Homonationalist discourse as a politics of pragmatic resistance in Singapore's Pink Dot movement: Towards a southern praxis

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Pink Dot SG is a non-profit social movement launched by LGBTQ Singaporeans to rally support for Singapore's LGBTQ community. Every year, since its inception in 2009, it organises a free-to-all public event, which attracts increasingly larger crowds. In this article, I undertake a critical multimodal analysis of one of its official promotional videos, in order to show how a discourse of homonormative nationalism, or homonationalism, is constructed within it. Although from a radical queer perspective especially of the North, homonationalism is construed as problematic in that it leaves heteronormativity unchallenged and appears to be depoliticised, in the case of the Pink Dot movement, I argue, the discourse works tactically as a form of 'doing' a politics of pragmatic resistance within an illiberal sociopolitical context. Therefore, although it appears assimilationist and complicit with wider heteronormative and state structures, from the perspective of a southern praxis it can be re-conceptualised as a contextualised form of resistance that demonstrates the resilience, creativity and agency of a queer subaltern constituency in Singapore.

KEYWORDS: Homonormativity, homonationalism, southern praxis, pragmatic resistance, critical multimodal discourse analysis, Singapore, Pink Dot

INTRODUCTION: SITUATING THE STUDY

This article examines the nexus of non-normative gender/sexual and national identities within Singapore's contemporary LGBTQ movement. Drawing upon Puar's concept of 'homonormative nationalism' or 'homonationalism' (Puar 2007), I view it specifically as a form of *discourse*, and extend it, particularly, as a discursive strategy employed by a queer subaltern constituency in 'doing' a politics of pragmatic resistance in an illiberal city-state. My focus is the Pink Dot movement in Singapore (or 'Pink Dot SG', a name which aligns sexual/gender non-normativity with the nation), launched in 2009, which organises

a large-scale, free-to-all public rally, themed 'Freedom to Love'. This is held annually in Hong Lim Park, the only public space in Singapore which allows the gathering of a mass assembly without an official license. In this article, I explore the 'impossible presence' (Chan 2012) of a visibly optic queer event in a city-state that continues to criminalise gay sex and maintains a resolutely heteronormative public sphere. My point of focus is on the promotional online videos produced annually, which have been pivotal to the success of the Pink Dot movement (Philips 2013). A close multimodal analysis of one of the videos, titled 'For Family. For Friends. For Love', is analysed in order to explicate the discourse of homonationalism at work.

The analysis is situated within the dual perspectives of critical discourse studies (CDS) and 'southern theory' or, as I shall term it, 'southern praxis'. While it is assumed that sociolinguists are familiar with CDS, and so it requires less explanation, a southern praxis perspective will be outlined in greater detail. CDS, motivated by goals of social justice and emancipation, is a perspective interested in the discursive dimensions of social issues that sustain asymmetrical power relations, which privilege certain groups in a society whilst disadvantaging and marginalising others; the latter of which entails closure of life possibilities for disenfranchised subjects. The term 'critical' is understood, broadly, to encompass the complex dynamics of power relations at work in any situation, in any given sociopolitical-historical moment. While CDS has an established tradition of investigating various forms of hegemonic power structures, research on resistance as discursively articulated by historically marginalised groups remains largely underdeveloped. The potential exists, nonetheless; note, for example, Wodak and Meyer's statement: 'CDA [or CDS] researchers are interested in the way discourse (re) produces social domination, that is the power abuse of one group over others, and *how dominated groups may discursively resist* such abuse' (Wodak and Meyer 2009: 9, emphasis mine). CDS, therefore, has the capacity to engage more fully with various aspects and interrelations of power, from the points of view of institutional structures as well as of marginalised individuals and communities that engage dominant structures in agentive ways (see also Lazar 2014). In this study, power relations are viewed both in terms of state and heteronormative hegemonies, and especially, in terms of discursive resistance exercised by a marginalised LGBTQ community.

'Southern theory' (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Connell 2007) or 'southern praxis', as I call it, refers to a mode of intervention that seeks to unsettle the hegemony of Northern-centricity in governing the geopolitics of knowledge globally, in favour of interconnected and multiple sites from which theory and practice get constituted. From a *critical* perspective, I argue that this is not solely about the development of intellectual projects, but has important implications for political organising and lived experiences as well. The imbrication of theory and practice/action, as *praxis*, is absolutely essential for a critical enterprise.

Aligned with Mohanty (2003), I use the 'North'/'South' terminology to generally 'distinguish between affluent, privileged nations and communities and economically and politically marginalised nations and communities' (2003: 226). While these terms loosely distinguish the northern and southern hemispheres, affluence and marginality of course do not line up within this geographical frame in any stable way. As the Comaroffs (2012: 7) put it, there are enclaves of 'the south in the north and the north in the south'. The terminology, therefore, is necessarily imprecise, slippery and porous, and for this reason, I find Mohanty's formulation of 'nations *and communities*' extremely useful. Having said this, the North/South terminology serves a political, explanatory function that draws attention to the experiences of colonisation, historically as well as discursively, and the structured imbalances of power and influence across geoscapes. The notion of the 'South' or periphery, moreover, importantly functions as an analytical category to denote a politicised positionality in regard to theory and practice. The periphery as an 'ex-centric location' (Bhabha 1994) has been conceptualised as offering an 'angle of vision' or a 'special vantage point', arising from an acute awareness of borders and boundaries, which are exclusionary *and* enabling in providing pathways to navigate between the borders (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; hooks 1984; Mohanty 2003).

