

Digital as an enabler: A case study of the Joburg Pride 2012 clash

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Introduction

In 2012, gender activists from the One in Nine Campaign¹ interrupted the Joburg Pride parade. They did so to demand a minute of silence to remember members of the LGBTIAQ² community who had “been murdered because of their sexual orientation and gender expression.”³ The response from the parade and Pride organisers was not one of solidarity; instead the organisers and activists clashed violently. Joburg Pride has always been a contested space, from the first march in 1990 (before the end of apartheid) right through to the clash in 2012. In fact, the points of contestation within the LGBTIAQ community are parallel to some of the tensions that have existed and continue to exist in South Africa.

This event made possible very difficult conversations, which could not have been previously held in a public space. These conversations took place not only in the moment of clashing, or in face-to-face conversations afterwards but they also manifested on digital platforms such as the social networking site, Facebook. Digital and online platforms are interesting in that it is on these platforms that sentiments around issues such as the de-politicisation or commercialisation of Pride in South Africa become visible in a way that is not always possible offline.

To understand the role digital media played, and the nature of the conversations, this study is positioned in the realm of cultural studies and centres in some ways on questions of power and agency. The ways in which the concept of culture as a site of struggle emerges in relation to the case at hand is complex (Fiske, 1987; Epstein Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991).

The violent clash that took place at the Pride parade in Johannesburg in 2012 generated a large number of responses. For the purposes of this study

only a selection of these responses is examined here and a thematic analysis of the content was conducted, from which five dominant themes arose. They are:

- “What’s race got to do with this?”: Race, inclusivity and intersectionality
- No cause for celebration: The de-politicisation and commercialisation of Pride
- “Maybe next year you can ask”: Communication and conversations
- “This is MY route!”: Permission, access and the right to Pride
- “They think it’s their right to put the rest of us at risk!”: Safety and violence

This paper argues that without the digital space, the above-mentioned themes may not have become as evident as they are. It holds that the space of the digital enabled these conversations. This paper provides some context for the 2012 Joburg Pride clash, a very brief overview of the history of Pride, a discussion on what it is about digital space that enables conversations, and goes on to unpack the themes that arise from the digital content generated around the 2012 Joburg Pride clash.

Context

On 6 October 2012, the activists from the One in Nine Campaign halted the annual Joburg Pride parade by staging a “die-in.” They lay down in the middle of the street in front of the parade and asked for a minute’s silence. This was orchestrated in order to remember the members of the LGBTIAQ community who had “been murdered because of their sexual orientation and gender expression.”⁴ In response, the event organisers threatened to drive over them with their vehicles and “told us [One in Nine] we had no right to be at the parade.”⁵

Joburg Pride is an annual celebration held by the LGBTIAQ community and has taken place since 1990. It is often described as having a history that “runs alongside the history of the transition to democracy in South Africa” (Craven, 2011: III). While there are other Pride events that regularly take place in South Africa, it is the longest-running Pride event in the country (Craven, 2011).

During the 2012 clash there were several parties involved, but the key groups, including their supporters, can be identified as two parties: the Joburg Pride organising committee and parade participants, and the One in Nine Campaign activists. The Joburg Pride organising committee is responsible for

coordinating the Pride events, including the parade, which it describes as “an annual celebration of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) identity and sexual diversity.”⁶

The activists who interrupted the Joburg Pride parade were members of the One in Nine Campaign, a gender-based advocacy group which was established in 2006 in response to Jacob Zuma’s (South Africa’s current president) rape trial.⁷ The group is described as consisting of “diverse women, with backgrounds in law, conflict negotiation, sexuality and reproductive rights, HIV, gender-based violence, and most with personal backgrounds of economic struggle” (Bennett, 2008: 7). Bennett further describes the groups as “a movement-building organisation working in a post-1994 South Africa” and that its “discourse and activism have had a powerful impact on the meaning of feminist organising in South Africa” (p.10).

