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Devarenne, Nicole

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White Supremacy, ‘Colouredness’ and Queerness in Oliver Hermanus’ *Skoonheid/Beauty* (2011)

Nicole Devarenne, University of Dundee

Unlike their creator, most of the characters in Oliver Hermanus’ *Skoonheid* (*Beauty*) come from a conservative white Afrikaner community with strong allegiances to the apartheid past.¹ Long after the formal end of white supremacy in South Africa, the protagonist, François, adheres to a certain view of Afrikaner identity as a closely organized group of racial, linguistic, and cultural characteristics that are singular, distinctive, and self-contained. While anti- and post-apartheid discourse has put this account of Afrikaansness under considerable pressure, emphasizing the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic syncretism that is part of the Afrikaans cultural inheritance, François and his circle depict how little some white South Africans have changed with the country’s transition from apartheid. But *Beauty* breaks new ground by linking the racial and cultural essentialism that informs some versions of South African whiteness with coercive heteronormativity and homophobia. François is outwardly heterosexual, but meets other white Afrikaans men for clandestine sex. My analysis of the film begins with a scene in which he rejects the opportunity to take a ‘coloured’ lover, oddly, on the *grounds* that the man is gay.² I argue that this rejection stems from a desire to evade and exclude the black, ‘coloured,’ and queer identity formations that trouble François’s self-definition with their heterogeneity and their claims to shared concerns and a shared history. With the help of three brief but crucial scenes in which Hermanus brings François into contact with ‘coloured’ men, I show

how *Beauty* challenges and deconstructs the linked racial and sexual identities that are the legacy of apartheid. At the same time, Hermanus affirms the authority of ‘coloured’ people to speak to the social and political significance of public queer life in South Africa, in response to the marginalization of queer of color contributions to the struggle for human rights during apartheid.³

In what follows I will locate *Beauty*’s critique of homophobic ethnonationalism in relation to three themes: the ideological construction of ‘colouredness’ in relation to whiteness and Afrikaansness; inter-generational conflict around the expression of cultural and sexual freedoms; and the racially divided history of the struggle for LGBTQI rights in South Africa.⁴ In a country where the film industry has historically been dominated by white filmmakers, I will demonstrate how Hermanus reads whiteness back to itself, whilst empowering his ‘coloured’ characters to “animate the equality provisions” of South Africa’s constitution, and drawing attention to the “cultural labor” of LGBTQI communities of color.

In an early scene in *Beauty*, François drives to a remote farmhouse, where he joins a group of other white Afrikaans men drinking beer and making small talk in the kitchen. The conversation is cordial, but punctuated by awkward silences, and overly polite. The men discuss the weather and regret that they don’t have time to barbecue; two of them talk shop about a problem with email; the host (Henry) asks if they are all acquainted and introduces a newcomer, Brian (“Don’t worry, he’s okay”). On the kitchen wall near the door, there’s a crucifix and a blackboard with a rudimentary shopping list (milk; butter; cheese; bread). Most of the men are dressed casually, in loose-fitting clothes and drab colors that blend in with the kitchen’s beige décor.⁵

Then a seventh white man (Gideon) appears, and asks for a word with Henry. Behind him, a young and attractive ‘coloured’ man, dressed in a blue teeshirt, enters the frame. [Fig 1] The men stare. Gideon tells his companion to wait in the car, and appeals to the others to trust him—his “friend” is “alright” and not “from around here.” But one of the men objects: “You can’t bring him here.” François adds: “See how he looks; we’re not *moffies* [faggots].” Henry moves Gideon towards the door, insisting: “No moffies; no coloureds. You know that.” A heated conversation is heard off screen. “You don’t have to shove me,” Gideon calls out, and then leaves. A leisurely transition shot of the outside of the farmhouse follows, subtly acknowledging the way white Afrikaner identity has been linked to agrarian and pastoral aesthetic modes since the early twentieth century.⁶ Hermanus then cuts back to the interior, where Brian is performing fellatio on François; nearby, another white male couple is having sex.

The scene establishes a collective context for François’s racist/homophobic habits of recoil and repudiation: the rejection of a gay ‘coloured’ man, on the grounds that he is gay, by those who meet secretly for sex with other men, draws attention to a wider lack of coherence that characterizes white Afrikaner identity in South Africa. Reading whiteness back to itself with the help of the gay ‘coloured’ characters in the film, Hermanus demonstrates the extent to which some white identities depend upon shallow and illogical claims to cultural and racial ‘purity’ and exceptionalism.⁷ But as François and his peers repudiate their kinship with gay ‘coloured’ men, Hermanus also depicts the effects of the racialization of queerness under white supremacy, suggesting that ‘colouredness’ and queerness have been produced as inter-related identities in South Africa. Although the film’s gay ‘coloured’ characters are peripheral and soon removed from view, their intrusion into François’s world troubles

its claims to singularity and coherence, simultaneously insisting on the importance of queer of color cultures and critiques in the creative deconstruction of racial and sexual identities in post-apartheid (or post-post-apartheid) society.

“Those People Over There”: Race and Hybridity in South Africa

On a metatextual level, the challenge to the ‘coloured’ man’s right to enter the farmhouse anticipates the way Hermanus has been asked to account for his relationship to *Beauty*’s subject matter. In an interview with Hermanus during the Durban International Film Festival in 2011, Dylan Valley commented: “One of the most interesting things about *Skoonheid* is that as a Coloured or Black director you are telling a White Afrikaner story. Historically in South Africa, it’s been the other way around.”⁸ Hermanus responded with an anecdote about “two well known South African gay socialites” who had “hustled their way into a press screening of the film”:

[T]hey reacted very badly to it. They called a journalist who I know very well to try and influence her review of the film. [...] When I met with her I realized that the biggest problem they had with the film was that I was telling that story. However they had no problem with me making *Shirley Adams*. They really appreciated *Shirley Adams* because it was “those people over there.” I think ownership over content is a big South African issue. People want context, they want to know what connects you to the story. The first question I’ve been getting all week is “where does this story come from?” What that question really means is “are you Afrikaans?”⁹

Hermanus’s first film, *Shirley Adams: Portrait of a Mother* (2009), is a neo-Realist study of a middle-aged ‘coloured’ woman’s struggle to cope with the harsh social realities of life on the Cape Flats, whilst caring for her son, who has been paralyzed in a gang shooting. It is strikingly different in tone, style and subject matter to *Beauty*, in

which ‘coloured’ people play only marginal roles. Questions about Hermanus’s “ownership” of *Beauty*’s content would seem to mark attempts to distance his ethnicity from the film’s preoccupation with white society. As such, they challenge his authority as a commentator on whiteness, as well as the white gay community, and are animated by a form of racial/linguistic essentialism that views ‘coloured’ people as less Afrikaans than white Afrikaans-speakers (or not Afrikaans at all).