What might constitute a southern praxis? Here, I outline three points pertinent to the present study. Firstly, a southern praxis involves de-centring Northern-centric prerogatives in theorising which, arising from an inadequate recognition of their own socio-historical specificities, are presented as universally agenda-setting. As a form of discursive colonisation, a Northern-centric lens, through which the rest of the world is read, profoundly excludes the experiences and social thought of the periphery, views the South merely as a source of 'unprocessed data' in need of Northern theoretical illumination, and 'others' the South as exotically different or playing catch-up with the North as the normative point of reference (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Connell 2007; Mohanty 2003; Spivak 2000). For example, in sexuality research, a Northern-centric 'rights' discourse has been assumed to be universally applicable, and globalisation is seen as the unilineal spread of Northern models of homosexuality (Altman 1997; Warner 1993). In assuming a global gay identity, Altman (1997: 417), for instance, argues for the 'emergence of a Western style politicised homosexuality in Asia' and places Asian gays in a place of deferred arrival in a normatively woven Northern narrative of gay liberation.

Secondly, decolonisation of knowledge goes beyond demystifying Northern privilege to contributing positively towards a globally inclusive theory-making and practice. Resisting erasure and 'othering' of the South means viewing the South as legitimate producers of theory in their own right about the social world they inhabit, and re-writing ideas of Northern experts from their situated insights (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Connell 2007). The Comaroffs (2012)

rightly advocate a move from 'grand theory' towards 'grounded theory', the latter of which involves a historically contextualised knowledge production based on a lived praxis. Fundamentally, then, a southern praxis eschews 'monopolies of truth' (Das 1995), such that all knowledge production, regardless from the North or the South, must necessarily be self-reflexive and acknowledge its social, economic, political, historical, and geographical groundedness.

Thirdly, a southern praxis adopts the view of theory and practice as a transnationally shared process achieved through dialogue and mutual learning. As Connell notes (2007), engagement, critique, respect and recognition form the bases of mutual learning, whereby the North too must learn as actively as the South. Mutual learning can be in the form of developing an interconnected set of intellectual projects that emerge from varied social starting points as well as forging transnational alliances for political organising (Connell 2007; Mohanty 2003). A critical southern praxis strives to move from a politics of identity towards building a transnational politics of solidarity. Writing about homosexuality in Brazil, Parker (1999: 231) outlines a politics of solidarity as that which is 'capable of hearing not only our own pain and suffering, but also the pain and suffering of others, subject to the multiple forms of oppression, exploitation, and injustice that have been produced by the contemporary world system'. This is needed for political organising in both the North and the South.

To be sure, CDS and a southern praxis are consonant perspectives. Both are modes of critical intervention into hegemonic discourses of power and privilege, and are aligned with excluded, marginalised communities. Both also believe that knowledge production is not an apolitical activity, but is invested in relations of power and ideology. However, while CDS with its well-developed linguistic and semiotic frameworks offers a sharp analytical instrument for discursive critique of knowledge practices of various kinds, CDS scholarship itself, built upon and propagating Northern hegemonic epistemologies, can also learn from a southern praxis.

The critical analysis of the Pink Dot video, from a southern/CDS perspective, builds upon two sets of conceptual ideas, which shall be explained below. The first is 'pragmatism', through which the sociopolitical contexts of Singapore and Singapore's LGBTQ movement can be historically understood. Resistance in pragmatic terms, or 'pragmatic resistance' (Yue 2012), is introduced, against which the emergence of the Pink Dot movement and its tactical approach are set out. The second set of ideas is 'homonormativity' (Duggan 2003) and 'homonationalism' (Puar 2007), and how these are differently, and strategically, implicated in the Pink Dot SG movement. In the light of these conceptual discussions, the critical analysis of the Pink Dot video in terms of the discourse of homonationalism as a politics of pragmatic resistance is then undertaken. In concluding, I return to some observations about 'doing' queer politics from a southern praxis perspective.

THE POLITICS OF PRAGMATIC NECESSITY

The concept of pragmatism is central to understanding the production of the LGBTQ culture and activism in Singapore, both from the point of view of state governance and in terms of a tactical response formulated by a marginalised queer constituency. As a mode of governance, the ideology of pragmatism was developed as an 'instrumental rationality' (Chua 1995: 59) by the ruling PAP government (the People's Action Party) for postcolonial nation-building since the 1960s. Based on a survivalist ethos, it justified overt government intervention in all areas of social life, rationalised as 'natural', 'necessary' and 'realistic' solutions to challenges of nation-building (Chua 1995). Underlying state pragmatism was a clear economic imperative. Economic growth was seen as the best guarantor of social and political stability necessary for national survival, and material improvements were regarded as the most tangible index of 'taking care of the collective good' (Chua 1995).

In practice, the policies rationalised on pragmatic grounds often proved to be undemocratic and unapologetically anti-liberal. Also, rather than 'in principle', the exercise of pragmatism has been 'contextual' and 'ad hoc', which could suddenly alter the trajectory of previously established policies by the introduction of radically newer ones, and could prove inconsistent and contradictory to existing policies. The PAP government, however, while maintaining the formal features of a democratic electoral politics, has promised that in the final analysis its policies would lead to the establishment of a stable communitarian democracy. Hence, pragmatism as an operative logic has achieved popular legitimacy among Singaporeans, and is constitutive of the ideological consensus between the government and the people.

Referring to the contradictions as ambivalences between non-liberalism and neoliberalism, and rationalism and irrationalism, Yue (2012: 1) describes the PAP's practice as an 'illiberal pragmatism', which is central to understanding the governance of homosexuality and the production of an LGBTQ culture in Singapore. For example, even though gay sex is criminalised through the maintenance of Section 377A ('Outrage of Decency') of the penal code, same-sex cohabitation is permitted through a recent change in property law, arising from an over-supply of public housing, which makes it possible for same-sex couples to co-purchase government-subsidised flats. Thus, although a hegemonic discourse of heteronormative home ownership continues to prevail, the new government policy has unwittingly made possible non-heteronormative domesticity. In another example, motivated by the government's desires for Singapore to become a global city in transnational capitalist networks, queer involvement in creative industries, for instance, is accepted, turning arts and culture into commodities which add value to the country's economy (Chan 2012; Yue 2012).

