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Aesthetics of Coalition and Protest

The Imagined Queer Community

QUEERNESS
RACE
POLITICS
BELONGING IDENTITY
COMMUNITY

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1 Introduction

This project is the result of a journey across the disciplines. Its ambitious aim is to engage the queer community in a discussion about identity, difference and community at a time when it gains more and more acceptance into the socio-cultural and political mainstream. The place for such discussion is the borderland between Ethnic Studies and Queer Studies as they are located in the broader field of transnational American Studies. The starting point of the discussion is not new and not unique to the queer community, but it is certainly one that has grown from the incorporation into a cultural and political mainstream. A certain trend toward homogenization at the expense of difference has been observed in many other social movements based on collective identity. The goal of this study is therefore twofold: On a general level, it questions longstanding ideas about identity and community at a moment when the individualized U.S. society is often deemed post-identity and thus by extension post-community. On a more specific level, the project deconstructs the notion of the queer community, white and male-centered as it is right now, and attempts to reimagine a pan-ethnic queer community. This is not simply a move toward inclusion of 'the other'—in this case the inclusion of queer people of color into the mainstream queer community[1]—it is also an attempt to engage in a dialogue across difference. The resulting dialogues are both hierarchically constructed in the sense that they need to happen between minoritized communities of color and the white majority, and horizontally constructed, taking place between similarly marginalized communities of color. The focus is on the multiple marginalizations of

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[1] Mainstream, as it relates to the idea of a queer community, means the growing incorporation of whiteness and maleness as the new norm within the community. This project differentiates between a transgressive queer community that incorporates many differences across gender, race, ethnicity, and class, and a mainstream queer community.

queer people of color within heteronormative[2] society, communities of color, and the mainstream queer community.

> In a supposedly post-identity society driven by highly individualized consumerism, the queer community is a perfect starting point to engage in a discussion about identity and community because it is, or rather should be, suspicious of both. It is nowhere that the suspicion of identity, inherent as it is to the original idea of queerness, comes as forcefully alongside the idea of community as it does in the queer community. However impossible or imaginary such a community might be, it is still believed to exist nationally, and even transnationally.[3] The result of queerness's suspicion of identity, however, is a homogenizing effect, based on the prerogative of whiteness in which queerness ironically turns into a racialized marker that situates the white queer at the center of the queer community and in stark contrast to the straight racial other. To counter such a homogenization effect, this project examines the intra-communal racial heterogeneity through the aesthetic works by or about queer people of color produced within such context. These works speak to the processual character of community at the same time, as they remind us of the material and economic realities that are shaped by identity markers such as race, gender, class, and sexuality.

Identity politics, as they have emerged from the social movements of the 1960s, have since been hailed and criticized alike. With the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States the idea of a post-identity and colorblind society has entered into public discourse and the media.[4] The voices of those who see identity as a mere social con-

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[2] Heteronormativity refers to a set of heterosexual norms (heterosexual sex, heterosexual marriage, binary gender system) that is enforced on a socio-cultural and political level.

[3] The idea of a transnational community surfaces in social activism across the globe in which queer organizations based in the U.S. pledge solidarity with queer movements in different places, sometimes ignoring that queerness is not a universal concept.

[4] Ian Haney Lopez points out the dangers of colorblindness and its relation-ship to white dominance in his seminal work *White By Law* (2006): He defines colorblindness as "[t]his looming racial paradigm [that] has three central elements […]: (1) continued racial dominance by Whites; (2) an expansion of who counts as White along socio-racial rather than bio-racial lines' and (3) a colorblind ideology that simultaneously proclaims a robust

struction that should be eliminated rather than institutionalized have become louder than ever. These voices join forces with a highly individualized consumerism that takes the emphasis away from traditional identity markers such as race and gender and replaces them with the prerogative of individualized consumption. Yet, identity remains an important marker of social and material inequalities. It continues to surface in current politics either overtly, for example in the struggle for same-sex marriage, or covertly through what Ian Haney-Lopez terms 'Dog-whistle-politics'[5].

In this study, the relevance of identity, especially for minorities will not be easily discarded. Identity, and by extension, community still holds a powerful position in the personal, cultural, and political realm of society, because people still organize around markers of identity. Yet, identity, especially collective identity and the political organizing around collective identity also carry with them the dangers of homogenization in favor of a positive life-script that erases differences within the community (Appiah 1994).[6] Identity is never singular, and never essential.