Hermanus sets *Beauty* in Bloemfontein, because, as he puts it, “I assumed it was the sort of South African city where I’d never want to spend my life. It’s a bastion of Afrikaanerdome [sic] and very segregated. It was the capital of the Orange Free State in the first republic of South Africa and was where the British first established concentration camps to lock up Afrikaners during the Boer War.”¹⁰ At a considerable distance from Hermanus’ native Cape Town, Bloemfontein has an urban population of 111,000 people, of whom 65% are white. 89% of the white population is Afrikaans-speaking.¹¹ In a recent study of white Afrikaners in Bloemfontein, Cornel Verwey and Michael Quayle found that members of their (admittedly “small and localized”) sample group showed a tendency to “jettison” some aspects of Afrikaner identity in an attempt to distance themselves from the apartheid past and avoid culpability for it. They “did much discursive work to discard certain visible aspects of Afrikaner identity,” for example by disavowing the nationalist discourses rehearsed in apartheid homes, cultural institutions and schools, and rejecting a close relationship between their group identity and the Afrikaans language, despite its importance as “a keystone of [...] Afrikaner identity.”¹² They also showed a tendency, in culturally heterogeneous settings, to hide the fact that they were Afrikaans-speaking.¹³

Verwey and Quayle's findings suggest a shift in the way white Afrikaners describe their 'Afrikaansness,' at least in public, in response to post-apartheid culture. But they also reveal that, for some white Afrikaners, whiteness remains central to Afrikaner identity, despite evidence of inter-racial marriage amongst the Dutch at the early Cape, and particularly among "white immigrants who founded families that apparently persist among the contemporary Afrikaner population."¹⁴ From an Afrikaner nationalist perspective, creolization has historically been understood both as a threat to white ethnic purity by South Africa's indigenous peoples and as an attack on the Afrikaans language and culture from British imperialism. Adam Haupt points out that the fear of creolization aided the consolidation of Afrikaner nationalist hegemony, and suggests that anxieties about creolization are rooted in resentment at the decline of Afrikaner nationalism after apartheid.¹⁵ In *Beauty*, Hermanus critiques a tendency by some white Afrikaners to reject evidence of creolization in their own culture and to refuse its opportunities for cultural adaptation and exchange, in marked contrast with the 'coloured' community he depicts in *Shirley Adams*. While the interaction between Shirley and her friends and neighbors celebrates syncretism and the capacity for cultures and languages to adapt to each other, *Beauty* portrays a white community whose dedication to racial and cultural 'purity' seems unaffected by the demise of apartheid.¹⁶

While the participants in Verwey and Quayle's research tried to free themselves of the more toxic associations adhering to Afrikaansness in the post-apartheid environment, the authors concluded that they also sought to preserve their white privilege by "strategically distanc[ing] Afrikaner identity from black African identity."¹⁷ Verwey and Quayle's investigation offers an implicit critique of parochialism, opportunism, and insincere engagement with anti-racism in the process

by which “Afrikaans people are reinterpreting their identity in post-apartheid South Africa.”¹⁸ Nonetheless, the article remains strikingly silent about the ample evidence of Afrikaansness amongst people who are not, according to their own or others’ definitions, white.

Roughly half of the mother-tongue Afrikaans-speakers in South Africa are ‘coloured,’ and despite the political privileges they have sometimes enjoyed over black South Africans, they have long suffered the effects of political and cultural marginalization. This marginality is evident in the shortage of academic literature about the history of this social group prior to the mid 1990s, although there has been increased scholarly interest in ‘coloured’ identity since the majority of ‘coloured’ voters “flock[ed] to the banner of the National Party” in the 1994 elections.¹⁹ Conservative white Afrikaner culture’s sidelining of ‘coloured’ culture, and the ‘coloured’ community’s fraught relationship with Afrikaans, also speak to the contested situation of ‘colouredness’ within Afrikaansness. The Afrikaans language was born in the ‘kitchens’ of the early Cape, staffed by black and ‘coloured’ servants and slaves, but decreolized in the early twentieth century in the service of white supremacist nationalism. Popularly, ‘coloured’ Afrikaans, with its code switching and linguistic borrowing from other South African languages, has been regarded as a degenerate dialect. However, it has also been championed by ‘coloured’ writers such as Adam Small, while white writers like Marlene van Niekerk have strategically used non-standard Afrikaans to undermine Afrikaner nationalist claims to cultural and linguistic purity at the end of apartheid.²⁰

Where white supremacist ideology has distanced South African whiteness from the evidence of its heterogenous origins, ‘colouredness’ has been closely associated with syncretism, to the extent that historical writing about ‘coloured’

identity has been dominated by the assumption that hybridity is its “essence.”²¹ This stigmatized, “supposed condition of racial hybridity” goes hand-in-hand with the view that ‘coloureds’ are “deficient in positive qualities associated with racial purity and handicapped by negative ones derived from racial mixture,” with many ‘coloured’ people “internaliz[ing] the racist values of the dominant society.”²² The South African novelist, short story writer and scholar Zoe Wicomb has noted how ‘colouredness’ has been taken as shameful evidence of the history of miscegenation in South Africa, in relation to the conventional wisdom that ‘coloured’ people belong to a “distinct racial group that resulted from miscegenation between European settlers and a heterogenous black labouring class of African and Asian origin.”²³ Wicomb sees attempts to “establish brownness as a pure category” as a “denial of shame.”²⁴ But she also points to the ‘coloured’ community’s complicity with white supremacist nationalism in their “shameful” vote for the National Party in 1994.²⁵

Wicomb’s post-apartheid novel *Playing in the Light* (2006) examines the impact of shame on ‘coloured’ family life, where the internalization of white supremacist ideology and a hatred of blackness leads to a collapse of family relationships and a painful search for identity by its protagonist. Marion has been raised as white by her ‘play-white,’ light-skinned, ‘coloured’ parents. Prevented from acknowledging his child’s ethnicity, her “romantic” father encourages her to think of herself as a mermaid.²⁶ Marion eagerly accepts this role, and is discovered “rolling half naked in the grass” by her mother. Helen is angered by this display of sensuality, and condemns Marion for behaving “like a disgusting native.”²⁷ But Helen’s disgust for blackness is accompanied by a disdain for hybridity itself: she feels that “mermaids” should be “ashamed” of being “neither one thing nor another” and that “[n]o one likes creatures that are so different, so mixed up.”²⁸

It is instructive, when viewing *Beauty*, to remember the close relationship between Helen's attempt to restrict Marion's sexual self-awareness, and her veiling of Marion's 'coloured' identity (which is nonetheless always available, at least through the mermaid metaphor). Here, Helen reveals her (self-)shaming association of blackness with libidinousness, so that repressing her daughter's 'colouredness'—a matter of great importance to her as its emergence would betray Helen herself—requires inhibiting Marion's sexual development. The double burial of sexual and racial self-knowledge creates the dangerous forces which are released in the novel's discovery plot. It is thus to be expected that the relationship most charged with (homo)erotic energy in *Playing in the Light* would be the friendship between Marion and her 'coloured' employee, Brenda, who helps Marion uncover her parents' past.