LGBTQ communities in Singapore, therefore, have circumnavigated around the ambivalences of an illiberal pragmatic governance, in order to survive and thrive. The same applies to the LGBTQ movement in Singapore, necessitating

queer activists to negotiate the legal restrictions and stigmatisation of non-normative sexualities and gender through a tactical response of pragmatic resistance. Pragmatic resistance refers to a sustained collective strategy which seeks to advance the LGBTQ movement, while ensuring that it survives the scrutiny and potential retaliation of the government (Chua 2014). Although queer activists in Singapore, like their counterparts elsewhere on the globe, want to be allowed to live full self-determined lives, their approach reflects a highly contextual and reflexive response of 'toe[ing] the line, while pushing boundaries' (Chua 2014: 20). The approach has been highly adept at reading signals and shifts in the sociopolitical environment in order to seize as well as create opportunities to progress (pushing boundaries), while not jeopardising the survival of the movement (toeing the line). Such acts as organising street protests or belligerently demanding rights could be seen to pose a threat to existing power structures, and are avoided. Tactics, too, are continuously adapted, escalated or scaled down, based on earlier lessons learnt (Chua 2014).

Pink Dot SG and pragmatic resistance

Here, I outline specifically the emergence of the Pink Dot movement as a mode of pragmatic resistance, demonstrating its tactical manoeuvring around the illiberal pragmatism of governance. In her book, *Mobilizing Gay Singapore*, Lynette Chua (2014) outlines several factors which shaped the tactical direction taken with the Pink Dot initiative, as a historic moment in the LGBTQ movement of Singapore.

One important factor was the unsuccessful outcome of a parliamentary petition advanced by Singaporean gay activists to decriminalise gay sex in 2007. Under Section 377A of the penal code, sexual intimacy between gay men, even when consensual, is punishable by a two-year jail term. Expressed through the language of rights, the gay activists who had spearheaded the petition had no expectation that the law would be repealed, but wanted to force political attention to be paid to it. As a result, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong made an assurance that Section 377A would not be enforced against gays in consensual, private situations. However, the law was retained symbolically, sending a clear message that LGBTQ interests were not to be prioritised above those of the heteronormative mainstream which, it was argued, had yet to accept non-normative sexualities. The unsuccessful result of the petition confirmed local queer activists' expectation that a Northern-style liberal rights discourse was not an effective instrument for social change in Singapore. It became clear, too, that legal restrictions against gay men would not be removed unless mainstream values shifted in favour of doing so. This meant that garnering a visible support base of straight allies and demonstrating alignment with mainstream goals of social cohesion and harmony were imperative.

Secondly, in the wake of the petition to repeal Section 377A, there emerged a vocal countermovement led by a conservative Christian minority group. This

required the LGBTQ constituency to respond cautiously and non-confrontationally, so as not to be seen as causing social disharmony, thus underscoring the importance of achieving a wider support base.

Thirdly, an economically-motivated trend towards social liberalisation led to the government relaxing its licensing rules for public speech and assembly in Hong Lim Park, the site of Singapore's 'Speaker's Corner', in 2008. As long as organisers of events pre-registered with the police, and did not broach politically sensitive topics on race and religion, they were no longer required to obtain a license to hold public gatherings at the site. The new exemption rule gave queer activists an opportunity for collective mobilisation in the Park, leading to the inception of Pink Dot SG in 2009.

After much deliberation among queer activists, the decision was made not to hold a Northern-style protest or gay pride parade that could be seen as politically confrontational and off-putting to the masses. Instead, the concept of organising a free-to-all carnival-like rally, aimed at social cohesion and mobilising mass support, was birthed. Under the banner 'Freedom to Love', the event aimed to 'raise awareness and foster deeper understanding of the basic human need to love and be loved, regardless of one's sexual orientation or gender identity' (Pink Dot SG 2013). The idea was for anyone to simply show up at a designated time in the park attired in pink, for a picnic, some entertainment and speeches by LGBTQ ambassadors. The highlight of the event was the formation of a giant human Pink Dot, to be photographed aerially from a nearby hotel for a visual record of collective solidarity.

At the first Pink Dot SG rally in 2009, 2,500 people – queer, and straight allies – showed up. Since 2009, Pink Dot SG has been an annual event, attracting increasingly larger crowds. In 2015, the estimated turnout was 28,000 people (*The Straits Times*, 14 June 2015). In the run-up to the Pink Dot SG rallies, the organisers produce a promotional video, different each year, which they circulate widely online. In what follows, the 2014 official video will be analysed to show the emergent tactical discourse as a form of pragmatic resistance.

THE DISCOURSE OF HOMONATIONALISM AS PRAGMATIC RESISTANCE

Evident in the Pink Dot SG videos is a discourse of homonormative nationalism. The terms 'homonormativity' and 'homonationalism' were coined by Duggan (2003) and Puar (2007), respectively, in regard to the U.S. context. I briefly outline these concepts, and then explain how they are put to work differently in the context of Pink Dot SG.

Duggan (2003: 50) defines homonormativity as:

> a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.

According to Duggan, homonormativity signals a new neoliberal sexual politics that is consonant with broader neoliberal 'equality politics' in the U.S.A. since the mid-1990s, as manifested in the rhetoric of U.S. politicians, corporations and the media. She is critical of U.S. gay civil rights groups that have adopted this neoliberal rhetoric, thus moving away from a broad-based progressive queer politics. Homonormativity, she argues, leads to a shrinking of the gay public sphere and a 'stripped-down equality' (Duggan 2003: xx), seen merely in terms of access to institutions of domestic privacy, the 'free market', and patriotism.

Although homonormativity is complicit with the reproduction of heteronormativity, and appears depoliticised, when viewed through the lens of pragmatic resistance, the case of Pink Dot SG, I suggest, can be read *as a form of tactical politics* within illiberal state structures. Instead of shrinking the queer public sphere, leveraging on a discourse of homonormativity, in fact, offers the Pink Dot movement an opportunity to expand, strategically, the queer public sphere. This applies beyond the conspicuous staging of the rally for one day, to a wider reach through its videos and other content posted on its website and other media platforms.