The degree of violence that took place between the Joburg Pride organisers and activists was surprising considering that in South Africa the LGBTIAQ community is often assumed to be a united community. Often it is described as epitomising the diversity and unity of South Africa post-1994, and the movement’s history is tied to the country’s own history of democracy and endeavour to build a united national identity (Craven 2011). Hungwe and Hungwe (2010) write that membership of a nation requires that individuals carry out “an act of imagination through which they identify with others whom they will never actually meet or even see” (p.33). It is this imagining that is useful to hold onto when interrogating what occurred at Pride 2012 – did the organisers of Pride imagine a different LGBTIAQ South African community to the one that the activists had in mind? Was it these different imaginings of the LGBTIAQ community and the South African nation that led to the tensions and violence at Pride 2012?

Joburg Pride: A brief historical glance

Pride has always been a contested space, and these contests have centred on what the event is meant to be or to symbolise. Some members of the LGBTIAQ community view it as a space for protest while others view it as “a day of celebration” while others, as Craven (2011) argues, view it as both protest and celebration (p.54). Craven’s work on the tensions present in the history of Joburg Pride is useful for this research as it traces the history of the movement as well as some of the major issues that have shaped its meanings

and practice over time. These issues include “issues around race, gender, class, gender identity, sexual orientation and the multiple intersections between these identities” (p.7).

Joburg Pride has changed over the course of its existence and Craven describes the current manifestations of Pride as “massive, commercially marketed and slickly run events” as being “a million miles away from the iconic images of the few hundred people, many covering their faces with paper bags, who took part in the first march in 1990” (p.44). She argues that what has remained consistent throughout its history are the tensions that have surrounded the event – tensions which came to a head at the 2012 Joburg Pride event.

The first march in 1990 was planned as a political protest, as were subsequent marches. In 1991 the theme of the march was “March for Equality” and in 1992, “Marching for our Rights” (Craven, 2011: 55). It was in 1994 that the event began to take on a less political tone with the introduction of Paul Stobbs as the chair of the organising committee. He was of the mind that “Pride was too political,” and one of his first changes enacted was to change “the name of the event from a ‘march’ to a ‘parade’” (Ibid.).

In 1998 and 1999 there was an attempt to strike a balance between celebration and protest but the event was still referred to as a parade and not a march. A decision was made that the event “should always be described as such” (p.58). Several alternative Pride events emerged over the years, including events such as Soweto Pride, out of the discontent with the “commercial and depoliticised nature of Johannesburg Pride” (Ibid.). In 2007 the organisers of Pride ran and organised the event under a new structure. They described themselves on their website as “organisers, all with considerable skills and experiences in relevant fields and not linked to troubled events” (p.43). They branded the new event as “Joburg Pride” and removed the words “lesbian” and “gay” from the name. This led to the board being accused of devaluing the LGBTIAQ aspect of the event to “make it more attractive and less threatening to heterosexuals” (p.43).

It was at Soweto Pride in 2007, after the murders of lesbian activists Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Massoa,⁸ that Carrie Shelper of People Opposing Woman Abuse and the One in Nine Campaign asked why the Joburg Pride event was not taking place in Soweto. Craven argues that this question reflected “the view that following the murders in July it was Soweto that

represented the front line of the struggle for the rights of gay and lesbian people” (p.59). The organisers of Joburg Pride accused Shelver of creating division in the community by asking the question in a public space. In response to this accusation and to Shelver’s questioning, several activists protested at the Joburg Pride event. They wore shirts and carried placards with “Bring it to Soweto” printed or written on them, and used the Pride space as a site of protest (Ibid.).

By no means is this brief overview the only work that exists on Pride in South Africa.⁹ However, the issues raised by Craven’s work are useful in light of this study, and important to hold onto in light of the conversations that took place online, in particular on Facebook, after the 2012 clash.

On methods and selection

The internet and digital platforms are interesting sites to study in that they present the possibility for creating new ties and for the maintenance of existing ties between people and the groups they belong to. In some way this is representative of life offline except that digital platforms make possible the documentation of these interactions (Wellman *et al*, 2001).

The internet is not only “a virtual world external to the viewer but also an internal one, part of the network of links and associations that exist in the viewer’s own mind” (McLelland, 2002: 389). This is important to bear in mind when remembering that the values and viewpoints of those partaking in conversations on the pages are still rooted in their contexts and socio-cultural spaces which shape their worldviews. Furthermore, for the purposes of this paper and all research into digital spaces, it is important to note that internet communities are “restricted to the digital ‘haves’ (or at least those with digital social capital) rather than the ‘have nots’” – that offline class and social divides do exist online (Murthy, 2008: 845). In particular it is significant to note that the digital “haves” in South Africa mostly access the internet via their mobile phones. In December 2012 it was estimated that approximately eight million South Africans access the internet from their mobile phones and this too shapes how they use the internet and contribute to conversations online (World Wide Worx, 2012).