The queer community is an interesting example of a community in the 21st century, because its existence is never doubted, yet its collective identity is unclear or at least debatable and its borders are highly volatile to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. In addition to being exemplary for today's society, investigating the queer community

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commitment to antiracism yet works assiduously to prevent effective racial remediation. (148)

[5] Ian Haney Lopez defines dog whistle politics as "coded talk centered on race" used by [p]oliticians […] seeking to surreptitiously communicate support to small groups of impassioned voters whose commitments are not broadly embraced by the body politics" (Dog Whistle Politics 4). He uses Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign as an example of such politics: "Campaigning for president, Ronald Reagan liked to tell stories of Cadillac-driving 'welfare queens' [...]. In flogging these tales about the perils of welfare run amok Reagan always denied racism and emphasized he never mentioned race. He didn't need to because he was blowing a dog whistle" (4).

[6] See Kwame Anthony Appiah's contribution to Amy Gutman's *Multi-culturalism* (1994).

especially through its racial politics addresses two blind spots: First, it shows the relevance of racial markers in the construction of a sexual identity. Second, it acknowledges the importance of queerness in the construction of racial identity. Reading race and queerness through each other instead of against each other is a method that has only slowly begun to be integrated into debates on race and sexuality within the broad fields of Ethnic Studies and Queer Studies. Apart from expanding the dialogue between race and sexuality and their respective fields, this project adds an additional perspective: It attempts to bring various ethnicities into dialogue with each other by investigating pan-ethnic queerness.

1.1 Introducing the Queer Community

In the wake of neoliberalism's pressing attempts to break collectivities apart and individualize society according to (niche) marketing strategies, the idea of a national, even transnational, queer community still prevails. The idea of a queer community is ubiquitous in the media, academic scholarship, and everyday parlance. Yet, despite its inflationary usage, its inherent contradiction is often overlooked. The queer community defies definition. It is arguably a community that has arrived in a broader cultural context, while it simultaneously remains a subcultural[7] community rooted in the imaginary extension of the queer activism of the 1990s. Lingering in an in-between state as something which has been (during the height of AIDS activism) and simultaneously is not here yet (the mainstreaming of queer identities precludes a truly queer community), the queer community only exists as an imaginary construct that differs tremendously from the image that the media momentarily provides of it.[8] The juxtaposition of queer, as originally something de-essential, and community as something rather essential can be difficult

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[7] Dick Hebdige, in his seminal work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), describes subcultures as a "challenge to hegemony" (17).

[8] Think, for example, of advertisement from J.C. Penny, IKEA, and Amazon that celebrate gay consumerism with mostly white same-sex couples and families on display.

to say the least. Although the meaning of the term queer community varies greatly depending on the context in which it is performed, it has hardly ever been investigated carefully. Instead, queer liberalism has made the white gay male the community's poster boy, ignoring many intra-group differences like race, class, age, and gender. "[Q]ueer liberalism", as David Eng defines it in *The Feeling of Kinship* (2010), "articulates a contemporary confluence of the political and economic spheres that forms the basis for liberal inclusion of particular gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subjects petitioning for rights and recognition before the law" (2-3). He places queer liberalism in the context of other markers of identity arguing that "we inhabit a political moment when disparities of race — not to mention sex, gender, and class — apparently no longer matter; they neither signify deep structural inequities nor mark profound institutional emergencies. Our historical moment is burdened by the language of colorblindness [...]" (3). The queer community contributes to a growing structural homonormativity[9] perpetuating racism, ageism, classism, and many other -isms on various levels. The existence of a queer community that is aware of its intersections with other communities seems indeed impossible. Therefore, I want to investigate the queer community from an intersection that remains an underexamined chapter within queer theory: race and sexuality. The possibility and potential of a pan-ethnic queer community is hardly ever questioned. It is not only haunted by the non-particularity of whiteness[10], it is also haunted by different histories of racialization and different implications of identity on queerness and race.

As Benedict Anderson stated in his seminal publication *Imagined Communities* (2006), any community greater than primordial villages is imagined and functions in the way we imagine it. Although this is a

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[9] Homonormativity is a term coined by Lisa Duggan in *The Twilight of Economy* (2003). It describes the growing tendency of queer subjects to be incorporated into a normative lifestyle. For further insights into the concept of homonormativity, see Chapter 2.