In *Beauty*, the appearance of 'coloured' men on screen corresponds with moments when François seems closest to revealing, to himself or to others, the heterogeneity of his sexual life—whilst meeting other white men for sex, surveilling a younger man with whom he has become infatuated, and cruising in a Cape Town bar. His need to conceal his sexual complexity is as much a product of his adherence to the values of the apartheid past as is his failure to acknowledge his kinship with 'coloured' Afrikaans speakers. In two of the three scenes involving 'coloured' men, François is disgusted by an embodiment of his own sexual behaviors and desires in the figure of the racial other. He distances himself from his own queerness and displaces it onto 'coloured' men, simultaneously using the machinery of apartheid to bar their access to him as a potential object of same-sex desire. 'Coloured' interlopers in François's world pose a threat to what Theo Sonnekus has described as the "compartmentalized" identity he has created out of "notions of nationalism, puritanism, patriarchy and homophobia."²⁹ Partly this has to do with their 'otherness'

and their attempts to occupy space that apartheid allowed white people to reserve for themselves. But, by virtue of their notional hybridity, their very presence also challenges the claims to purity and singularity upon which white Afrikaner nationalist identity has historically constituted itself.

This challenge is intensified in the scene on the farm by the men's queerness, which calls to mind the 'coloured' community's relative hospitality to LGBTQI subcultures in contrast with white culture, as well as white queer culture's cultural, linguistic and political indebtedness to queer of color communities. 'Coloured' culture in South Africa has offered opportunities for the public expression of non-normative forms of gender identification and expression. According to Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, 'coloured' communities in the Western Cape "contain the oldest, most developed and least-explored gay South African subculture."³⁰ Gevisser and Cameron claim that "nowhere else in this country have homosexuals been so integral to a culture."³¹ Indicatively, 'coloured' culture produced the word "moffie," which has been re-appropriated from its function as a slur by the queer 'coloured' community.³² "Gayle," a queer linguistic code based on English and Afrikaans that "flourished" from the 1970s onwards, evolved from 'coloured' speech.³³

With the use of this Afrikaans word in the scene in the farmhouse, Hermanus highlights the entanglement of white queer history in South Africa with 'coloured' cultures and languages. Later in this article I will point to the ways in which some white queer civil rights activists have sidelined the political interests of their 'non-white' colleagues or failed to acknowledge the importance of the anti-apartheid liberation struggle in contributing to their own political gains after apartheid.

Born (Almost) Free: Inter-Generational Conflict and the 'New' South Africa

Beauty's plot focuses on François's pursuit of a young white man, Christian, to whom he is unable to express his sexual interest and whom he eventually rapes in an eruption of thwarted desire, frustration, envy and rage. The film periodically suggests that François suffers from an inability to reconcile his selfhood, largely a product of his adherence to Afrikaner nationalist ideology and his past military service to the apartheid state, with new forms of identity that accompany the transition to a more democratic society, albeit one still deeply troubled by the social and economic legacies of apartheid. Hermanus avoids analepsis, alluding to François's past struggles with alcoholism and his history of 'losing control' through a conversation with his doctor. These problems are not explicitly linked to his participation in South Africa's "Border War," but it is significant that François's downfall begins when he is reacquainted with a fellow veteran, Christian's father.³⁴ Recent attention in the South African press to the experiences of LGBTQI conscripts in the "Border War" have uncovered horrific abuses, but even in the 1980s the Afrikaans writer Etienne van Heerden was breaking the silence around homophobic violence on the border, recounting the ritual humiliation and abuse of "moffies" in the South African Defence Force.³⁵

The film derives much of its menace from the threat of revelation, and much of its pathos from François's inability to reconcile private self-knowledge with his public persona. Linking François's personal failings to national ones, Lindiwe Dovey describes it as "a chilling depiction of a South Africa in which masquerading trumps the expression of individual desire and truth."³⁶ François has clearly been shaped by his experiences in the military, but this alone does not explain his preference for the closet whilst living in a country whose constitution was the first in the world to

explicitly protect the rights of gay and lesbian people. He and the white men he meets for sex are clearly very fearful of exposure—of the censure of, and loss of their status within, a conservative, patriarchal, culturally stultified community whose allegiances still lie with the apartheid state under which homosexuality was criminalized. As a result they seem unable or unwilling to recognize their queerness, even to each other.

But if François's military past deprives him of some freedoms, it also enables him to limit or withdraw the freedoms of others. Hermanus shows François surveilling his female family members as well as Christian and other young white men exercising their freedoms in the post-apartheid state. Where surveillance doesn't suffice, for example when he seeks to put an end to a date between his daughter Anika and Christian, he calls upon the armed wing of the state, by reporting the car his daughter has borrowed stolen. Showing François surveilling others (whilst simultaneously surveilling François), Hermanus links the audience to what Ryan Gilbey calls François's "poisoned perspective."³⁷ But Hermanus also uses younger characters to offer possibilities for the creative reconstruction of national identity after apartheid, and a nuanced celebration of South Africa's transition from white supremacist rule. These younger characters include the 'coloured' man at the farmhouse, whose presence heightens the tension in the scene in inter-generational terms, as an older community that refuses to 'move with the times' comes into contact with a young outsider whose presence challenges the foundations of their group identity.

The scene at the farmhouse is the first occasion when Hermanus puts François in contact with young 'coloured' men. Later in the film, cruising in a Cape Town nightclub beyond the reach of his Bloemfontein community, François recoils when a 'coloured' man approaches him, just as he does when surrounded by his peers.³⁸ [Fig

2] In an enigmatic scene that takes place between these demonstrations of François's loyalty to the apartheid past, he follows Christian to university, and watches from a distance as this man with whom he is infatuated expresses affection for a fellow male student. Where François interacts with black, Asian and 'coloured' people primarily as employees, sales personnel, or interlopers, here we see Christian enjoying a close inter-racial friendship. François watches as Christian initiates an intimate conversation with his friend, at a distance from their group, which ends with a kiss and an embrace [Fig 3]. In the approach to the conversation, Hermanus cuts back and forth between François and the younger men, but the conversation itself is presented without interruption, returning to François after the embrace.

Deon Lotz's performance suggests that François is pleased and excited by what he has observed; he is subsequently shown in close-up in his car, breathing carefully and smiling to himself with pleasure or affection. In the next scene, he buys an iPod for Christian. He now appears to know that Christian is sexually available to men (in an earlier scene, it is suggested that Christian has been involved in gay bashing). But François's scopophilic interest in the conversation also asks to be associated or compared with his own rejection of 'coloured' men. His behavior in the scene on the farm, and in the later one in the bar in Green Point, are complicated in this scene by the focus on Christian's friend. (It is *his* face rather than Christian's that is available to view). That François is not repelled by the possibility that Christian is sexually involved with a 'coloured' man suggests that his habits of recoil and denial are related to occasional, repressed desires to be released from the apartheid past, with its restrictions on both homosexuality and inter-racial sex.

In *Beauty's* penultimate scene, Hermanus again suggests that François envies the younger generation, as he covertly observes a loving exchange between two

young, white gay men. As in the earlier scenes where François spies on Christian and his friend at university, and Anika and Christian at Clifton Beach, here François, like the film's audience, can observe but not overhear. Where the silence was realistic in the earlier scenes, given François's distance from those he is observing, here the sound design is expressionistic rather than realistic, heightening his sense of exclusion. Although the film is ambiguous on this point, it is implied that François is waiting for Christian. To François's knowledge, Christian has not reported the rape, but an earlier scene showed François receiving a phone call at work, and subsequently withdrawing a large sum of money from the bank. With the (blackmail?) money in an envelope on the table beside him, François is now waiting alone in a public space: a popular burger restaurant, enclosed in glass. Christian does not arrive, and François's thwarted desire for him and its repercussions are recalled in pointed contrast with the young couple's mutual respect and affection, their relative freedom from censure, and their defensive awareness of François's furtive regard.