A benefit of using the internet as a research tool is that it not only collapses geographical distance but allows for “both asynchronous and synchronous communication between individuals and groups” (Markham,

2011: 118). This means that one can pick up a conversation hours or days after it began because of the archival nature of the internet. This aspect of the internet allows researchers to study the manner in which “social realities are displayed or how these might be negotiated over time” through language and social interaction (p.122). Such is the case with this paper – Facebook’s archival nature allowed me as a researcher to search for content generated in October 2012. I could trace all conversations that took place on the Joburg Pride and the One in Nine Campaign’s Facebook pages, as well as the online blogs and their comments.

This paper employed a case study approach in order to strive towards an all-inclusive understanding of “how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation,” as well as how they make sense of the situation (Nieuwenhuis, 2011: 75). A thematic analysis was conducted in order to identify recurring themes to “offer interpretations of the meanings of texts rather than just quantifying textual features” (Richardson, 2007: 15). On sampling, the paper zones in on conversations that took place online, which included press releases, posted to Facebook, a Thought Leader blog post, and several Facebook posts and comments on the Joburg Pride and the One in Nine Campaign pages for the time period 6 October to 20 October 2012.

A few ethical considerations

The internet, in complicating and making possible new ways of doing research, impacts on ethical considerations associated with research. Some of these fundamental issues are anonymity, and the matter of private versus public.

A researcher needs to note that if they were to quote directly from something a participant wrote online, that it is “theoretically possible for any reader to find the real identity of the person quoted” (Robinson and Schulz, 2009: 693). When capturing and publishing information, the researcher needs to take this fact into account and be particularly careful in protecting the participant or research subject’s identity (Robinson and Schulz, 2009). Anonymity cannot be guaranteed because a user’s distinct language use may be identifiable. Further, some features of internet interactions such as reduced social cues, create a sense of anonymity, not guaranteed anonymity (Stewart and Williams, 2005). It’s important to note that the posters or Facebook users are not named to protect their identities, unless they wrote blog posts which were published on a platform other than Facebook.

While on the matter of private versus public, some internet users participating in discussions on public sites may consider their interaction to be private. Others may know that the site is public but will not want to be studied. It is important that researchers are aware of parameters and the “non-obvious perceptions and attitudes of the participants” on the sites (Markham, 2011: 122). Stewart and Williams suggest that traditional ethical guidelines and practices should be reviewed in line with the features of internet research and the considerations that need to be taken into account (Stewart and Williams, 2005: 410).

Digital as an enabler

After the Joburg Pride organisers and the One in Nine Campaign activists clashed, the internet was alive with videos, images, tweets, wall posts and blog posts of what had taken place. After the initial news moment had passed, conversations continued to happen online as people shared content around what had taken place and participated in conversations in comment feeds. Social media and other online spaces became an archive for conversations that occurred among each group’s members and between the groups themselves. These conversations, under normal circumstances would eventually disappear in national and local media as other events unfold and capture the public’s attention. Social media platforms, in particular Facebook, became enabling spaces which allowed for these conversations to continue. The online conversations and commentary were less careful than those that were being presented in traditional media such as newspapers.

This paper argues that the digital space made it possible for voices to be heard and viewed publicly, voices which would not have been present in the public sphere prior to the reality of social networking sites, such as Facebook. Further, it allowed for people to be exposed to viewpoints that were not their own and to be held accountable for the values they espoused, as well as have these challenged, publicly. This makes possible a richer public sphere, although somewhat more volatile and unstable due to the multitude of uncensored or un-moderated voices.

The internet is increasingly being recognised as a context or a space where one plays one’s identity out in the sense that it is a performative space. Performative in the sense that it opens a space for one to present one’s identity to the digital community with which one is interacting. This

is, in particular, associated with the rise in popularity and uptake of social networks such as Facebook where a great deal of time spent on the platform is associated with the maintenance of one's identity through the upkeep of one's online profile details and the content with which one interacts.