[10] Richard Dyer (1997) writes, "Whites can thus believe that they are nothing in particular, because the white particularities on offer are so obviously not them. Extreme whiteness thus leaves a residue, a way of being that is not marked as white, in which white people can see themselves. This residue is non-particularity, the space of ordinariness" (223).

longstanding idea, it is still valuable for analyzing the queer community for two reasons: It draws attention to the malleability of the queer community, indebted as it is right now to homonormativity and whiteness, on the one hand, and stresses the practical and material consequences determined by the way in which we imagine the queer community, on the other hand. To elaborate on the first point, it is important to note that imagined communities give room for change, exactly because they are imagined. Although it is always a power struggle over who shapes and determines the make-up of a community, it is also possible to change and reconstruct an imagined community. It is also important to do so now, because the queer community is increasingly used as a political tool at the moment. In today's political climate, the idea of a queer community does not only serve as a structure of support for some queer individuals, it also serves as a proxy for how 'modern' and 'evolved' a nation is. The more active and visible the queer community, the more liberal is the nation-state perceived. The possible terrible consequences are many. The pinkwashing[11] campaign of Brand Israel that serves to camouflage the state's cruelties against Palestinians is just one, albeit major example. Another effect is the growing homonormative structure evolving around and within queer politics in which same-sex marriage has become the main political goal. Although the queer community's visibility is used as an evaluation tool for a nation's progress, the theoretical possibility, political and practical usefulness of this queer community can be highly doubted, especially when it is troubled with the intersection of race and sexuality.

Race and sexuality are two modes of identity that need to be thought simultaneously and that need to step into dialogue with each other in order to demystify the common perception of gay as white and non-white as straight, and also in order to push progressive queer politics forward. Progressive queer politics means queer politics that do not solely focus on rights and recognition for a few of its members, but that aim for greater social justice for all of its members. Investigating the queer community from an intersectional perspective is therefore tremendously important, because how we think of and imagine the queer

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[11] Pinkwashing is an analogy to whitewashing. It describes strategies of companies, nations, and other entities that foreground their LGBT friendly attitude in order to cover potentially negative activities.

community determines how we act on behalf of it, socially, culturally, and politically. Responsibly incorporating community into the messy context of queering race and racializing queerness remains an urgent endeavor for queer scholarship and activism. A queer community is too often taken for granted, because it appears to carry value for some queer people. Yet, who these people are and what the psychological, socio-cultural, and political potential of the community is, is never critically analyzed. This study proposes challenges to long standing beliefs about identity, community, queerness, race and the intersections of all these categories that need to be acknowledged before making claims on behalf of a community that might have no theoretical foundation, let alone practical and political consequences. We need to keep in mind that no matter how imaginary and impossible a truly inclusive queer community might seem, the queer community in general (whatever its different perceptions) nevertheless remains an important structural component in some people's lives that has social, cultural, psychological, and political consequences.

Three questions are my primary concern: Is a pan-ethnic community possible given the different implications of identity for community, queerness and race? What role can this community play at the intersection of community, identity, and nation? What kind of dialogue does a pan-ethnic queer community create along the lines of the social, the cultural, and the political?

1.1.1 Is a Pan-Ethnic Queer Community Possible?

The juxtaposition of a very essential concept, such as community, with an anti-essential concept like queerness is already contradictory and begs the question how we can think of community post-identity. Community and identity have always been two sides of the same coin, namely that of an idea indebted to essential views about individual and group identities. After the critique of identity and within the wake of neoliberalism's individualization of society, the possibility of communi-ties based on identities has become somewhat troubled. Steve Epstein summarizes the problems of community building around identity in the 21st century:

> As formerly paradigmatic patterns of identity construction (such as "the lesbian feminist") lose sway, they are replaced by a loosely related hodgepodge of lifestyle choices. Collectively these offer more individual space for the construction of identity, but none provides a clear 'center' for the consolidation of community. (154)

Queerness perfectly fits Epstein's example. In its original usage, queerness is also a rather lose conglomeration of lifestyles, defying a clear center. Although, clear centers have become less clear over the last decades, the need for a sense of belonging and collectivity has constantly grown within the last decades. Sharon Holland calls this, "the stubborn insistence that we do belong to one another despite our every effort at home and in the institution, to lose track of, if not forget altogether, such belonging" (15).