What makes this scene difficult for François to observe is not just the public, reciprocated desire between the men, unparalleled in his own experience, but perhaps more importantly their situatedness in his city, his culture, his whiteness, if not exactly his milieu. The open display of their affection for each other is thus, if not straightforwardly a condemnation of his failure to identify as a gay man, a painful reminder of freedoms he feels he has been denied. The scene ends with a lingering (25-second) close-up on François, in which Lotz performs almost entirely with his eyes. From there, Hermanus cuts to an even closer side-on shot of François, from the passenger seat of his car, as he makes a spiralling descent through a darkening parking garage. The film ends here, the fade to black extinguishing François's consciousness. And just as Hermanus involves his audience in François's surveillance

of those he cannot admit he desires, he also makes us unwilling passengers in François's self-silencing, as well as his failure to atone for his crime against Christian.

In *Beauty*, Christian and Anika are white and relatively secure in their privilege, but conflict between them and their elders is nonetheless symbolic of the relationship between the 'new' South Africa and the social and economic legacies of apartheid. François complains that his daughter does not know her "place" and that she treats him like a "cash machine." The immediate motivation for François's rape of Christian appears to be frustrated desire, but desire that is complicated by envy of Christian's youth, beauty, and social opportunities, as well as François's suspicion that Christian is using him for his money. (Immediately prior to the rape, Christian asks his "uncle" François for a loan.) The conflict between François's generation and Christian and Anika's is partly driven by the older generation's unforgiving and hypocritical hold on financial resources; in servicing his fascination with Christian and its consequences, François shows greater willingness to part with his cash.

On another level, inter-generational conflict is driven by the older generation's perception that the young enjoy privileges to which they themselves have only limited access: privileges associated with the greater linguistic and sexual freedoms that accompany post-apartheid democracy. Despite his wealth and authority, François seems sincerely to believe that he lacks the same opportunities as Christian. In a scene in which he comes close to coming out to Christian, he describes the restrictions he experienced in his youth in terms of his "duties to the family." Such duties were understood by many white Afrikaans men as the preservation of the apartheid state, racial 'purity,' and the Afrikaans language. In a country where English remains relatively unmarked by the taint of colonialism (Antjie Krog recounts an exchange with a black student in which he asserts that English is not a colonial language, in

comparison with Afrikaans) there are advantages to being an English speaker, above and beyond the obvious privileges enjoyed by the speakers of a globally dominant language.³⁹ Although both his parents are Afrikaans speakers and sometimes address him in Afrikaans, Christian appears to speak only English, and so, like Ronald Reagan speaking to François Mitterrand in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's illustration of the power of ignorance, compels his family members and their friends to converse with him "in an acquired tongue."⁴⁰ At a family gathering to which François is invited, Christian's mother complains of having had to practice her English while Christian was attending an English school. Similarly, François seems to be at a disadvantage in the company of this English speaker who, like the participants in Verwey and Quayle's study, finds it easy to "jettison" Afrikaans, and with it his link to the apartheid past. If François seems ill at ease conversing in English here, however, his mastery of Christian during the rape is reinforced by his use of English throughout the scene. If it is Christian's ignorance of Afrikaans that seems to privilege him in some scenes, François's apparent linguistic disadvantage comes to appear assumed or ironic after the brutal revelation of his physical power (he does not require a weapon to overwhelm Christian).

LGBTQI Rights and Political Struggle

Beauty, as well as some aspects of its reception in South Africa, draws attention to the legacy of the racially divided struggle for LGBTQI rights in the country. The film also illustrates what Zethu Matebeni has described as the "great paradox" of living in a nation with an LGBTQI-friendly constitution, where many residents struggle to access the protections mandated by the law.⁴¹ In the scene in the

farmhouse kitchen, the expulsion of Gideon and his 'coloured' companion speaks of the possibility of François's own marginalization, disenfranchisement and censure as a gay man. But Hermanus gives the lie to the notion, which Jane Bennett views as an inheritance from "what can be termed 'lgbt rights' discourse" in the global north, that "the experience of homophobia paralleled the experiences of racism" and that "self-identification as gay or lesbian warrant[s] access to a political space free of intersectional accountability."⁴² LGBTQI people of all races in South Africa have suffered human rights abuses; the activist and justice Albie Sachs has described what "happened to lesbian and gay people" as the "essence of apartheid."⁴³ Nonetheless, white queer people have generally enjoyed greater freedoms, with even the apartheid state relatively tolerant of gay life in white urban areas.⁴⁴ Gevisser writes that as a result of changes in law enforcement policy from the 1960s onwards, and the patrolling of toilets and popular cruising venues, gay and lesbian subcultures were forced "indoors," into bars and clubs that the police "left alone." These venues "became safe and dependable community meeting places for those white men and women who were allowed in." Meanwhile, "those who were black or could not afford either the entry-fee or the risk of being spotted in a gay place were left, quite literally, out in the cold."⁴⁵ But some queer people in apartheid South Africa nonetheless refused to acknowledge the privileges that accompanied their whiteness: the activist Hein Kleinbooi describes encountering the "misguided attitudes" of white "comrades" who viewed their experiences of homophobic oppression as "equivalent" to his experiences of poverty and racism. Writing in the early 1990s, Kleinbooi describes feeling caught between these white activists and black comrades who accused him of "hijacking the struggle" when he "brought up the issue of gay rights."⁴⁶

In *Beauty*, the young ‘coloured’ man’s expulsion reflects on how some members of the white LGBTQI community have continued to invoke the privileges they enjoyed under apartheid in order to disempower fellow South Africans whose race or class positions differ from their own. Drawing upon an account by Ndivhuwo Khangale, Amanda Lock Swarr describes how the Johannesburg Metro Police threatened to arrest drag queens at the annual Pride March in 2004, because “their wigs and makeup (construed as a ‘disguise’)” contravened an apartheid-era law, the Regulation of Gatherings Act.⁴⁷ Even after police “changed their position” and agreed not to make arrests, members of the white conservative Gay and Lesbian Alliance “vowed to make sure drag queens in particular” were arrested for contravening the Act, as their “parades” were viewed as harmful to the image of gays and lesbians.⁴⁸ For Swarr, this as an example of “how the terrain of gender liminality is not smooth or consistent” in contemporary South Africa, where she is concerned with how “raced and classed distinctions are drawn among drag queens, drag artists, and transsexuals.”⁴⁹