The internet is in itself a social space and can be recognised as a “public space” (Nip, 2004: 414). To a degree, Facebook became such a public space post-Pride 2012. The tensions, clash and conversations that occurred in Rosebank, Johannesburg moved online to the pages on Facebook. Although the internet is in itself a public space as Nip (2004) has suggested, it is still important to note that the internet, to a large degree, privileges “certain groups, languages, gender or countries to the exclusion of others” (Wall, 2007: 263). In light of some of the tensions around Pride, this is no different to issues such as that of access to white privileged spaces – this is one of the primary, historical contestations to surface around Joburg Pride (Craven, 2011).

The internet's supplementation of social capital

In light of some of the debates within studies on the role of the internet in our daily lives, this paper adopts the argument that the internet supplements social capital (Wellman *et al*, 2001). The internet is seen to be “integrated into rhythms of daily life, with life online viewed as an extension of offline activities” (Wellman *et al*, 2001: 440). It moves away from the argument that the internet plays a central role in our lives, and moves closer to the view that the internet is adopted as and how it is needed (Mehra *et al*, 2004). Research by Prinsloo *et al* positions the internet as “enabling counter publics to exist and contest dominant power relations” (2012: 145–146). As with the case of Joburg Pride 2012, the internet provided a platform to discuss and dissect the clash between the Pride organisers and the activists as well as for members of the LGBTIAQ community to debate some of the issues that arose. What follows is an analysis of the key themes that arose out of the content generated online after the 2012 clash.

Themes

The themes discussed below arose out of content that was released online by Joburg Pride and the One in Nine Campaign, including the comments that were posted to Facebook from individuals engaging with both groups. Due to

the quantity of data online, I've selected only key posts and comments which speak to the themes. Some of the topics they cover include: race, inclusivity, commercialisation, de-politicisation, communication, permission, rights, access, safety, violence and community. They are unpacked below.

“What’s race got to do with this?”: Race, inclusivity and intersectionality

Race was the primary theme that arose from the thematic analysis of comments and posts. This includes posts by the activists and those who supported the actions of the Joburg Pride organisers. The activists cited racism as being behind the organisers’ response, while the organisers’ and their supporters wrote that race had nothing to do with the response to the activists.

In her blog post shared on the One in Nine Campaign’s Facebook page, Dipika Nath comments on the 2012 clash. The post, “Gay Pride is political” asks “is it a coincidence that all but one of us demanding one minute of silence at Joburg Pride were black, that all those who assaulted and intimidated us were white and that only black people were physically attacked?” (Nath, 2012).

In response to this post, a commenter wrote “what troubles me in South Africa, is that you are defined first by RACE, then SEX, then SEXUAL ORIENTATION. But race trumps all and the preoccupation and constant anxiety about what one’s race says about you or what other people will think it says about you tires me.”¹⁰ While a member of the One in Nine Campaign page in a post touched on intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989): “There is a difference between a gay, white, male, living in Rosebank and a lesbian, black woman, living in Kwa Tema with regards to accessing rights/freedoms/safety etc.” She goes on to ask, “Have people forgotten about race and class or does the magic wand of ‘LGBTI’ make that all go away?”¹¹ This post speaks to many of the comments that feature under this theme of race, inclusivity and intersectionality.

Under another post on 10 October 2012, a member of the One in Nine Campaign page wrote a comment that corresponds with the above post. She wrote that she believed “that had the 1-in-9 activists been a group of all white women, the reaction to them – of asking them to move for safety reasons etc. – would most certainly one of a more respectful nature.”¹² This prompted another individual to write “get with the 21st century. This is not about racism, but it’s clear that people still hang around in the years before 1994.” To which

the first poster wrote, “if you’re not willing to acknowledge the far-reaching influences our history and social conditioning (since the dawn of time, all over the world, not just in a South African context) have on our present day social interactions, then we’re going to struggle to engage in a progressive, constructive manner here.”

While on the Joburg Pride page, an individual responding to comments wrote that “in South Africa, I am oppressed because I am gay full stop. What’s race got to do with it?”¹³ This comment was followed by another from someone asking her “which south Africa r u living in, being oppressed for being gay only...u must be joking, face this issue on a political content, race has something to do with this.” To which the former poster retaliated with “race has something to do with this because you wont let anyone forget, you wont allow for healing and moving on and addressing more pressing issues.”¹⁴ The question to ask, if race is not the issue, then what does this individual believe the “more pressing issues” to be?