Puar (2007, 2013) links the concept of homonormativity explicitly to a national scale, in theorising practices of U.S. sexual exceptionalism, and terms this phenomenon 'national homonormativity' or 'homonationalism'. She shows the collusion between homosexuality and nationalism in U.S. national rhetorics of patriotic inclusion against orientalist invocations of Islamic terrorists. The strategic appropriation of non-normative sexualities for U.S. nationalist agendas is explained in the following terms:

> For contemporary US nationalism and patriotism, the production of gay and queer bodies is crucial to the deployment of nationalism, in so far as these perverse bodies reiterate heterosexuality as the norm but also because certain domesticated homosexual bodies provide ammunition to reinforce nationalistic projects. (Puar 2007: 39)

Homonationalism is viewed as an inevitable facet of modernity, and is characterised by a number of features. For example, the relationship between non-normative sexualities and the nation is seen to be convivial rather than antagonistic. Homonationalism is also primarily exclusionary in that it privileges queer white bodies, and denies homonational subjectivity to undesirable 'others' based on such criteria as race, ethnicity, religion and age. Furthermore, as argued by Puar, homonationalism is neither an identity nor a political position.

In the case of Singapore, in so far as official discourses on the 'global city' appropriate non-normative sexualities and genders to create the city-state as cosmopolitan, tolerant and open (Obendorf 2012), it can be said that homonationalism, as a feature of modernity, does get enacted tacitly and

grudgingly. However, unlike Puar, my interest in homonationalism here is from the perspective of a queer subaltern practice, rather than from a position of institutional state power. Specifically, my uptake on the concept of homonationalism is how an LGBTQ movement yokes together homonormativity and nationalism as a political discursive strategy. Furthermore, unlike Puar's thesis that U.S. homonationalism is contingent upon the exclusion of racial and religious others, the performance of homonationalism by Pink Dot SG is consciously inclusive of all Singaporeans.

Homonationalism and Singapore's shared values

The homonational discourse in Pink Dot SG resonates closely with Singapore's nationalist values as articulated in a White Paper tabled in Parliament in 1991 and accepted the following year. Former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong had proposed developing a national ideology, called 'Shared Values', which aimed

> to evolve and anchor a Singaporean identity, incorporating the relevant parts of our varied cultural heritages, and the attitudes and values which have helped us to survive and succeed as a nation. (Shared Values 1991: 1)

The motivation for the Shared Values came from concerns regarding shifts among Singaporeans from communitarian to individualistic values. Presented from a binaristic Asian-Western frame, Goh cautioned that

> Traditional Asian ideas of morality, duty and society which have sustained and guided us in the past are giving way to a more Westernised, individualistic, and self-centred outlook on life.[1] (Shared Values 1991: 1)

Individualism was seen to produce a sense of 'hypersubjectivity' at the expense of commonality with others, implying an unwillingness to make self-sacrifices for the social good (Chua 1995). Moreover, according to Goh, a communitarian ethos had contributed to the success of East Asian capitalist nations' economic competitiveness in relation to the industrial West since the 1960s. It was feared that a decline in Asian communitarian values would have repercussions on Singapore's continued economic competitiveness globally.

The government, thus, proposed five values constitutive of Singapore's national ideology:

1. Nation before community and society above self.
2. Family as a basic unit of society.
3. Community support and regard for the individual.
4. Consensus, not conflict.
5. Racial and religious harmony.

Even though the White Paper lacked legal status, as an officially promoted and politically sanctioned document that was accepted by Parliament, the Shared Values bear institutional and ideological gravitas, and have since

represented rational grounds for action by the government and the citizenry. In fact, all five values, in some form, are resonant in the homonationalist discourse of the Pink Dot videos, regardless of whether Pink Dot SG is orienting to the Shared Values in any conscious way.

HOMONATIONALIST DISCOURSE IN THE 2014 PINK DOT VIDEO

Here, a multimodal analysis of Pink Dot's official 2014 promotional video, titled 'For Family. For Friends. For Love' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iGKe IbxDoQ) is provided. The video presents a montage depicting Singaporeans of various sexualities, genders, ethnicities and ages speaking directly to the camera; sexuality is indexed through verbal or visual cues, while gender, ethnicity and age are represented visually in a self-evident way. Addressing the audience directly, through the camera, accords subject status to all speakers in terms of presence and voice. The close or medium shot images chosen to represent these speaking subjects allow personal or social identification to be established, metaphorically, between the addressers and the audience, regardless of the diversity of the addressers. Interspersed with these 'speaking' images are other shots of the same individuals photographed holding either a 'pinkie' cushion (Pink Dot's mascot) or a circular pink cut-out with handwritten apothegms. Notwithstanding individual differences, therefore, they constitute a collective community, indexed through association with LGBTQ-friendly symbols and paraphernalia. The language used in the video is English, which is an official national language and lingua franca in multicultural Singapore, and this, too, serves to bind the represented diversity. The analysis aims to show how the five Shared Values are intertextually resonant in the video and are constitutive of the discourse of homonationalism. (The excerpts below are numbered to reflect the sequence in which the utterances appear in the video transcript. Underline denotes speaker's emphasis; square brackets enclose inaudible words, pauses or extralinguistic information.)

Nation before community, society above self

The first Shared Value calls for national unity and interests to be prioritised above the rights and prerogatives of any individual or subgroup within Singapore society. In the video, Pink Dot celebrations patriotically call into presence Singapore's national identity, for example:

(11) I remember the year we had the helicopter with a Singapore flag flying past.
(12) It was like a happy National Day.
(13) I literally had tears in my eyes.

Each of these utterances is visually seen as spoken by different women: a middle-aged Chinese woman, a young Malay woman, and an elderly Chinese woman, respectively. Collectively, they reanimate by recalling a past Pink Dot rally, replete with national symbolism.