In the scene at the farmhouse, a cockerel crows as Henry ejects Gideon and his young ‘coloured’ companion on behalf of the white men inside. Hermanus draws attention to how this conservative white gay community betrays racial others with whom it shares a linguistic and cultural inheritance as well as an embattled position within a (often violently) heteronormative society. Simultaneously, he depicts some white Afrikaners’ unwillingness to relinquish their investment in apartheid’s social hierarchies, as well as their use of white supremacist privilege to control membership of their community. These actions are consistent with the way François and his circle set themselves apart from their wider national community, which they view as corrupt, menacing, and biased in favor of the interests of black people and

homosexuals. Hermanus positions conversations in which the white characters discuss the contemporary political realm in close proximity to moments highlighting their penchant for self-deception and hypocrisy. In a conversation with his own family and Christian's, moments before the orgy scene in the farmhouse, François complains: "[y]ou never know with these moffies. They get away with a lot these days." The rape scene cuts directly to a conversation between François and his wife where it becomes apparent that he has explained his injuries as the result of a carjacking. His wife declares: "[t]he police will certainly not do anything. Typical. This land is now really going to the dogs."⁵⁰

The repudiation encoded in the white community's use of the word "moffie" is an extension of the white gay liberation politics of apartheid-era South Africa, in which some activists sought to distance themselves from their racial others. While the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality, formed in 1994 and disbanded in 1999, successfully lobbied for the inclusion of sexual orientation as a legally protected characteristic in 1996, it suffered from what Natalie Oswin calls it "politics of strategic essentialism."⁵¹ From early on, its "executive committee decreed 'direct political action, civil disobedience, picketing, demonstrations and protest type actions' to be 'inappropriate'" and "developed arguments about the immutability of sexual orientation as parallel to the immutability of race."⁵² According to Oswin, the NCGLE has "never managed to shake the internal tendency toward elitism that was fostered in its early days." Nor has it disrupted "the circulation of [a] widespread public perception that it was an elite organization run by and catering to the white, affluent gay and lesbian community."⁵³ Although she steps back from holding "the conservative strategy adopted by the NCGLE in its early days [...] responsible for the persistence of class, race, and gender schisms within South Africa's gay and lesbian

communities,” she regrets the deepening of these schisms that have resulted from such a lobbying strategy.⁵⁴

Writing in the early 1990s, Mark Gevisser describes a “widely-held perception” within the white gay subculture

that the annual pride march is a “black affair,” even though [...] a full 75% of the participants were white. Publicity campaigns in gay bars [...] have revealed that the majority of white gay men who participate in Johannesburg’s mainstream commercial gay subculture stay away from the march because they find it “too political,” too closely linked to the ANC, and—quite bluntly—too black. For many white people, then, “black” and “political” are conflated in a perception that links current-day activism to black liberationist politics: this liberationism not only heightens their fear of disclosure, but, through its association with the aspirations of South Africa’s black majority, runs counter to their own deeply-entrenched conservatism.⁵⁵

In the period closely following Nelson Mandela’s release from prison, the failure to recognize the march as an event which serves the political interests of white and black people alike is a failure related to this white gay subculture’s refusal to reflect on how it has benefited from apartheid’s demise. This may also help to explain why François, a character who in other ways seems little concerned with how he is perceived, permits his homosexuality to remain under erasure well after the end of apartheid. Moreover, the conflation of the terms ‘black’ and ‘political’ reveals a failure to recognize loyalty to whiteness as a political choice in itself. When the activist Simon Nkoli was arrested and charged with treason in the 1980s, the white gay organization to which he belonged refused to intervene on his behalf, on the grounds that they were “apolitical.”⁵⁶ Matebeni points out that to decide not to “antagonize the state by taking sides for somebody who’s fighting against apartheid” is to take a political stance.⁵⁷ Matebeni sees this moment as leading to a “split” between Nkoli’s “queer politic” (founded on what she reads as intersectionality; supportive of political prisoners;

supported by women of color as well as white women and “other progressive white people”) and a white gay party she is hesitant to call a “party.”⁵⁸

The recent Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall movements have challenged the legacies of colonialism, whilst also making a contribution to intersectional politics in South Africa. As April Sizemore-Barber puts it, they explicitly embrace “feminist and queer politics,” as well as “intersectionality and multiplicity,” and have “revealed the very material ways that white supremacy and its apologists continue to shadow and shape current realities.”⁵⁹ For Nadia Davids, no “other organization or activist movement has [...] taken on gender or sexual politics, headfirst, [...] as Rhodes Must Fall has. It’s quite extraordinary. Because there is such a long history of sacrificing those conversations on the altar of what the greater struggle objectives are. And [...] these students do not allow that.”⁶⁰

As South Africa continues to redefine itself as a nation after colonialism and apartheid, Hermanus recognizes the crucial contribution that queer politics, and particularly queer of color politics, are making to the fight against racial essentialism and white supremacy. Paraphrasing Keguro Macharia, Ashley Currier and Thérèse Migraine-George suggest that “queer African bodies can [be] seen as productively subversive in their ever-shifting, haunting, and fragmentary (in)visibility.”⁶¹ By contrast, Xavier Livermon has highlighted the importance of queer visibility in creating freedom and “animat[ing] the equality provisions of the constitution.”⁶² For Livermon, “[b]lack queers bring dissident sexualities and gender nonconformity into the public arena” through their “cultural labor” and through “the act of seeing and being seen,” but also by making themselves known “as queer subjects.”⁶³ In so doing, they destabilize “the consistent representation of queerness as outside blackness and blackness as heteronormative.”⁶⁴

Livermon's focus is on the cultural labor performed by black queer people within their own communities, but *Beauty* dramatizes the importance of the labor performed by queer people of color for the wider body politic. The film employs queer 'coloured' men to confront the patriarchal heteronormativity that continues to be expressed in some articulations of post-apartheid whiteness, and to draw attention to the challenge posed by racial hybridity and non-normative sexual expression to whiteness and white hegemony. The insistent presence of 'coloured' gay men in the spaces François selects for sex with white men poses a challenge to his privileged position and self-definition, whilst also "animat[ing] the equality provisions" of South Africa's constitution at a moment when these provisions are under renewed threat from conservatism and traditionalism.⁶⁵

Conclusion: Queerness and Freedom

The film's Afrikaans title translates as "beauty," but the meaning of the adjective upon which the nominalization is founded—"skoon," or "clean"—gets lost in translation. In several scenes, François engages in protracted or perturbed rituals of cleaning his hands, teeth, face, or body in sparkling bathrooms whose cleanliness brings his inner turmoil into relief. At the nadir of his moral decline, he half-heartedly attempts to sanitize his polluted swimming pool, its murkiness an obvious analogy for his lack of insight into his own psyche. In a scene that draws together the beginning and end of the film, François and his wife attend a literary reading where Brian (the white newcomer from the farmhouse scene) is also in the audience. The young, white, Afrikaans author reads a passage from his novel in which a warring heterosexual couple are spiritually cleansed by a rainfall, while Brian and François cast meaningful

looks at each other. At the farmhouse, François cuts his finger as he opens a can of beer. Later, the cut reopens in the shower, continuing to bleed as he gets into bed with his wife. François's obsessive cleanliness may well point to a fear of contracting a sexually transmitted disease in a country that continues to suffer one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection in the world. It may also reveal a degree of unacknowledged shame at his taboo sexual behavior. But I would argue that what are also revealed in these moments are half-submerged anxieties about his whiteness. On one level the film, with some queer theory after Foucault, appears to claim modern sexuality "as the most intensive site of the demand for, and detection or discursive production of, the Truth of individual identity."⁶⁶ But here race is an adjacent site where meaning is intensively sought and produced. In troubling the 'truths' of the racial and sexual identities that populate François's purified, decreolized world, Hermanus insistently 'contaminates' it. At the same time, with his largely static camera shots and studied long-shot compositions, he captures its political and cultural stagnation, and the failure or refusal of many of its white inhabitants to emerge from an apartheid worldview.