The above are just some moments of larger and more fragmented discussions or comments made on race and the LGBTIAQ community. These comments show that race and racism are emotive topics in South Africa, one which still needs to be unpacked to begin restorative conversations among South Africans. Speaking to the notion of “more pressing issues” is the next theme which looks at what was raised by the One in Nine Campaign’s protest on the de-politicisation and commercialisation of the Joburg Pride event.

No cause for celebration: The de-politicisation and commercialisation of Pride

As mentioned above, the One in Nine Campaign’s protest was centred on what they considered to be the de-politicisation and commercialisation of Pride. The leaflets they distributed at the parade before and during their protest included a critique of Pride, with a particular focus on their belief that Pride has increasingly become a commercial event. Their argument, taken from the leaflet’s content, was that Pride in its current form had permitted “the old, racial apartheid to be translated into a new, economic apartheid.”¹⁵ The protest in itself also consisted of requesting a minute of silence from the parade participants to remember those who had been the victims of hate crimes.

Over the past few years, there has been an “upsurge in hate crimes targeting black lesbians and gender non-conforming persons in particular.”

Prinsloo *et al* puts this down to the idea that in South Africa homosexuality is “constructed as a Western import” and that “the policing of lesbian women, apart from [...] exclusionary practice” manifests in “the form of extreme physical abuse including ‘corrective rape’ and murder” (Prinsloo *et al*, 2012: 140). Despite this, Pride has become increasingly commercialised and has moved away from being a defiant and protest-driven event (Craven 2011). Craven’s work supports the content distributed by One in Nine at the 2012 parade and Nath’s blog post, “Gay Pride is political” (Nath, 2012).

In her post Nath argues that “Pride has been de-politicised away from a vision of social justice, it is important to point out that Pride’s politics, as currently formulated, follow the money” (*ibid.*). She continues to write that the Joburg Pride board claim not to be “political animals” and that their event was a platform for others to display their politics. Nath argues quite pointedly that “any forum that claims to work on behalf of LGBT communities, which include black lesbians who are raped and murdered because of who they are and how they look, is in itself a loud and screaming political statement” (*ibid.*). The board chooses to distance themselves from political activity, despite the history of Pride being deeply rooted in a political past. However, despite this distancing from politics, the board chose the theme “Protect our Rights” for Joburg Pride 2012 – a political statement and perhaps call to action.

A comment on Thought Leader following this post states quite pointedly that there are “two fairly obvious points as yet unmade: 1. Are the issues of corrective rape and the murder of black lesbians on the agenda of Pride? Is so, how and where? If not, why not? 2. Whether or not 1in9 ‘disrupted’ the parade, the level of violence directed at the small group of women is the big issue. Is the organising committee ‘proud’ of their leader’s horrifying response?”¹⁶

On 7 October 2012, the Joburg Pride page posted that they would be holding a meeting to discuss the One in Nine Campaign and would release a statement the next day. Someone commented on this post with “what is the use of pride events...why are we coming to the parades ppl are being murdrd in townships that is reality there is no cause for celebration really if we are dying.”¹⁷ While another individual commented on the same post that “it feels like Pride organisers have lost touch with the true spirit of Pride. Is pride about activism or have Tanya and co become party planners?”¹⁸

In response to the press release entitled “Joburg Pride response to One in Nine protest” posted on Facebook on 8 October 2012, there were many comments. One individual commented that a similar demonstration by the One in Nine Campaign had taken place “during the Soweto March and people circled round and observed the minute of silence. I support the right of One in Nine to protest during the march without asking permission.” This comment lends itself perfectly to the next theme, a push from Pride organisers and individuals commenting online for the One in Nine Campaign to communicate their intentions and request permission.