Firstly, as the speaker in (11) reminisces, the video cuts to actual footage, shot from a distant aerial perspective, of a human Pink Dot formation at an earlier rally, seen as a mass of shimmering pink. The concept of the 'Pink Dot' is itself overdetermined with nationalistic meanings. The term 'Pink Dot' alludes to a disparaging remark made by former Indonesian President Habibie in 1998 to refer to Singapore's small geographical size, barely represented on the world map as a little 'red dot'. The 'red dot' was reclaimed positively by Singapore's political leaders in the same year, and has since become a symbol of national pride. In choosing the name 'Pink Dot', therefore, the organisers can be said to be proudly aligning the movement with the nation, through a creative twist in hue. In fact, although pink is a recognised colour of non-normative sexualities globally (Altman 2001), here it is given an added local/national significance, for pink is a blend of Singapore's national flag colours of red and white. The mixing of colours, symbolic of diversity, has become a fundamental expression of Singapore's national identity. Pink, notably, is also the colour of the national identification cards issued to Singaporean citizens; in the context of Pink Dot, the colour symbolises the inclusiveness of all Singaporeans, regardless of sexual orientation. The formation of the human Pink Dot, then, is highly significant as a visual symbol of Singaporeans[2] uniting as a singular body politic (pun intended), regardless of sexuality and gender. More than a symbol, in fact, the national body politic is performed literally and physically through the 'collectivisation' (van Leeuwen 2008), corporeally, of diverse bodies.

Secondly, the national flag is overtly referenced in the video. As the speaker in (11) continues with the utterance 'the helicopter with a Singapore flag flying past', the video at this point cuts to more sky-view footage showing the national flag being airlifted. The text-image congruence reinforces the ideological significance of the flag as a supreme national symbol. The visual display – and the act of watching – the national flag from an extreme low angle is a powerful invocation of patriotism. The original performance of nationalism at the earlier rally and the intertextual re-enactment of that moment in the 2014 video construe a two-way relationship between sexuality and nationalism. On the one hand, the Pink Dot celebration is aligned with and subordinated to national values. On the other hand, in the nationalistic performance, no Singaporean – regardless of sexuality/gender – gets excluded. Queer subjects may occupy a peripheral social position, but in terms of national identity, they are also very much part of the centre.

Thirdly, the performance of nationalism is underscored through the analogy made in (12) of Singapore's National Day, an annual national celebration to mark Singapore's independence as a nation-state in 1965. During the commemoration, the national flag is patriotically raised, accompanied by the singing of the national anthem. By likening the experience at the Pink Dot rally to a 'happy National Day', a convergence of the two kinds of celebration is achieved, and the Pink Dot event, arguably, gets elevated to a national

celebration. In this regard, the invocation of, and alignment with, the nation allows the powerful emotional affect expressed in (13) to be understood as a moment of intense nationalistic pride at Pink Dot.

Although the video shows Pink Dot SG as patriotic and respectful of the nation, it also weaves in elements that push the heteronormative boundaries of a conservative Singapore society:

(31) I think I want to live in a society that's fair.
(32) So that our LGBT families and friends can consider coming back home.
(33) I want my cousin to feel like this <u>is</u> a different place than the one she left.

The 'I want' (main) clauses express future-oriented aspirations of what is yet to be. Clause (31), in particular, implies that Singapore society presently is far from 'fair'; fairness, understood specifically, from dependent clause (32), as the social exclusion of LGBTQ members of society. Redressing the social exclusion is discursively attempted through use of the inclusive first person plural pronoun and referents indicative of close relationships ('our families and friends') in (32) and through personal kinship reference ('my cousin') in (33). The expressions denoting movement 'can consider coming back home' and 'a place … she left' are suggestive of a society's progress report. That Singaporeans have not felt at home in their own country and have had to depart is a national indictment against social inclusiveness. Yet, change and progress are implied as possible as well, with references to homecoming and 'a different place', thus making national pride achievable after all.

Family as the basic unit of society

The second Shared Value emphasises the importance of family ties: 'It is the group within which human beings most naturally express their love for parents, spouse and children, and find happiness and fulfilment' (Shared Values 1991: 3). This universalistic formulation, in fact, is perfectly consonant with Pink Dot's broadly construed slogan, 'Freedom to Love', referring not only to the love between non-normative persons but including a spectrum of other loving relationships among friends and within largely heterosexual families.

The video surfaces two ways in which the idea of the family is accorded importance. On the one hand, the Pink Dot rally is framed as a family-centred event, stressing familial bonds.

(14) I went to Pink Dot with my uncle and aunty.
(15) I went down with my sister as well as my mom. When they are there, it affirms their acceptance of me.
(16) I want my sons who are both gay to be happy and to live fulfilled lives.
(17) I want my mom to accept me as a transgender.

Expressed from the perspectives of straight parents (16) as well as non-normative children (15 and 17), they all speak a common message of acceptance. From the point of view of queer offspring, the desire for family approval and support is conveyed explicitly through the lexical items 'acceptance'/ 'to accept'. Here, family relationships are emphasised over an autonomous individual subjectivity. The image that accompanies (15), in fact, shows the speaker photographed in a part-whole 'analytical' relationship (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996) with his parents and sister at a Pink Dot rally, which emphasises his familial identities as a son and brother, rather than as a gay subject.

From the perspective of straight family members, acceptance is either verbalised (see 16), or implied by the act of attending Pink Dot events together as a family (14 and 15). At the same time, non-acceptance by families is also painfully portrayed. Whereas in (15) and (16), the mothers are supportive of their gay sons, the mother in (17) has yet to accept her transgender son.

In all these scenarios, heteronormativity is uncontested; however, heteronormative family members are called upon to embrace non-normative members as part of being 'family'. Pink Dot's slogan, 'Freedom to Love', in this regard, is a call for straight parents, children, siblings, and other kin to accept a family structure that is sexually diverse.

On the other hand, the depiction of the family-oriented queer subject is pushed further in the video, by extending family formation to include them:

(23) I want to find love.
(24) Someone who is always there for me during my good times and in my bad times.
(25) To be able to bring <u>my</u> own [er] boyfriend or partner home.
(26) We've been together for six years.
(27) Ten years.
(28) We've been together for seventeen years. I wish one day we can move in and stay together.