The notional proximity of 'colouredness' and hybridity is deeply problematic, and any attempt to celebrate 'coloured' culture as particularly hospitable to cultural creativity, creolization, or non-conformity in the expression of sexuality or gender identity must wrestle with that problem. With that caveat in mind, I would like to suggest that the *ideal* of hybridity—with its structural opposition to the master narratives of cultural and racial purity, linguistic chauvinism and heteronormativity—is perceptible in *Beauty* thanks to the presence of its 'coloured' characters. It is also tempting to imagine that Hermanus's own allegiances lie in those marginal spaces, as a not-quite-"born free," 'coloured' director making a place for his distinctive film-

making within the South African film industry. Many of the mechanisms that power that industry, not to mention the interpretative habits of the local audience that adheres to it, are the product of apartheid—much like *Beauty's* protagonist himself. But the fact that Hermanus is able to portray François with such “shocking” compassion demonstrates his ability to identify with others across formidable generational and social divides—a capacity for imaginative acts of sympathetic association that François, apparently, does not share.⁶⁷

At the risk of reinstating distinctions that the Black Consciousness movement tried to put aside, I must note that darker-skinned black people in the film are usually out of focus, shot in extreme long shot, or placed on the very edges of the frame. Images of ‘non-white’ women, whether black, ‘coloured’ or ‘Asian,’ are also rare. There is a close-up of a female ‘Asian’ shopkeeper towards the beginning of the film, as François buys cigarettes on his way to the orgy in the farmhouse. She is pictured behind latticed security bars that would seem to emphasize her subalterity as a woman of color. It is worth recalling Macharia’s warning that “the overwhelming focus on same-sex acts has sidelined important African feminist work on how gendered and sexed and sexualised bodies become invested with political significance.”⁶⁸ We should also remember Matebeni’s characterization of the dominant narratives about lesbians in South Africa as over-emphasizing the story of the impoverished, butch black lesbian who is punished for challenging masculinity with [corrective] rape. Matebeni believes that these narratives create, among other falsehoods, the impression that this “special” form of rape “is happening only in Black South African townships” and that it is “not necessary to write about white lesbians in South Africa.”⁶⁹ Hermanus could clearly not have described the experiences of all LGBTQI South Africans, all South Africans of color, or all South African women, in one film; in the

latter respect, particularly, *Beauty* deserves to be viewed in the light of his representations of ‘coloured’ female experience in his other films. Although *Beauty* does not depict the experiences of women of color, it does speak to the “pressing need,” as Vasu Reddy, Surya Monro, and Matebeni have put it, “to develop knowledge about LGBTQ and non-heterosexual identities in relation to other social characteristics, such as ethnicity and national identity.”⁷⁰

There is a certain poetic justice to the fact that the first Afrikaans film to screen at Cannes (it went on to win the Queer Palm at Cannes as well as Best South African Feature at the Durban International Film Festival in 2011) is a critique of white Afrikaner identity by a ‘coloured’ director. *Beauty* interrogates a form of Afrikaansness that has white heterosexuality at its center, and which has claimed Africanness only insofar as that Africanness can be scrubbed ‘clean’ of its associations with black African cultures, languages, and histories. Moreover, while François and his peers focus on their putative disadvantage as white Afrikaners in the post-apartheid dispensation, they remain deliberately ignorant of the ways in which others, with whom they have much in common, are multiply disadvantaged. *Beauty* offers a perspective on race and sexuality in South Africa that makes these withheld freedoms visible, but also celebrates the agency of ‘coloured’ and queer identities in exposing the incoherences and inconsistencies of a dominant white social identity. The film also holds out the tantalizing possibility that things might happen differently in other South African settings. The scene in the bar in Green Point (where at least one interracial same-sex couple hovers around the edges of the frame) as well as the foreclosed possibility of a ‘coloured’ man participating in the group sex on the farm, gesture with pathos towards off-screen social spaces in which white and ‘coloured’

gay men act upon their mutual desire. François's journey ends in darkness, but in the darkness of off-screen space, other struggles for freedom continue in the light.

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¹ According to Zethu Matebeni, "most South Africans do not use the word queer," but I am using the word here for convenience, and in relationship to LGBTQI subjectivity across racial categories. This approach has its problems, amongst them its deployment of a Euro-American term that threatens to universalize 'queer' experience. However, my article does aim to emphasize the specificity of queer South African subjectivity, and also points to some shared experiences and histories, at least among white and 'coloured' queer people. Matebeni, "How ~~Not~~ to Write about Queer South Africa," *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Identities*, curated by Zethu Matebeni (Athlone: Modjaji Books, 2014), 57.

² Mohamed Adhikari explains that in South Africa, "contrary to international usage, the term *Coloured* does not refer to black people in general. It instead alludes to a phenotypically varied social group of highly diverse cultural and geographic origins. [...] The Coloured people were descended largely from Cape slaves, the indigenous Khoisan population, and other black people who had been assimilated to Cape colonial society by the late nineteenth century. Since they are also partly descended from European settlers, Coloureds are popularly regarded as being of "mixed race" and have held an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy, distinct from the historically dominant white minority and the numerically preponderant African population." Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 2.

³ It is important to acknowledge the disjunctures between queer studies in the global North, and queer of color critiques emerging from Africa. The latter challenge what Keguro Macharia has called the "imperial perch" of queer studies (Keguro Macharia, "On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint," *GLQ* 22, no. 2 [2016]: 183-190; 187). They express concerns about the application of Euro-American terminologies that obscure cultural difference and distort or diminish the variety of sexual practices and identities in Africa (see, for example, Matebeni, "How ~~Not~~ to Write about Queer South Africa," 57). They also question whether it is "possible to speak of a lesbian or gay national subject at all under the discourses of anticolonial and postcolonial nationalisms, given the transnational character of these subject positions" (Neville Hoad, "White Man's Burden, White Man's Disease," *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* [Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007], 68-89; 75). As Ashley Currier and Thérèse Migraine-George describe it, "[t]he unwieldy melding of [the] turbulent field formations [of African studies and queer studies] has engendered a salutary questioning of marginality, methodology, identity, subjectivity, and representation, queries that drive the antifoundationalist impulses of queer African studies" (Ashley Currier and Thérèse Migraine-George, "Queer Studies/African Studies: An (Im)possible Transaction?" *GLQ* 22, no. 2 [2016]: 281-305; 289).

⁴ I am following Zethu Matebeni, Surya Monro, and Vasu Reddy in using this particular initialism in the South African context. *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship, and Activism*, eds. Matebeni, Monro and Reddy (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁵ Nicky Falkof describes the scene as "tinted an almost nostalgic sepia." Falkof, "ENG/AFR: White Masculinity in Two Contemporary South African Films," *Critical Arts* 30, no. 1 (2016): 15-30; 20.

⁶ The significance of the farm in white Afrikaans literature has been described most notably by J.M. Coetzee in his *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988).