“Maybe next year you can ask”: Communication and conversations

It appears from the comments online that the Joburg Pride organisers did not try to communicate with the One in Nine Campaign activists at the moment of the protest. Instead, the focus of the organisers was on moving the activists out of the way of the parade participants. In their press release on 8 October 2012, the One in Nine Campaign stated that their members were “distributing leaflets to explain why they were there.”¹⁹

They go on to state that “instead of engaging with us, Pride organisers assaulted us, threatened to drive their cars and trucks over us, called us names and told us we had no right to be at the parade. As lesbians and gender non-conforming people, we had every right to be there and to claim the space and assert our demands as anyone else attending the parade.”²⁰

An individual commenting on Nath’s blog post, “Gay Pride is political,” wrote “maybe next year you can ask the organising committee BEFOREHAND to incorporate your cause into the march?”²¹ This is a strange suggestion that members of the LGBTIAQ community should request permission to display their outrage at the attacks and deaths of members of the community. This sort of theme continued with posts such as one posted on the One in Nine Campaign’s wall reading “next time better planning is advisable.”²² With another person responding to a Joburg Pride page post on 7 October 2012 on the convening of a meeting to discuss the One in Nine Campaign, wrote that the One in Nine Campaign should have arranged with the Pride organisers for “the 1 minute of silence beforehand” and that they were “sure that they would have been more than welcome to accommodate them.”²³

These comments on communication and requesting space during the parade beforehand to have a protest or demonstration speak to the notion

of permission, access and the right to Pride. It also speaks quite loudly about the notion of ownership, that a particular group “owns” a space that is part of the larger LGBTIAQ community’s history.

“This is MY route!”: Permission, access and the right to Pride

Charl Bignaut’s article in *City Press* (13 October 2012), entitled “Some of us are freer than others” concludes by describing an image from footage taken at Pride where Jenni Green, a Joburg Pride board member, is seen shouting “drive over them” and then turns to the camera and declares “this is MY route!” (Bignaut’s emphasis). It appears in that declaration by Green that members of the organising committee feel a sense of ownership and control over what was celebrated as an event belonging to all members of the LGBTIAQ community.

A comment after Nath’s post supports this sense of ownership, a commenter wrote, “a jolly and fun and organised parade, requiring some serious negotiations with Traffic dept and other authorities was disrupted. No-one, regardless of what you stand for, has the right to do that. It is rude, and smacks of a culture of entitlement.” Comments on ownership and “entitlement” support the sense that Pride is seen as belonging to the Joburg Pride board and not the LGBTIAQ community.

What stands out under this theme is that the One in Nine Campaign were criticised by the Joburg Pride board for not planning with the Joburg Pride organisers to have a minute’s silence. A minute’s silence which served to honour those members of the LGBTIAQ community who had been the victims of hate crimes. In response to Joburg Pride’s post on 7 October 2012: “Joburg Pride will convene a meeting first thing tomorrow morning and will release a statement regarding the 1 in 9 campaign,” an individual posted a comment that said “my reaction – stop the parade for one minute and join them in the cause. After all it is part of our community getting killed. Or is it because we don’t care about the black lesbians and people that get killed because of who they are.”

Another commenter wrote in response to the 7 October 2012 “convening a meeting to discuss 1 in 9 post” that “I’d like to thank the protestors for reminding us all that apartheid is still very much alive in our country, and that a lot of work still needs to be done – now more than ever.”²⁴ Nath writes in her piece that “if there had been any doubt in our minds it became clear

then that queerness as identity cannot constitute a common political ground” (Nath, 2012). She goes on to say that if there had been “any illusions that queerness, and the acquisition of formal LGBT rights, in South Africa had started to bridge racial and socioeconomic divides and that we were all part of the LGBT community (in the singular), here is incontrovertible evidence that we are dissected along class, race and gender lines now more than ever” (Ibid.).

On 8 October’s post, someone commented “I’m all for stating your cause but do it within the ambit of the law and the rules set out...I support every effort made by the Pride Board and feel that the One in Nine campaign should rather find better and legal ways to state their cause. A float in the parade could of got the message across just as clear without breaking laws.” This speaks to a prescription for what constitutes a political protest or way of conveying a message, that if the activists had acquired a float, they would have made a greater impact. However, the clash that took place – although unintended – had far more impact than any float at Joburg Pride could ever be.