With the attempt to create community and collective identity against neoliberalism's attempts to fragment each, the resulting queer community currently homogenizes highly individual queer life experiences. Queer liberalism has made whiteness and homonormativity central aspects of the queer community, ignoring intra-group differences and abandoning transgressive queer politics in favor of an increasing incorporation into the nation-state. The illusion of a transnational queer identity overshadows the individuality of queer experiences not only on different sides of national borders, but also within one single cultural context. This deception forecloses any valuable discourse about the difficulty of creating community around identity. In extension, the struggle to incorporate two or more markers of identity, such as race and queerness proves extremely complex given the tremendous ignorance of their different histories within the U.S. Forging alliances across differences without erasing them, an approach that Third World Feminism had already advocated more than two decades ago, appears to be a longstanding, yet challenging vision in the endeavor to find similarities between groups. Attempts to racialize queerness and to queer race are thus ongoing challenges to the building of a pan-ethnic queer community.

Collectivities have always played a central role within the political efforts of minorities as the histories of feminism, civil rights activism, and other social movements have shown. Yet, since the idea of identity has been vehemently criticized, the question remains how we can

conceive of new forms of community after the critique of the subject and the critique of identity. Is community, specifically, is a queer community still possible? Community has always come after identity in a genealogical sense. The need to establish some form of identity on which to ground a subsequent community has become destabilized through the critique of identity so that we can now ask what happens to community after identity in another sense: What happens to community when there no longer is an identity on which to base said community?

Today new forms of community need to embrace the fluidity of identity and also the non-visible, non-recognizable forms of identity. The current trend of aiming for greater visibility for some minorities, such as queer people, always contains the danger of proposing recognition within the status quo as the only practical form of politics. Transmitting this visibility into a forced assimilation into the nation-state, readily available for surveillance and oppression, and into the creation of new normativities oftentimes results in the exclusion of other non-conforming, less visible lives and identities.[12] The fluidity of identity and queerness continues to trouble a queer community. Yet, the possibility of a pan-ethnic queer community is even more challenged, because it is haunted by different implications of identity on race and queerness. The queer community, at the beginning of the queer movement shortly after the Stonewall Riots in 1969,[13] has remained critical of identity and searched for other ways of creating community which allows people to live without embracing an identity that has been

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[12] This is a risk every subcultural community that aims to be integrated into the mainstream faces. As soon as a subcultural community becomes incorporated into the mainstream, this community may show exclusionary mechanisms toward its internal differences that are similar to those exclusionary mechanisms imposed onto the subcultural community by the mainstream.

[13] The Stonewall Riots took place in the early morning of June 28, 1969. The patrons of the Stonewall Inn in New York City's Greenwich Village started fighting back against a police raid of the bar and a series of demonstrations erupted which are believed to be the catalyst for the gay liberation movement that followed. At the forefront of these riots were people of color and transgender people. Unfortunately, the aftermath of the Stonewall Riots have turned into high-consumerism pride festivals celebrated across the world that largely neglect the transgender and queer of color experience.

designed to mark them as 'other'. This idea works well with new forms of community after identity. However, it is this ambiguous relationship between queerness, identity and community which creates problems for the intersection of queerness and race. Discarding identity altogether ignores the lived realities of many people of color for whom racial identity is still a major determinant of their life choices. Recently, the current mainstream queer community has started to ignore the ambiguous relationship between identity, queerness, and community by creating a queer identity structured, among other normative markers of identity, through whiteness. It largely remains ignorant of non-white identities and some of the leading LGBT organizations continuously refuse to acknowledge racism on a broader structural level, let alone recognize it within their own organizational forms and political actions.

The building a community on the basis of queerness as critical of identity and oppositional to a so-called norm instead of creating a new homonormative queer identity, while recognizing that some of these oppositional positions are still structured through modes of identity such as race, but also gender, age, able-bodiedness, and other modes of identity, is difficult. It remains an ongoing challenge for queer theory and politics.

It is a particularly important project now, given the recent pink-washing campaigns of self-proclaimed liberal nation-states and given the illusion of a colorblind society. Specifically in the U.S., a nation-state lead by a black President with a purported gay-friendly political climate, Obama's recent support of same-sex marriage[14] and Hillary Clinton's speech on gay rights as human rights[15] are at the forefront of a

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[14] On Wednesday, May 9 2012, Obama gave a TV interview in the White House with ABS's Robin Roberts and said "At a certain point, I've just concluded that for me personally it is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married." For an interesting article on the events that lead up to this interview, see Calmes and Baker (2012).