⁷ Jane Bennett says of Zanele Muholi that she, like Toni Morrison, “confront[s] whiteness simultaneously by ‘reading it back’ to itself and by charting the ground for a range of difficult and intellectually powerful questions about and to whiteness.” Bennett, “‘Queer/White’ in South Africa: A Troubling Oxymoron?,” *Queer in Africa*, 99-113; 106.

⁸ South African filmmaking excluded black people for most of its history, and “[o]pportunities were almost non-existent for black scriptwriters or directors” (Martin Botha, *South African Cinema 1896-2010* [Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2012], 35). According to Lindiwe Dovey, “[a]ll aspects of the South African film industry—production, distribution, and exhibition—began to come under strict state control as early as 1949” (Lindiwe Dovey, *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2009], 45). Black and white audiences were treated differently, “each with their own set of rules and operations, films and theatres,” thus creating a “very fragmented film industry” (Botha, *South African Cinema*, 52 and 35). Not only did the government monitor and control the films seen by black audiences, but it also, particularly from 1969, used its state subsidy scheme to reduce funding for “politically subversive films.” Importantly, the subsidy scheme promoted “the development of a nationalist Afrikaner cinema, intended to sustain Afrikaner identity” (Dovey, *African Film and Literature*, 46-47). Films made under the “so-called B scheme for black South African audiences,” launched in the 1970s, provided government support for the training of white filmmakers (Botha, *South African Cinema*, 52 and 115). These directors “demonstrated little knowledge of black culture” and “had to rely on actors to translate their own dialogue” (ibid., 115). Ramadan Suleman’s *Fools* (1997) is “regarded as South Africa’s first all-black feature film” (Katlego Mkhwanazi, “SA Filmmaker Ramadan Suleman Receives a French Order,” *Mail and Guardian* November 19, 2014, <https://mg.co.za/article/2014-11-19-ramadan-suleman-receives-a-french-order>. Accessed June 10, 2019).

⁹ Dylan Valley, “Interview with director Oliver Hermanus,” <https://www.africasacountry.com/2011/08/interview-with-film-director-oliver-hermanus>. Accessed September 16, 2018.

¹⁰ Richard Phillips, “Filmmaker Oliver Hermanus discusses *Beauty*,” World Socialist Website, 4 August 2012, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2012/08/sfoh-a04.html>. Accessed September 16, 2018.

¹¹ Cornel Verwey and Michael Quayle, “Whiteness, Racism, and Afrikaner Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *African Affairs* 111/445 (2012): 551-575; 557.

¹² Ibid., 552 and 554.

¹³ Ibid., 564.

¹⁴ George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 112.

¹⁵ Adam Haupt, “Race, Audience, Multitude: Afrikaans Arts Festivals and the Politics of Inclusion,” *Muziki* 3, no. 1 (2006): 16-27; 22.

¹⁶ One of the areas in which this contrast is most obvious is in relation to language. The characters in *Shirley Adams* speak English and Kaaps (otherwise known as Cape Vernacular Afrikaans or Afrikaaps), a variety spoken by ‘coloured’ people and marked by strong tendencies towards lexical borrowing and code switching. I do not mean to overstate the linguistic conservatism of the white characters in *Beauty*—they do use English colloquialisms or converse in English at times—but in comparison with Kaaps speakers, their code switches are not pervasive or disruptive to the structural integrity of standard Afrikaans. In other words, their language does not display its connectedness to other South African languages in the way that, for example, Kaaps and Scampton do. For more on Scampton, a “mixed language used mainly by youth and developed in the 1980s from the original Tsotsitaal,” see Xavier Livermon, “Queer(y)ing Freedom: Black Queer Visibilities in Postapartheid South Africa,” *GLQ* 18, nos 2-3 (2012): 297-323; 322 n53.

¹⁷ Verwey and Quayle, “Whiteness, Racism, and Afrikaner Identity,” 560.

¹⁸ Ibid., 552.

¹⁹ Mohamed Adhikari, “From Narratives of Miscegenation to Post-Modernist Re-Imagining: Towards a Historiography of Coloured Identity in South Africa,” *African Historical Review* 40, no. 1 (2008): 77-100; 77 and 83.

²⁰ See Nicole Devarenne, “The Language of Ham and the Language of Cain: ‘Dialect’ and Linguistic Hybridity in the Work of Adam Small,” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 45, no. 3 (September 2010): 389-408 and “‘In Hell You Hear Only Your Mother Tongue’: Afrikaner Nationalist

Ideology, Linguistic Subversion, and Cultural Renewal in Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf*." *Research in African Literatures* 37, no. 4 (November 2006): 105-20.

²¹ Adhikari, "From Narratives of Miscegenation," 84.

²² Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*, 15 and 14.

²³ Adhikari, "From Narratives of Miscegenation," 78.

²⁴ Zoë Wicomb, "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa," *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, eds. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 91-107; 92. In his account of the history of 'coloured' separatism, Adhikari links recent movements such as Khoisan revivalism—which arose in the mid 1990s and affirms Khoisan identity "as an authentic culture of ancient pedigree in place of Colouredness, which is repudiated as the colonizer's perverted caricature of the colonized"—to historic arguments for 'coloured' privilege over black people in South Africa (Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*, 186). Adhikari also notes that in its essentialism, the movement has disqualified "Muslims and Malays" (groups that have made an enormous contribution to 'coloured' culture) from Khoisan status (*ibid.*).

²⁵ Wicomb, "Shame and Identity," 93.

²⁶ Zoë Wicomb, *Playing in the Light* (New York and London: The New Press, 2006), 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Theo Sonnekus, "'We're Not Faggots!': Masculinity, Homosexuality and the Representation of Afrikaner Men who have Sex with Men in the Film *Skoonheid* and Online," *South African Review of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (2013): 22-39; 22.

³⁰ Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, "Defiant Desire: An Introduction," *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*, eds. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York and London: Routledge, 2012 [1995]) 3-13; 7. Writing in the 1990s, Gevisser speculates as to "why gay life flourished and was tolerated in these communities," describing the "annual Cape Coon Carnival" as a tradition that parodies and subverts conventions relating to gender and sexuality. He also points to the "influence of the Muslim Cape Malays in the region," noting that "while the Koran explicitly condemns male homosexuality, many gay Muslims maintain that their culture has always implicitly tolerated it as a preferable option to heterosexual adultery." Gevisser concludes that sexual dissidence has been "tolerated" better "in a hybrid, creole society like that of the coloureds than in supposedly coherent societies with strong patriarchal mythologies and traditions, like those constructed by the African and Afrikaner nationalist movements in South Africa." Mark Gevisser, "A Different Fight for Freedom," *Defiant Desire*, 14-86; 28).

³¹ Gevisser and Cameron, "Defiant Desire: An Introduction," 7.

³² The word "moffie" originated in "the 'coloured' communities of the Western Cape as the equivalent of words like 'queer' and 'faggot' with derogatory connotations. It has, however, been re-appropriated, especially by 'coloured' gays." Jacqueline Maingard, *South African National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 185 n10.

³³ Ken Cage, *Gayle: The Language of Kinks and Queens: A History and Dictionary of Gay Language in South Africa* (Houghton: Jacana Media, 2003), 35 and 19.