“They think it’s their right to put the rest of us at risk!”: Safety and violence

The Joburg Pride board focused on the issue of safety in their response to the One in Nine Campaign’s protest action. In their press release they wrote that the “group of protestors” who “ran out into the road and formed a human blockade across the Pride route” had “caused a major safety hazard.”²⁵

They further stated that they thought that the protestor’s banner “no cause for celebration” was an anti-gay statement. They note that “some hostile interactions” took place “between members of the LGBTI community in the Parade and the protestors,” while the marshals were attempting to “move the protestors to the side of the road, so that the parade could continue safely, but were met with further resistance.”²⁶

In response to the 7 October post about the Joburg Pride board convening a meeting to discuss and release a statement regarding the One in Nine Campaign someone commented that to “stop a parade of this magnitude if you have followed correct procedure, approached the board and arranged for this to be legally done, not hi jack a parade and put other people’s safety at risk, this sends out the wrong message and puts the LGBTI community in the wrong kind of media spotlight!”²⁷

Nearly every comment on the Joburg Pride page posted by members of the board or its supporters focused on safety and risk, which is ironic from a board whose message for Joburg Pride 2012 had been “Protect our Rights” and who were concerned with safety but resorted to violence against the protestors from the One in Nine Campaign. To support this statement, an individual commented on the Joburg Pride page, “the theme was protecting our rights! That the Joburg Pride committee infringed upon LGBT rights to organise is very telling! The racism displayed, and subsequently defended here, is appalling! The racism of white liberals is disgusting. Shame on you! Shame on all of you!”

Concluding remarks

The conversations featured would not have been possible or have had the degree of exposure they did without the digital space and what it offers in terms of communication. For instance, if social networking sites, like Facebook, did not archive or store the data shared or posted to the platform, the conversations that feature in this paper, would have been lost. However, it is always important to bear in mind that not everyone in South Africa has equal access to the internet and digital platforms to voice their position on what took place at Joburg Pride 2012.

It is evident in the themes discussed that the South African LGBTIAQ community is divided along several lines, and that dialogue between members of the community is not easy. The themes have resurfaced in the digital space and public sphere with the announcement of the disbanding of the Joburg Pride board on 3 April 2013.²⁸ This announcement and the conversations that have spun off from it, as well as the content from the Joburg Pride 2012 clash will inform a larger research project going forward. In particular, this forthcoming research will seek to unpack how the conflict that arose between the Joburg Pride and the One in Nine Campaign groups is in fact a reflection of the tensions that exist in South Africa and are part of a broader conversation around citizenship and national identity.

Lastly, it is important to note that in relying on digital platforms, in a country where there are only a few “digital ‘haves’,” that this analysis is not a fully inclusive analysis of all the issues that arose out of the Joburg Pride 2012 clash (Murthy, 2008: 845). It is rather an analysis of the digital content available to those with access, and able to contribute to the conversations online.

Endnotes

1. The One in Nine Campaign is an organisation “grounded on a feminist critical analysis of the patriarchal nature of existing political arrangements” (Milani, 2012: 20). The campaign was formed in 2006 in response to the Zuma rape trial. The campaign “supports survivors of sexual violence” and works to “apply pressure on various branches of the criminal justice system through direct action and targeted advocacy.” (One in Nine, 2014).
2. LGBTIAQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and queer.
3. One in Nine Campaign. 8 October 2012. Statement by the One in Nine Campaign. www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/.
4. One in Nine Campaign. 8 October 2012. Statement by the One in Nine Campaign. www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/.
5. One in Nine Campaign. 8 October 2012. Statement by the One in Nine Campaign. www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/.
6. The Joburg Pride website describing what the responsibility of the organising committee is. www.Joburgpride.org.
7. One in Nine Campaign’s Facebook page (www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/members/).
8. Sigasa and Massoa were murdered in Soweto on 7 July 2007. Their murders were considered to be hate crimes because they were targeted because of their sexual orientation (Women’sNet, 2007).
9. Another useful read on Pride in South Africa is De Waal and Manion (2007). This text explores Pride from 1990 to 2005.
10. A comment on Dipika Nath’s blog post (Nath, 2012).
11. A member of the One in Nine Campaign’s post on the group’s Facebook page on 10 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/).
12. A member of the One in Nine Campaign commenting on another member’s post. 10 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/).
13. An individual commenting on a post on the Joburg Pride Facebook page. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).
14. An individual responding to a comment on a post on the Joburg Pride Facebook page. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).
15. One in Nine Campaign. 8 October 2012. Statement by the One in Nine Campaign. www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/.
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17. A comment to the Joburg Pride post that they would be holding a meeting to discuss the One in Nine Campaign. 7 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).
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