

Problems around the implicit exploitation of black participants for their exotic appeal are compounded by the fact that the difference that is actually played out during this carnival in gendered and racial terms is also severely limited. Firsthand observation of the *Cape*

*Town Pride Parade* reveals that the amount of black people participating in the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is still disproportionate when compared to the amount of white participants. So too, the female participants are still largely overwhelmed by the men. Even though this has been challenged through a definite increase in black and/or female participants, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is predominantly attended by a white male elite. And, even though a serious attempt has been made by the organisers with their ‘fringe’ *Pride Parade* to accommodate black *lbgtq* participants in the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, the manner in which they are fringed by discourse and practice indicates that homonormative regulations operate during this carnival in the favouring of white gay men.

### African homosexual identities and questions of authenticity

The apparent lack of ‘other’ (non-white) *lbgtq* expressions within the South African context is not only linked to the exclusionary structures laid down through homonormative regulations (as seen in the Gay Village), but also through heteronormative conventions that often invest black homosexuality with negative associations. The current renegotiations of identities within post-apartheid South Africa and post-colonial Africa have led to enquiries into the hegemonic western

structures that are imbedded locally. In this process of renegotiation, critiques of colonialism and western hegemony are frequently lodged against the “western imports” (Spurlin 2001:189), the products, cultures, and identities that were brought into and enforced upon the local population. Local identities are scrutinised for signs of authenticity, for traits and histories that could reveal whether they are ‘genuinely’ African or a non-African import.

The issue of homosexuality’s place within the African sphere is highly contentious as it hinges on the supposed immorality of western sexual discourses that were imposed on the African population. The homophobic treatment of homosexuals as allegedly non-African impostors is echoed in the accusations of various African leaders (such as Robert Mugabe, Yoweri Museveni, Sam Nujoma, Jacob Zuma, and others) that homosexuality is a perverted, bourgeois western phenomenon. They view homosexuality as a colonial identity that was imposed on, and hence assimilated by, black Africans. This sentiment is found, for instance, in Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe’s much publicised condemnation of homosexuality in 1995 during the *International Book Fair*. Mugabe (cited in McNeal 1998), received worldwide criticism when he stated at the event that homosexuals were “worse than pigs and dogs” and therefore had no civil rights in Zimbabwe. Homosexuality is accordingly regarded by some African leaders as a non-African, imported and immoral culture that entails the supposedly perverted activities/identities practiced predominantly by whites. In the same vein, the Africanness of *lbgtq* identities are also a point of dispute amongst political commentators – *Sunday Sun* columnist Jon Qwelane (2008:14) provoked a local uproar when he recently wrote that “gay is NOT okay”, and stated that “there would be a few things [about which] I could take issue with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, but his unflinching and unapologetic stance over homosexuals is definitely not among those”.<sup>8</sup>

The debate around homosexuality being either African or non-African centres around the issue of gay identity as a western construct, and therefore also a western import. In the South African context, homosexuality and gay identities are often stereotyped as not only “a colonial import, but ... as a disorder brought about by the oppressive social structures of apartheid” (Spurlin 2001:189). Pre-colonial African identity is equated with heterosexuality, while gay identity constructions are regarded as the ‘object’ product of colonial oppression and racist legislation. Particularly, gay male



**Fig 4:** *Cape Town Pride Parade, 2008.* Photograph by Ernst Van der Wal, 2008.

identities are seen as bourgeois western phenomena, as ‘feminised’ imperial imprints within the masculine domain of African nation states (Spurlin 2001:197). It is significant that the threat of homosexuality in the African context is often narrated in terms of its supposed feminisation of African nationality and identity. As Annie Leatt and Graeme Hendricks (2005:313) argue, the condemnation of homosexuality as unAfrican reveals the desire of certain Africans to reassert the validity and virility of their culture(s), which were often ignored or debased in colonial discourses. In heteronormative African discourses, a black gay identity is seen as a form of perversion that not only points to white domination, but that threatens to replicate the colonial emasculation of the African male.