[15] In December 2011, Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State of the Obama administration made a speech in front of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva that gay rights are human rights. She argues, "[i]t is violation of human rights when people are beaten or killed because of their sexual orientation, or because they do not conform to cultural norms about

new queer liberalism. Queer people appear to have come closer than ever to be full members of American society, and the queer community, although still mostly addressed under the umbrella acronym LGBT appears to have become a full member of the sociopolitical landscape, as well. Certainly, the U.S. is one of the most progressive countries in the world when it comes to queer rights. After all, there are many countries in the world where homosexuality is still penalized by law. But this should not stop the queer community in the U.S. from addressing hegemonizing tendencies within that surface as exclusionary norms for queer people who are not readily incorporated by a broader mainstream. Also, beyond the support within the Obama administration and beyond all legal and political achievements, it is easily overlooked that there is more to social justice than laws and rights and that queer rights are certainly not the last civil rights struggle after all other civil rights struggles have been successful. They are also not the best indicator with which to evaluate a nation-state's progress from a state of pre-modernity to that of a postmodern, liberal state. Urvashi Vaid (1995) cited in Alexander (1999) affirms:

> [C]ivil rights do not change the social order in dramatic ways; they change only the privileges of the group asserting those rights. Civil rights strategies do not challenge the moral and antisexual under-pinnings of homophobia, because homophobia does not originate in our lack of full civil equality. Rather, homophobia arises from the

how men and women should look or behave. It is a violation of human rights when governments declare it illegal to be gay, or allow those who harm gay people to go unpunished. It is a violation of human rights when lesbian or transgendered women are subjected to so-called corrective rape, or forcibly subjected to hormone treatments, or when people are murdered after public calls for violence toward gays, or when they are forced to flee their nations and seek asylum in other lands to save their lives. And it is a violation of human rights when life-saving care is withheld from people because they are gay, or equal access to justice is denied to people because they are gay, or public spaces are out of bounds to people because they are gay." For a full transcript of Clinton's speech, see http://www.advocate.com/news/daily-news/2011/12/06/obama-adminstration-makes-case-lgbt-rights-united-nations?page=0,1

> nature and construction of the political, legal, economic, sexual, racial, and family systems within which we live (p.183). (296)

The ambiguous relationship between rights and recognition and social justice is certainly something that needs to gain more attention in general. The analysis of *Wildness* and its theoretical context will take a closer look at the shortcomings of a political approach to equality that solely focuses on rights and recognition. The problem with rights based politics is simple: Legal achievements only turn into effect after the fact. In order for hate crime legislation to become valuable, the homophobic, or racist attack must already have occurred. Social justice that centralizes truly transformative change, on the other hand, demands a greater makeover of society and a broader discussion about power and control than narrowly defined inclusion and recognition demands. In addition, the legal system often hurts exactly those populations it is supposed to protect, as I will elaborate below.

More intersectional work still needs to be done. Some events in recent and not so recent LGBT history have shown the difficulty of creating a dialogue between communities of color and the queer community. This makes the building of a pan-ethnic queer community difficult, not only on an abstract theoretical level but also on a practical, material level. Miscommunication and outright work against each other, while ignoring potential for alliances, overshadow a possibly fruitful dialogue. The tremendous whitewashing of Stonewall, for example, continues to trouble one of the quintessential sites of memory for a queer community. More recently, in 2008, the discussion surrounding Proposition 8 in California, has spurred the queer community against communities of color, especially the African American and Latino communities, by assuming exclusive communities—white and gay versus straight and non-white—and ignoring potential overlaps. Similarly, the prominence of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy within queer politics has lacked an intersectional dialogue.[16]
A re-reading of these events through an intersectional framework can be helpful to imagine a pan-ethnic queer community in the past, present

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[16] For more information on Proposition 8 and Don't Ask, Don't Tell, see below.