In the above segment, only queer subjects are featured. (23) to (25) constitute three parts of an extended clause structure, with each subsequent part adding to the previous. The propositional content involves a narrative script of seeking love (23), establishing a stable, committed relationship (note, the formulaic expression 'good times and in ... bad times' that resonates with traditional heterosexual wedding vows) (24), and including one's significant other in the wider kinship circle (25). Verbally, the script suggests a prerogative that is familiar to straight Singaporeans. Yet, the speakers in this case are all manifestly non-normative sexual subjects indexed, semiotically, through pink attire (23), tomboyish appearance (24), or through a male speaker's lexical reference to 'my boyfriend' (25). By attributing each part of the clause to a different queer speaking subject, family formation is implied as

a universal desire shared by non-normative and normative sexual subjects alike.

In (26) to (28), same-sex couples (a lesbian couple (26) and two gay couples (27 and 28)) are featured, claiming stable, long-term relationships, ranging between six to seventeen years. Each pair is visually framed as a 'couple' through their close physical proximity and through mutual engagement of some sort – looking at each other (27) or depicted in a shared activity (26) and (28). The public declarations about their years together highlight the monogamous nature of their relationships, disrupting stereotypes of gay promiscuity. Such a representation counters the government's expressed fears of 'permissive social mores' of 'alternative lifestyles' which would 'weaken the family unit', thus recommending that 'Singapore should not follow these untested fashions uncritically' (Shared Values 1991: 3). The video representation not only directly challenges such a view, but normalises non-normative sexual relationships. The lesbian couple (26) is visually featured holding a toddler, without verbally calling attention to the infant in any way, thus implicitly normalising sexually diverse family structures.

In sum, this segment of the video shows queer people presented *just like* straight people, with a natural desire to love and be loved like anyone else.

Community support and regard for the individual

The White Paper on Shared Values explains that although the government recognises that individuals have rights which should be respected, each society must determine the balance between the individual and the community. Unlike Western societies which emphasise individual rights, Asian societies favour communitarianism, where individuals can rely on the care and support of one another as a way to strengthen social cohesion (Shared Values 1991).

The theme of relying on wider group support is pronounced in the video, which relates also to the theme of consensus-building (discussed in the next section). On the one hand, the value of community support is represented as LGBTQ persons finding validation by participating in the Pink Dot rallies over the years. In the following, four individuals (two of whom appear to be transgender) recall past rallies each has attended. Their attendance signifies their identification with the Pink Dot community; through their participation, each of them, in turn, contributes towards forming that community.

(7)   My first time, I think it was in 2009.
(8)   I attended the one last year, 2013.
(9)   I attended the last three years.

On the other hand, community support is represented also from the point of view of straight allies:

(38) This year, I really want to go to show my support to my friend who I haven't been supporting all this while.

(39) Even if you don't have a relative who is LGBT, just go and support [them].

Here, the call for support is extended beyond the family to friends and the general public; that is, everyone. The speakers' personal support for queer individuals or the community is symbolised by their wearing pink and by attending a Pink Dot rally (note the verb 'to go'). One's physical presence at the rally becomes both a symbolic and an actual gesture of solidarity. These utterances also signal the importance of recruiting new participants to the rally, thus growing the community support base.

Regard for the individual, which forms part of the third Shared Value, underscores the utterances below:

(18) [I want] to be included and not just be cast out.

(19) I would like people to stop judging and stop asking why – why we are gay.

(20) If I could, I want bullying to stop cos I went through it. It's hurtful and leaves a scar.

(21) And you lose your self-confidence and your self-esteem and your self-worth very quickly if you're being bullied, or you're being called names.

(22) If everyone can be more tolerant, then [.] less of us [.] will be hurt.

Queer subjects are represented as speaking up on their own terms from personal experiences of being socially excluded (18), judged (19), bullied and called names (20, 21). Similar to the liberation of women's oppression under patriarchy, it can be seen as a process of making the 'personal political' i.e., drawing attention to the social nature of prejudice and discrimination in order to redress them. However, here, it is a consciousness-raising or education of *the public*, and is balanced discursively through an assertiveness that is not confrontational. The subaltern subjects make explicit their personal standpoints in terms of what they want (18) and what they want stopped (19) and (20). Yet, social criticism against the straight mainstream is mitigated in a number of ways. Firstly, through passivisation and agent-deletion, the focus is deflected away from the discriminatory majority (see 18 and 21). Secondly, where agents are intact, vague and indefinite referents are chosen ('people' (19), 'everyone' (22)). Thirdly, the use of the conditional moderates the tone (see 20 and 22), which reflects poignantly the social reality of asymmetrical power relations at work where desired changes are contingent upon the collective good will of the majority.

Finally, community support and regard for the individual are forged through straight allies' advocacy of the marginalised LGBTQ community.

(34) This is a group that's still receiving a lot of rejection by a majority of our people.
(35) But there will be people like us, families like us, who believe that they deserve to be loved just like anyone else.
(36) All of us should really love them, appreciate them. This is who they are and what they are.

Interestingly, the use of the 'us' and 'them' pronouns can be read as socially divisive from the point of view of the Shared Values. Yet, by drawing attention to the division, the speakers from their position *as the straight majority*, collectively confront the prevailing attitudes of the conservative mainstream (34), and advocate a change of mindset (36). The 'us/them' discursive strategy, moreover, clarifies the position of straight allies, in that they are not part of the subaltern but speak up in solidarity *with* them, alongside the subalterns who are capable of speaking for themselves (as seen above). Neither is the straight 'in-group' conservatively homogenous. Implied in the word 'majority' (34) is the fact that there exists also a straight minority which is progressive. This is especially evident in (35) where self-referencing of 'people like us, families like us' suggests that a different (sub)group of 'us' belongs within the larger straight mainstream. These straight allies potentially destabilise the 'us/them' dichotomy, as they advocate a shared humanism ('they deserve to be loved just like anyone else').