Ironically, the persecution of homosexuality can in itself be seen as a colonial import. Sodomy and other so-called “perverse acts” were often considered by colonial rulers to be typical of the “immoral” (African) inhabitants of colonised lands, and homosexuality was regarded by European colonists as characteristically African and “unEuropean” (Bleys 1996:32). With homosexuality considered deviant by colonial rulers, the actual persecution of homosexuals in contemporary Africa has its roots in the continent’s previous colonial institutions. In the South African context, British colonial rule specifically viewed homosexuality as an abomination, and colonisers tried to stop same-sex practices by forbidding homosexuality by law (Herdt 1997:80). Homosexuality therefore appears to be judged in contemporary Africa as ‘unnatural’ by the very standards that were intrinsically imposed through colonial rule. The condemnation of homosexuality in Africa on the basis of its alleged colonial imposition reflects a deeply grounded heteronormative, colonial structure of prejudice and persecution that is still prevalent in contemporary African discourses. These regulatory structures are ironically used as a safeguard of African identity formations as they intrinsically detest any so-called abnormality that could threaten heterosexual, masculine domination. As Gustav Desai (2001:148) aptly asserts, “in some African contexts it was not *homosexuality* that was inherited from the West but rather a more regulatory *homophobia*” (emphasis in original).

### **African homosexual identities and carnival**

Allegations of the unAfricanness of homosexuality can be visually contested during the *Cape Town Pride*

*Parade* when certain participants mobilise cultural signifiers to assert their identities as simultaneously black, African *and* homosexual. Increasingly, black participants bring certain African signifiers into play when they celebrate their *lgbtq* identity during this parade. Even though these participants’ presence may still be disproportionate when compared to the amount of white participants, the apparent lack of black homosexual expressions within the Cape Town (and larger South African) sphere are actively countered by certain participants who challenge those heteronormative conventions that invest black homosexuality with negative associations.

In Fig. 4, participants are shown to use clothing and make-up to bring their own associations with Africa to the fore. The participant in the centre of this photograph is not only celebrating her homosexual identity, but also demonstrating her African heritage. The identity she performs links her sexuality with her ethnicity, since she deliberately chooses clothes that are to be read as essentially African by spectators,<sup>9</sup> and incorporates these signs in the visual repertoire that makes up her rendition of African homosexuality. Within the spectacle of this carnival, she constructs her homosexual identity as African by making these traits seem inextricably linked, rather than incompatible, categories. The carnivalesque thus provides the ideal platform on which to (re)construct and reinvest identity formations by actively combating stereotypical assumptions of homosexuality’s unAfrican nature. Since it is so strongly visual in nature, this carnival can aid in the renegotiation of certain sensitive issues; it can visually translate and fuse particular concepts (‘Africa’, ‘homosexuality’) through the visualisation of identity.

It is also important to consider that the participant depicted in Fig. 4 (as all other participants in this carnival) forms part of the performances surrounding her. With multiple and simultaneous enactments of identity within the spectacle of the carnivalesque, no performance is absolutely singular as all are witnessed, acted upon and situated within the larger sphere of carnival. This participant’s performance of identity is therefore not a closed-off, restricted act, but is witnessed as part of the various identities that are performed around her. The multiple *lgbtq* identities that are enacted (be it African, European, black, white and so on) all share the stage of one carnival; all move through the streets of Cape Town for one day. They are thus seen as sharing one essential component – their construction of *lgbtq* identities.

## Conclusion

After the fall of apartheid, South African sexual identities were given much more discursive space within which to reorientate themselves. Yet, the concurrent commodification of queer identities has led to a restriction of the gay imaginary. Narrations of global gayness clearly favour white, male, affluent expressions of identity, and this is reflected in discourses of consumption that appeal to the universally liberated gay subject. Heteronormative discourses propagating the unAfricanness of gay identities also severely limit the expression of *lgbtq* identities. The various spaces and discourses that we investigate reveal how both heteronormative and homonormative processes reduce the expression of various queer identities to (stereotypical, commodified, phallogocentric) gay identities within the space of South Africa, and specifically of Cape Town.