and future. Re-reading Stonewall, for example, as the exemplary intersectional moment in the past means engaging in the re-writing of history and memory in order to enable coalitional work in the present and future. Stonewall refers to the so-called Stonewall riots that happened in late June, 1969 when the patrons of The Stonewall Inn, a bar mainly frequented by gay and transgender people in New York City, decided to no longer tolerate the recurring police raids of gay bars. Original testimony of Stonewall describes the event as a move against police brutality and police discrimination which not only spurred gay and transgender people frequenting the Stonewall Inn, but which also drew people of color because of their shared frustration with police brutality. The beginnings of the movement made little difference between anti-poverty politics, queer rights, and anti-racist agendas and thus held much more potential to create an inclusive queer community. This is an image rarely evoked when remembering Stonewall today. On the contrary, Stonewall is hailed as the start of the gay, and thus almost by default white and male, liberation movement, erasing the involvement of many people of color, queer or straight, in the riots and ignoring the transgressive potential of the event. The intersectional possibilities of Stonewall, as far as the oppositional positions to dominant and normative forms of power of those involved are concerned, have given way to celebrations of the event that resemble high-consumerism festivals devoid of any political agenda. In 2010, at the Christopher Street Day festivities in Berlin/Germany, Judith Butler addressed the continuing racism within the organizations responsible for the event. She criticized the exclusion of the work of many queer of color organizations and subsequently refused a prize for civil courage which she had been awarded by the organizational committee:

> When I consider what it means today, to accept such an award, then I believe, that I would actually lose my courage, if I would simply accept the price under the present political conditions. ... For instance: Some of the organizers explicitly made racist statements or did not dissociate themselves from them. The host organizations refuse to understand antiracist politics as an essential part of their work. Having said this, I must distance myself from this complicity with racism, including anti-Muslim racism. We all have noticed that gay, bisexual, lesbian, trans and queer people can be instrumentalized by those who

want to wage wars, i.e. cultural wars against migrants by means of forced Islamophobia and military wars against Iraq and Afghanistan. In these times and by these means, we are recruited for nationalism and militarism. Currently, many European governments claim that our gay, lesbian, queer rights must be protected and we are made to believe that the new hatred of immigrants is necessary to protect us. Therefore we must say no to such a deal. To be able to say no under these circumstances is what I call courage. But who says no? And who experiences this racism? Who are the queers who really fight against such politics?[17] ("Civil Courage Prize" n.p.)

Butler's speech is not only one of the most prominent examples of the critique of racism within the queer community. She also goes one step further than simply critiquing racism within the community by explaining how the growing use of the queer community as a symbol of modernization within a nation-state is closely connected to the racism within this community. This is a danger that is only slowly recognized.

A further example of the political discrepancies between the queer community and communities of color is Proposition 8. Proposition 8 is a California state constitutional amendment passed in November 2008. It stated that "[o]nly marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California"[18] and therefore deprived queer couples from the right to marry. The vote was passed with a 52.24 to 47.76 'yes' to 'no' percentage. Immediately, the African American and Latino communities were blamed for the passing of the amendment and it became clear that the discussion about who was responsible for the overturn of same-sex marriage in California took a scapegoating approach. Why people of color might not have voted in favor of the proposition, or why people of color did not take part in the mainstream queer community's activities surrounding the vote was a question rarely asked. If it was asked, it was mainly queer people of color who analyzed the root of the question, not white queers. Although the blaming of communities of color for the outcome on Proposition 8 has faded within

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[17] http://www.egs.edu/faculty/judith-butler/articles/i-must-distance-my self/
[18] http://voterguide.sos.ca.gov/past/2008/general/text-proposed-laws/text-of-proposed-laws.pdf#prop8

the white queer community since it became clear that there were flaws in the interpretation of data[19], few discussions surrounding same-sex marriage in the queer community today are sensitive to the intersections of race and queerness. Instead the few dialogues that have been aware of the intersections during the race around Proposition 8 have been silenced by an almost ubiquitous support for same-sex marriage within the mainstream queer community. Jack Halberstam describes the phenomenon in *Gaga Feminism:* "Indeed, the desire for marriage completes a long process by which LGBT people, having been separated out from normative society and called pathological, are now embraced and in turn embrace the very culture that previously rejected them" (100). Unfortunately, the romantic ideal of marriage remains ignorant of the lived realities of many queer families for which marriage is not the ultimate solution on the road to a livable life. It also remains ignorant of queer alternative ways of living for which marriage is not an option or those queer alternatives that simply refuse to be incorporated into the nation-state at the expense of others. Especially for queer people of color, it is unlikely that same-sex marriage protects their relationships in the same way that it does white marriages, given the deeply embedded racist background within U.S. history.[20] An intersectional approach that focuses on broader social justice issues instead of single-issue politics certainly facilitates the dialogue between communities instead of impeding it.