Consensus, not conflict

The fourth Shared Value dictates that social issues ought to be resolved through consensus instead of contention. Consensus does not mean achieving unanimous support, but gaining majority support by bringing as many people on board an issue as possible (Shared Values 1991). Rather than use the Pink Dot video as a platform to explicitly lobby for legal rights, for instance, which would lay claim to a partisan agenda, the video positions the LGBTQ community as already having achieved a measure of social recognition and acceptance by the wider mainstream.

(2) It's great that Singapore has communities now that support the freedom to love.
(3) The attitude is definitely changing.
(4) People dare to show and they have the courage to love.
(5) Slowly but surely more and more people are more accepting.

Reference to a present time frame allows for staking claim to a growing support for the LGBTQ community; note the temporal adjunct 'now' (2), and the present progressive tense 'is . . . changing' (3) and 'are accepting' (5). The adverbials 'definitely' and 'slowly but surely' indicate the certainty of this attitudinal shift. This is reinforced by 'more' in (5), which both quantifies (in

the nominal group – 'more and more people') and intensifies (in the verbal group – 'more accepting') the increasing acceptance of the LGBTQ community. This social acceptance is rendered intelligible through a universal language of love. The clauses 'communities now that support the freedom to love' (2) and 'they have the courage to love' (4) 'speak' directly to Pink Dot's slogan which advocates an inclusive and expansive love. While (2) refers to support for queer people's right to love, given the co-textual context, (4) gives credit to straight allies who stand up against the tide of conservatives to extend their love, in solidarity, to non-normative Singaporeans.

The final segment of the video ends significantly on a note of consensus-building. The utterances below are spoken by diverse subjects, some of whose non-normative sexual and gender identities are made visually explicit (for example, a man in drag (40) and a lesbian couple with a baby (41)), and some whose identities are not visually explicit. The diversity is indicative of a general consensus among queer and straight people alike.

(40)   I believe that when we come together it's powerful. I believe the 21,000 people last year was extremely powerful.
(41)   It's really great to see how Pink Dot has come and gone so far.
(42)   I've seen it grow bigger and bigger. And hotter and sweatier. [smiles]
(43)   We could not have imagined 20,000 people gathering and supporting us.
(44)   Yes, completely inspiring to be part of that. When I saw everyone putting their lights to the sky.
(45)   I really felt the whole park and the thousands of people there bonding and coming together.
(46)   I wish my mom would come with me to Pink Dot for just one time cos I-I honestly believe that it might change her mind.

Here, participation at Pink Dot rallies is proof of a growing consensus among the mainstream. The following expressions constitute a semantic field, representing a united and solidary front: 'when we come together' (40); 'people gathering and supporting us' (43); 'everyone putting their lights to the sky' (44); and 'thousands of people ... bonding and coming together' (45). Accompanying (43) to (45) are various footages from past rallies, ranging from a close-shot of an elderly female participant in the Pink Dot crowd (43), to a distant aerial shot of the crowds as tiny dots of sparkling pink (44 and 45), to a long shot revealing a cross-section of a crowd (44). The support achieved is perceived as incremental and rising, as personally witnessed by Pink Dot participants (see 41and 42). The numerical count (21,000; 20,000) reinforces, objectively, the sizeable support and represents strength in numbers. From the point of view of queer subjects, the show of support is strongly affirming (note the intensifiers 'extremely powerful' (40) and 'completely inspiring' (44)). Yet, at the same time, there is a sobering reminder that consensus-building must be an ongoing struggle. A daughter longing for her mother's support in (46) indicates that it is individuals'

presence at the rally that contributes to the growing critical mass. This is represented, intersemiotically, where the individuated reference to 'my mom' is juxtaposed with an aerial shot of the dotted masses.

Racial and religious harmony

The promotion of racial and religious harmony in Singapore is essentially about majority and minority populations living together peaceably, in spite of differences. The government maintains an official 'CMIO' ('Chinese', 'Malay', 'Indian', 'Others') categorisation to distinguish the various ethnic communities in Singapore, with the Chinese comprising the sizeable majority (74.3%), and the Malays (13.3%), Indians (9.15%) and Others (3.2%) constituting the ethnic minorities (Singapore Department of Statistics 2016). 'Others' is a category which includes Eurasians of Asian-Western heritage. Even though no exact correspondence between ethnicity and religion exists in Singapore, most Malays are Muslims, but not vice versa. Muslims comprise 14.3 percent of the local population, after a fairly sizeable Buddhist (33.9%) and Christian (18.1%) population (Population SG 2016). Harmony-in-diversity is enshrined in the Shared Values as fundamental to the collective well-being of the nation.

Throughout the video, Singapore's ethnic diversity, in particular, is amply represented in the queer and straight subjects featured, with multi-ethnic harmony implicitly indexed through the juxtapositioning of shots in which persons of different ethnicities are shown. See, for example, (11) – (13) and (38) – (39) above. It should be noted, however, that ethnicity in the video is represented as self-evident, and not indexed overtly through semiotic markers like ethnic attire or cultural symbols. Analytically, then, identification of individuals for ethnicity is made exogenously based on the official CMIO classification, and not through expressed self-identification of the persons involved. Discursively, this serves, at the same time, to emphasise and de-emphasise ethnic identities in the video. On the one hand, it achieves a symbolic performance of multi-ethnic nationalism by the producers of the video. Yet, on the other hand, it serves to 'de-race' gender and sexuality in the national context, presenting the concerns and support for LGBTQ people as universally shared, rather than as community-specific.

The value of harmony-in-diversity as a cornerstone of Singapore's multi-ethnic (and multi-religious) national identity is explicitly foregrounded through the text-image relations in two instances of the video below:

(1) Living in Singapore, I think we got everything: different cultures, different beliefs, different races, different kind of people.
(6) We should embrace and celebrate our differences.