Carnival's relation to heteronormative and/or homonormative spaces is highly ambiguous. From one point of view, the homogeneity that is enforced by homonormative spaces (such as the Gay Village) is contested

during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* by introducing racial, gendered, and sexual heterogeneity into these spaces. Heteronormative discourses and the supposed unAfricanness of *lgbtq* identities are also challenged during this carnival by performances of African identities. On the other hand, the variety that is actually allowed into normative spaces during this carnival is sanctioned by its spectacular nature – it becomes a commodity in itself that is marketed to a gay audience and consumed by tourists. Whereas the carnivalesque can be regarded as a platform on which multiple sexual identities are performed, and therefore entails a more transient and ambiguous take on politics of the self, contemporary narrations of gayness restrict the identities displayed during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* to a more normative and often commodified conception of identity as opposed to that encountered within *lgbtq* subcultures. This carnival is thus a signifier of both the sexual identities that are displayed and those that are marked by their absence – those expressions of identity that are silenced and concealed by the normative structures of city.

## Endnotes

1. The *Cape Town Pride Parade* (or *Pride Festival* as it is also known) was launched in 1993, with logistical choices overseen by a Board of Directors which include prominent members of Cape Town's *lgbtq* population, such as HIV/AIDS activist Zackie Achmat and former Cape Town Tourism manager Sheryl Ozinsky. Initially staged during the months of either September or October, the festival has been moved to February in 2004 in an effort to attract gay tourism to Cape Town during its busy season.
2. This view of carnival is particularly indebted to Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal work *Rabelais and His World* (1968) in which he explores the disruption of social hierarchies and the inversion of categories of symbolic order during carnival. Bakhtin describes the social and cultural rationale of carnival as grounded in its capacity to reverse social hierarchies and to cross various boundaries (whether physical, political, social, or cultural) for a limited period of time. The anarchic and liberating qualities of carnival are stressed by Bakhtin as being forms of subversion that threatens to destabilise authority and order.
3. We use the term 'queer' as a rejection of fixed notions of sexuality. It is a term that denotes multiple sexual identity constructions and a disruption of the normalising politics of both heterosexual and homosexual identity (Horne 1996; Nicholson & Seidman 1995).
4. The New York *Stonewall Riots* of 1969 is an event that marked the launch of the gay-rights movements in America and is still regarded as playing a key part in gay-rights struggles on an international level (De Waal & Manion 2006:9).
5. Cape Town has a long history of gay culture and has been known as one of the most accessible cities in South Africa in terms of gay bars and cruising areas – see Gevisser and Cameron (1994) for an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon.
6. See Visser (2003) for an analysis of the gentrification of De Waterkant that led to its establishment as an area of gay leisure consumption.
7. Take for example the *Sydney Mardi Gras* and *New York City Pride March*, which are both large-scale events that have been recognised for their potential to draw large crowds. The *Sydney Mardi Gras* attracts up to half a million people, while the *New York City Parade* brings more than one million people to the streets of the city (Georgiou 2008; Kulwicki 2007). The open promotion and acceptance of both these carnivals by the mainstream media of the cities are partially motivated by the huge amount of money that these events bring in.
8. This column incited protests by various queer organisations. For example, Ian McMahon, *Cape Town Pride* chairman, organised an impromptu *Pride* protest outside the *Media 24* buildings in Cape Town. This protest was staged to highlight the attack on the constitutional and human rights of gay people, and what McMahon (cited in Cape Town Pride Press Release 2008) referred to as "Qwelane's blatant hate speech".
9. Certain signifiers (such as the red dress and Xhosa face decorations) are understood by spectators as evidence of a certain 'traditional' identity that is played out. This may not necessarily be the case – the participant may not even be a traditional African and the deductions made are largely based upon the spectator's stereotypical assumptions about what 'real' traditional Africanness entails. Yet the participant's conscious mobilisation of certain cultural signifiers in order to call up references of Africa in her performance is indisputable.

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