

## Pride for whom?

Creation of safe, inclusive spaces to be an 'other' in a normative society.

PRIDES are celebrated, internationally over four decades. How many people even entertain the thought that it originated from the most marginalised group of people within the LGBTI community. It was people who challenged daily expectancies of 'how we should look and behave.' Gender non-conforming identities always posed difficulties for people. Stonewall and the incidents followed by those early year's riots originated from drag queens and trans people. Surely gay and lesbian people were part of it – and that is the beauty of the Pride history – everyone was involved!

Expression of gender identity, the way how people perceive 'others' to be, what we expect to find when we deal with the person in front of us – that is the core of individuals uncomfortable awkward way of not knowing. Combine that with culture, fundamental beliefs, and tradition and people become so ridged, they will murder.

End of July 2007 a woman from Umlazi Township was stripped naked and her shack burnt down because she wore trousers. Although this has most possible no relation to her sexual orientation or her gender identity, it is a scary thought to realise how traditionalism, culture and fundamental beliefs keep women at ransom. This incident also poses an indirect serious threat to transgender people as it forms part of the current wave of patriarchal backlash.

Strict binary expectations like this and others go hand in hand with hate crimes based on sexual orientation. Whilst we still experience prejudice and discrimination causing people to lose their lives, we do not dare participating in annual Pride without seeking a deeper political message.

A year after the Umlazi trouser incident, on 2 June 2008 an out and open drag queen in Johannesburg were shot in cold blood – because of gender presentation. A Close friend of Daisy and witness at the scene affirms that Daisy was shot because of gender identity. They were not willing to be ridiculed or living a closeted live and became targets of homophobia and transphobia.

No Pride is won, gained or established for a collective LGBTI group if transgender and intersex people don't feel included. Many times the only way of acceptance by lesbian and gay people for transgender and intersex people is to 'blend in'. Many times one hear from gay and lesbian people, both in the organised LGBT sector and gay and lesbian individuals they are not interested in participating in gay Prides as they are not happy to be portrayed by a bunch of drag queens. (The very same people who stood up forty years ago, no more willing to be bashed by society and subjected to random police searches). Rather bring political messages to Prides, attend 'en masse' and make sure all diversity is visible, gay and lesbian people would rather prefer to 'brand' Pride as a drag event. The overall message and many years of hard work, activism and all efforts are lost when people consciously cut themselves loose from what I see as part of Queer history.

Transgender people feel they are accepted as long as they support LGB issues. LGB organisations need to be willing to take on advocacy issues – even if it clearly is for equity, equal rights & advancement of transgender and intersex people. Transgender people supported the same-sex campaign (and also internationally in countries where it was won, and still support it in countries where campaigns are still ongoing) – transgender people also want LGB people to support WITH SAME DRIVE issues that is of importance for transgender and intersex people for example the advocacy work and struggles with regards to sex description on birth registers at Department of Home Affairs. This might translate sometimes to having advocacy and lobbying time spent on issues which will mostly only be important to transgender, transsexual, gender non-confirming and intersex people. But that is the nature of activism and solidarity.

With the escalating amount of hate crimes, where the most fragile or vulnerable people, the most marginalised of the marginalised are targeted there is clearly no Pride yet. Specifically black lesbians, effeminate gay men, transgender people and people who are openly HIV/AIDS activists, being the constant targets just emphasise the fact that the long hard struggle is taking another dimension.

It is high time that we all realise the importance of the words of Simon Nkoli to not separate issues of poverty, race and class from queer issues. We need to stand in solidarity when taking issues of marginalisation on. One cannot randomly only want to fight against homophobia, without addressing racism, classism, patriarchy or transphobia. It is intersecting.

'Number one, I'm rejected by whites for being black. Number two, I'm rejected by blacks for being gay. Number three, I'm rejected by gays for dressing as a woman... I'm disgusted by the fact that gay

people still have the nerve to look down on other people. How do they expect to win the struggle if they do the same?&rdquo; &ndash; Iko Mash, *Pride: Protest and celebration*. (2002)

Over the past few years racial issues started watering down, what should be the important messages of Pride. Loaded discussions such as the route of the actual marches played out and emphasise actually more than anything else the fact that there is not true freedom yet. What seems to be just debate about a Pride march route, actually translate into much deeper theories. For who is a Pride march if it is following a route through a quite suburb or CBD area after shopping hours? Who gets to attend, participate and physically be part of the march? And in answer to this issue, is a counter solution of having a separate march through a township too&ndash; what is the message of having two Pride routes: one through a suburb or urban area and one through a township. Either way, the messages and importance of participation is the most important consideration at hand when making these decisions.

Unfortunately the more paper rights are gained, the higher the wave of resistance is monitored.

To summarise, only once we can as a collective LGBTI people celebrate Pride, knowing minority groups of people are not targeted because of their education, skin colour, gender identity and sexual orientation. We cannot allow to only celebrate Pride once a year in upper middle class suburbs focussing on festivities and celebrations. We need to feel the protection of Pride throughout the year. Then only we truly have Pride.

by Liesl Theron

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