The repeated verbal mention of 'difference' in (1) cuts to several juxtaposed shots in which persons who could be said to be of Malay and Chinese

ethnicities are represented. The video, in fact, opens significantly with a young Malay-Muslim woman, attired in a black hijab (an outward marker of Muslim religious identity), speaking the words 'Living in Singapore, I think we got everything'. Spoken by an ethnic/religious minority member, the statement is a powerful testament to the harmonious multi-ethnic/religious diversity of the nation. Similarly, (6) is spoken by a young woman who appears to be of Eurasian descent, belonging to an even smaller ethnic community in Singapore. The Eurasian identity of mixed Asian-Caucasian heritage itself represents the embodiment of the harmonious blend of different ethnicities.

The overt enactment of harmony-in-diversity, I suggest, is strategically harnessed as a platform for extending the ambit to include the LGBTQ community. The weaving of gender/sexual non-normativity into the multi-ethnic social fabric is achieved in a few ways. Firstly, through an overdetermination of the colour pink which, as noted, signifies queer or queer-friendly identities. In (1) and (6), the persons are mostly attired in pink, wearing pink hats, glitzy pink glasses, and holding a pinkie or a pink cut-out – each of these functioning as Attributes, indexing the Carrier's identification with the LGBTQ community. Secondly, as the Malay-Muslim woman (1) speaks the words 'different cultures', the image shown is of a Chinese woman holding a pink cut-out on which are the handwritten statements 'I want to stop talking about "gay rights". It's not "gay rights". It's human rights.' This is the only time 'rights' is mentioned in the video. The text-image correspondence, with the words 'different cultures' spoken by a Malay individual and the visually represented handwritten statement about rights held up by a Chinese person, achieves an assimilated presence for the LGBTQ community within the fabric of multiculturalism. Finally, in (6), through the modality of obligation, the Eurasian subject calls for a commitment to celebrate 'our differences' – which is deliberately double-voiced, in referring to ethnic/religious differences and, in the co-textual context of the video, gender/sexual differences also. It carries a certain poignancy that a member of an ethnic minority which has been socio-historically named 'Others' should raise the banner for inclusion of gender/sexual minorities in Singapore.

In sum, riding on multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, non-normative gender/sexualities get quietly imbricated into the overarching, familiar nationalist discourse of harmony-in-diversity. Arguably, this achieves a naturalisation of all kinds of difference as constitutive of Singapore's national identity.

CONCLUSION: REMARKS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A SOUTHERN PRAXIS

I aimed to show the construction of a homonationalist discourse in a Pink Dot promotional video, which resonated closely with Singapore's Asian-centric Shared Values. From the point of view of a queer radical critique, the assimilationist discourse of homonationalism found in Pink Dot SG would justifiably raise critical

concerns regarding complicity and a seeming lack of agency. However, viewed as a tactical discourse of pragmatic resistance, the Pink Dot discourse of homonationalism, as I have argued, demonstrates the resilience, creativity and agency of a marginalised community in the face of illiberal institutional apparatuses. Instead of being openly contestative, Pink Dot's resistance, shaped by a pragmatic necessity, followed a pathway centred on nationalism, social harmony, normative family-orientedness, consensus-building and forging alliances with the heterosexual mainstream. Viewed no less as a tactical politics of resistance in the case of Pink Dot SG, I disagree, therefore, with Duggan's theoretical position that homonormativity necessarily 'seriously disables political analysis and activism' (2003: xx). As demonstrated, the resistive politics analysed in this study pragmatically toed the line, while pushing boundaries. In other words, while strategically passing as normative, on the one hand, it simultaneously opened up a space for non-normative presence and recognition, on the other. For example, as shown in the Pink Dot discourse, while the movement is aligned with and leverages on the uniting force of nationalism, it also challenges Singaporean society to be open and inclusive of *all* citizens. Likewise, while upholding heteronormative family structures, the discourse, at the same time, pushes for the acceptance of non-normative family formations.

Herein lies an implication for the adoption of a southern praxis perspective. If read through a Northern-centric lens, the argument regarding the political import of homonormativity and homonationalism presented in the study could be interpreted as peculiar, anomalous, and as 'other'. However, from the perspective of southern praxis, the strategic practice shown in this study, contingent upon the socio-historical specificities of its context, paves the way for entry into a theoretically engaged dialogue and refinement of concepts developed in the North. As earlier described, this entails unsettling monopolies of truth-making, and allowing other narratives to come forth and to relate different narratives to each other in a globally inclusive way (Connell 2007).

Extending from this study is another implication of southern praxis, concerning political organising and transnational alliances. The conceptualisation of the Pink Dot movement, supported by the discourse in the videos, offers a different pathway to organise an LGBTQ social movement and mobilise communal support. The concept of Pink Dot SG, in fact, has been borrowed and adapted for political organising in a variety of geographical locations across the world, such as Hong Kong, the U.S.A. (in New York City and Salt Lake City), and Canada (in Montreal). In terms of global transnational flows, this disrupts Northern-centric narratives that assume a unilineal flow of knowledges and practices from the North, as the pivotal centre, and adapted ('glocalised') in the rest of the world (cf. Altman 1997). Neither does this example reify a simple North/South binary, whereby ideas either flow from the North to the South or in the reverse direction. Rather, the transnational flows in this case are multi-directional, and suggest interconnectivity of multiple sites in relation to the North and within the Asian South. Pertinently, too, contra a Northern-

centric assumption that focuses on rights as necessarily driving the discourse and political organising of LGBTQ communities globally, 'Asian values', as a set of ideas circulating widely within the Asian South, have strategically shaped the Pink Dot SG discourse and mode of political organising, and have been indirectly imported globally. To conclude then, what and how any activism ends up looking in any place cannot be determined a priori nor assumed to be a foregone conclusion, but is always contingent. And that applies to communities in the North as it does in the South.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that such an iteration is not unproblematic, and that the conjured image of 'Asia' and its communalist values are appropriated for state ambitions. (Thanks to Phoebe Pua for highlighting this point.)
2. Although foreigners could join the rallies (until 2017), only Singaporean citizens and Permanent Residents are permitted to participate in the Pink Dot formation.

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