³⁴ South Africa's "Border War" (now often referred to as the "forgotten war") was the attempt by the apartheid state from 1966-1989 to "stabilize" neighboring (if not actually bordering) countries engaged in civil or independence struggles. A neo-colonial expression of Cold War hostilities, it was one of the definitive experiences of South African masculinity in the late apartheid period.

³⁵ In *Sex in Transition: Remaking Gender and Race in South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), Amanda Lock Swarr builds on a news article published in the *Mail and Guardian* in 2000 that "detailed a pattern of medical experimentation, torture, and abuse of white gay conscripts during the 1970s and 1980s, allegedly including forced sex reassignment surgeries." (98) *Sex in Transition* also describes atrocities committed against transgender people of color during apartheid, as well as the struggle by South African citizens and refugees alike to access the protections afforded by the country's constitution in the post-apartheid period. In his "Border War" memoir, Granger Korff likens military service to "being in hell" for gay and trans men (Granger Korff, *19 with a Bullet: A South African Paratrooper in Angola* [Johannesburg: 30 South Publishers, 2009], 73-74). In "My Kubaan," a devastating short story about the psychological effects of "Border War" service, Etienne van Heerden's protagonist recounts how soldiers on the eve of a military operation "strip the moffies stark naked, tie them to the noses of jeeps and drive to town with them." Etienne van Heerden, "My Kubaan," ("My Cuban"), *My Kubaan* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1983), 91-99; 96 (my translation). Hermanus's current film project is based on the novel *Moffie* by André Carl van der Merwe, which

deals with “military conscription and how it shaped white masculinity during apartheid.” Vukile Dlwati, “Award-Winning SA Film Maker Tackles White Masculinity,” *City Press* on-line, 5 April 2018, <https://city-press.news24.com/news/award-winning-sa-film-maker-tackles-white-masculinity-20180405>. Accessed September 16, 2018. The news article does not reveal the connection with *Moffie*, but on August 16, 2018, Hermanus tweeted “What a time to be making a film about the SADF based on the book MOFFIE.” Accessed August 23, 2018.

³⁶ Lindiwe Dovey, “Mixing It Up: New Audiovisual Cultures in South Africa,” *Black Camera* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 177-196; 180.

³⁷ Ryan Gilbey, “Trouble in Mind,” *New Statesman*, 141.5102 (April 23, 2012): 53.

³⁸ I am taking a particular risk in ascribing an ethnicity to this character, in the absence of linguistic cues, under nightclub lighting, and where the actor’s physical appearance could fit more than one ethnic type in South Africa. It is possible the character/actor would not identify as ‘coloured’ (or for that matter, as male).

³⁹ Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (Johannesburg: Random House, 2002 [1998]), 15-16.

⁴⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Privilege of Unknowing: Diderot’s *The Nun*,” *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), 23-51; 23.

⁴¹ Ruti Talmor, “From the Margins You Push so that the Center Implodes,” *GLQ* 19, no. 3 (2013): 383-403; 388.

⁴² Bennett, “‘Queer/White’ in South Africa,” 108.

⁴³ Cited in Mark Gevisser, “A Different Fight,” 82.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁶ Hein Kleinbooi, “Identity Crossfire: On Being a Black Gay Student Activist,” *Defiant Desire*, 264-268; 264.

⁴⁷ Swarr, *Sex in Transition*, 207.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 207-208.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁵⁰ I have combined my own translations of Deon Lotz and Michelle Scott’s dialogue here with the subtitles, which omit subtleties such as “now” and “these days.”

⁵¹ Oswin points out that the insertion of “the phrase *sexual orientation* [...] into the draft constitution’s equality clause” predated the formation of the NCGLE, and speculates that there is a strong chance it would have been retained in the final constitution “whether or not this organization had launched its lobbying effort.” Natalie Oswin, “Producing Homonormativity in Neoliberal South Africa: Recognition, Redistribution, and the Equality Project,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 32, no. 3 (April 2007): 649-669; 666. Livermon speculates that the “clause on sexual orientation in the South African constitution was not developed with black queers in mind” and that its inclusion “was part of a concerted effort to retain the white minority population in postapartheid South Africa by suggesting that even those most abjected under apartheid rule (white queers) would be safe in the postapartheid state.” “Queer(y)ing Freedom,” 303.

⁵² Oswin, “Producing Homonormativity,” 652.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 660.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 666.

⁵⁵ Mark Gevisser, “A Different Fight,” 82.

⁵⁶ Nadia Davids and Zethu Matebeni, “Queer Politics and Intersectionality in South Africa,” *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 18, no. 2 (2017): 161–167; 162. At this point, Nkoli was a member of the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) and “led its racially inclusive Saturday Group in Soweto.” “The Glow Collection,” https://www.gala.co.za/resources/docs/Archival_collection_articles/GLOW.pdf. Accessed September 16, 2018.

⁵⁷ Davids and Matebeni, “Queer Politics and Intersectionality in South Africa,” 163.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 163. Nkoli founded GLOW (the Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand) in 1988.

⁵⁹ April Sizemore-Barber, “Archival Movements: South Africa’s Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action,” *Safundi* 18, no. 2 (2017): 117-130; 122n19 and 122. Sizemore-Barber writes about the only queer archive on the African continent, the Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) archive in Johannesburg.

⁶⁰ Davids and Matebeni, “Queer Politics and Intersectionality in South Africa,” 166. But Matebeni responds that this contribution has come at the cost of the “writing out” of cisgender women.

⁶¹ Currier and Migraine-George, “Queer Studies/African Studies,” 291.

⁶² Livermon, “Queer(y)ing Freedom,” 300 and 304.

⁶³ Ibid., 303.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 304.

⁶⁵ Matebeni notes that in April 2012 the House of Traditional Leaders “asked to remove the sexuality clause from the constitution. This has been an awakening for many South Africans, gays and lesbians especially.” Matebeni points out that “the constitution is not a fixed document because of our democratic system” (Talmor, “From the Margins,” 388). The footnote comments further on the irony of a group whose rights and freedoms are protected by the constitution trying to rescind the rights of another group protected by the same document. (402 n19) Livermon has emphasized the role that tradition can play in supporting LGBTQI people to find belonging in their communities. He describes the creative inhabitation of African traditional practices (circumcision rites; *lobola*, or “bride price”; and *isangoma*, or traditional medicine) by black queers, celebrating “the ability of black queerness to complicate and problematize notions of African custom, culture and tradition.” Xavier Livermon, “Usable Traditions: Creating Sexual Autonomy in Postapartheid South Africa,” *Feminist Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 14-41; 23.

⁶⁶ Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Privilege of Unknowing,” 10.

⁶⁷ Wally Mammona Hammond, “Beauty,” *Sight and Sound* 22, no. 5 (May 2012): 55.

⁶⁸ Keguro Macharia, “Archive and Method in Queer African Studies,” *Agenda* 29, no. 1 (2015): 140-146; 144.

⁶⁹ Matebeni, “How Not to Write about Queer South Africa,” 57-58.

⁷⁰ Reddy, Monro, and Matebeni, “Introduction,” *Queer in Africa*, 1-16; 3.