

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

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South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom provides, to my mind, an original and meticulously researched account of the shifting and often paradoxical deployments of sexualities that could be termed queer in the literary and cultural imagining of the South African nation between apartheid and post-apartheid eras. It thus makes a major contribution to contemporary South African studies. Munro effectively rethinks recent South African historiography from a new angle. In response to the standard avoidance of the question of LGBTQ issues in the critique of the failures of the post-apartheid state, Munro writes: "It is important not just to include gay rights as in and of itself a significant piece of the complex picture of South Africa's political change, and indeed the transnational reverberations of that change, but to also pay attention to what role gay rights have played in post-apartheid neo-liberalism; to how exactly identity politics and the 'free market' converge and possibly diverge; and to how the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution are inter-connected" (xxv). The book elaborates the palimpsestic histories, representations, and identifications that enable those interconnections.

South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come further makes significant historical and theoretical contributions to important questions on the terrain of nationalism and sexuality. Munro writes: "The figure of the gay person as a symbol of South Africa's democratic modernity is, of course, a radical departure from the traditional familial iconography of nationhood—and it emerges from a history in which homosexuality has long been a deeply contested idea, bound up with the re-imagining of race, gender, and nation in the context of settler colonialism" (viii).

While the above two interventions mark the book's major contributions, Part 1, "Fraternity and Its Anxieties," importantly re-imagines the homosocial in the context of prison writing in relation to the national liberation struggle, and makes the surprising yet compelling move of contrasting that version of the homosocial with difficult experiences of white gay conscripts in the South African defense forces. Part 2, "Gender, Apartheid, and Imagined Spaces of Nation," provides an original take on the reimagining of South African multi-racial demi-mondes. This part provides a fascinating excavation of the multiple genealogies of rainbow nation discourse in the run-up to possible figurations of the new nation, through readings of the work of Richard Rive and Bessie Head. The first chapter in Part 3, "Writing

the Rainbow Nation,” provides the most thorough reading of the problem of homo/sexuality in the post-apartheid writings of South Africa’s literary Nobel Laureates—J. M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer—that I have read. Taken as a whole, the book powerfully augments the history and historiography of the struggle against apartheid and its aftermath. Along the way, it makes important contributions to theories of the intersection of sexuality and post/colonial nationalisms more generally, and individual chapters offer innovative readings of some of the most important figures in South African literary studies.

Munro’s book builds upon, and in certain ways exceeds, recent books in both South African, African, and global queer studies—Marc Epprecht’s *Heterosexual Africa* (2008), Neville Hoad’s *African Intimacies* (2007), and Henrietta Gunkel’s *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* (2010), to start. *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come* has a finer sense of how literary works both capture and contribute to the political, social, and affective dynamics of the intersection of sexual, racial and national identities than any of the above. Munro’s discussion of the centrality of prison and military experience in the forging of the imagining of the new nation is an important addition to the more anthropological and medical work of Epprecht and Hoad’s legal and political focus.

In terms of more generalized considerations of nationalism and sexuality, Munro suggests a more ambivalent understanding of homonationalism than the one to be found in Jasbir Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007). Some of this ambivalence could be attributed to the differences between the national spaces of the U.S. and South Africa, though I think Munro makes more of a case for the critical and strategic use of human rights discourses. In relation to recent South African literary studies, Munro’s attention to the deployment of gay and lesbian characters and allegories in apartheid and post-apartheid writing supplements books like Shane Graham’s *South African Literature After the Truth Commission: Mapping Loss* (2009) and Rita Barnard’s *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* (2007).

Munro’s range of reading is impressive. She is responsible to multiple constituencies and interlocutors, and is equally adept at addressing scholarship produced in South Africa and scholarship produced internationally. The three-part division proceeding chronologically works well for both the genealogical and theoretical arguments of the book. The short concluding sections of each chapter provide important bridges to the subsequent chapter. The use of Zanele Muholi’s increasingly famous photographic portraits of South African lesbians in the final chapter returns South Africa to the world in moving ways and the conclusion offers a redemptive reading of Ashraf Jamal’s *Love Themes for the Wilderness* (1996) as an addition to “an alternative archive of postcolonial queer dissidence” (241).

Munro articulates complex theoretical questions in clear, elegant prose. Jargon is minimal, and clearly defined when used. Texts—literary, historical, and political—under discussion are invariably

lucidly summarized. The book is eminently readable without sacrificing complexity or rigor. Overall, I read this book with a sense of excitement. It will be of enormous use to scholars of South African Literature, African Queer Studies, and Queer Theory as it makes the transnational turn, and to a wider readership interested in the history, present, and possible futures of South Africa.

Works Cited

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