A third, rather recent event that shaped queer politics was the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) implemented in 2011. DADT was a controversial policy introduced by Bill Clinton in 1993 as a compromise to lift the ban for gays in the military. As a result of Clinton's policy, gays were able to serve in the military under the premise that nobody asks about their sexual orientation and nobody talks about their sexual orientation. After years of challenging the law and years of Republicans

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[19] See Egan and Sherrill (2009) for a complete analysis of Proposition 8. Also available as download at http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/issues/ega n_sherrill_prop8_1_6_09.pdf

[20] For a more detailed conversation about the inherent racism of gay marriage and the ways in which it advocates white supremacy and does not address the concerns of people of color see Bailey, Kandaswamy, and Richardson (2008).

blocking the vote against DADT, the U.S. Senate finally passed a repeal in December 2010. DADT has been one of the major foci in queer activism. Yet, the discussion surrounding the vote against DADT clearly lacked an intersectional approach. On an abstract level, the discussion centered two familiar opposites: inclusion vs. resistance. There were those who favor access to mainstream institutions for minorities as part of the inclusionary process, and those in favor of resistance to inclusion into these institutions. More specifically, there were two major groups of queers: On one side, there were those who were strongly in favor of a repeal arguing that the military remains one of the last major institutions from which openly visible gay people are still excluded. On the opposite side were those who said that the queer movement should not support the military in the first place, claiming that support of an institution taking part in imperialistic killings all over the world is incommensurate with queer politics and a queer movement. Without putting judgment on any side, it is safe to say that both analyses failed to speak about DADT from a position aware of the intersection of sexuality and race. The fact that was hardly ever mentioned was that "black women have been dismissed from the military disproportionately on behalf of being 'outed' as lesbian" (Cohen, *Black Queer Theory and Neoliberalism* n.p.). It is not to say that those who otherwise claimed to take no interest in military and imperialistic institutions should have promoted the repeal of DADT, because women of color were disproportionately harmed by it. Yet, the discussion surrounding DADT should have been sensitive to the variety of queer lives that embody the intersectionality between queerness and race on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the assumption underlying the discussion was that of a universal queer identity, pur-portedly white, ignoring the differences within and between queerness.These events are some examples of major socio-political changes that have happened over the last decades and that involved the queer community. What is often ignored, in the cursory use of the term, is the way in which this community is constructed to the inside and to the outside by those claiming to be part of it. Given the practical challenges and the theoretical ambiguities inherent in the different implications of identity for community, queerness, and race, a pan-ethnic queer community seems somewhat implausible. Yet, it is the imaginary character of every community that holds a lot of potential. It is exactly the implausibility of a pan-ethnic queer community which can

become one of its greatest strengths: it shields it from an early incorporation into the nation-state and into a homonormative structure.

1.1.2 Community, Identity, and the Nation

First of all, we need to remember that the queer community is imagined but nevertheless has real life consequences and provides a large group of people with a sense of safety and support. It can therefore create a dialogue between the social, cultural, and political realm if it remains aware of the ambiguous relationship between identity formation and power structures that work in tandem with each other. The intersection of identity and community is challenging. Yet, it is important to rethink identity in relation to community and vice versa if we want to engage in a truly inclusive, pan-ethnic queer community. A queer community aware of the ambiguities of identity can remain critical of re-presentational goals aiming at the affirmation of previously denigrated identities while working toward greater social justice. Both goals are situated at different ends of a political scale that tend to obstruct each other. By managing this balancing act, an imagined queer community can take up a critical position toward the nation. The question what role this community can play at the intersection of community, identity, and the nation plays a central role in this endeavor. Although a queer movement and queer politics are omnipresent, few politicians have ever literally addressed the queer community, if any. Not many have prefixed community with queer instead of LGBT or, even more reductive, gay. Thus, a pan-ethnic queer community can trouble the current promotion of a white, gay, and male community wrongly used as an indicator of a nation's progressiveness. If we carefully invest in the re-writing of queer memory and the building of a pan-ethnic queer community, we also engage in a racialization of queerness and the queering of race. The resulting politics are not easily grounded in already established identity categories but remain intersectional, multi-faceted and critical of a homonormative and possibly homonational[21] structure. Now is certainly

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[21] Homonationalism is a term coined by Jasbir K. Puar in her seminal work *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007). It is an abbreviation of homonormative