



South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom

Brenna M. Munro

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After apartheid, South Africa established a celebrated new political order that imagined the postcolonial nation as belonging equally to the descendants of indigenous people, colonizing settlers, transported slaves, indentured laborers, and immigrants. Its constitution, adopted in 1996, was the first in the world to include gays and lesbians as full citizens. Brenna M. Munro examines the stories that were told about sexuality, race, and nation throughout the struggle against apartheid in order to uncover how these narratives ultimately enabled gay people to become imaginable as fellow citizens. She also traces how the gay, lesbian, or bisexual person appeared as a stock character in the pageant of nationhood during the transition to democracy. In the process, she offers an alternative cultural history of South Africa.

Munro asserts that the inclusion of gay people made South Africans feel “modern”—at least for a while. Being gay or being lesbian was reimagined in the 1990s as distinctly South African, but the “newness” that made these sexualities apt symbols for a transformed nation can also be understood as foreign and un-African. Indeed, a Western-style gay identity is often interpreted through the formula “gay equals modernity equals capitalism.” As South Africa’s reentrance into the global economy has failed to bring prosperity to the majority of its citizens, homophobic violence has been on the rise.

Employing a wide array of texts—including prison memoirs, poetry, plays, television shows, photography, political speeches, and the postapartheid writings of Nobel Laureates Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee—Munro reports on how contemporary queer activists and artists are declining to remain ambassadors for the “rainbow nation” and refusing to become scapegoats for the perceived failures of liberation and liberalism.

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