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The politics of truth at LGBTQ+ Pride: contesting corporate Pride and revealing marginalized lives at Hong Kong Migrants Pride

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the articulation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ+) identities, lives, and rights at Pride events in Hong Kong. I argue that analyzing Pride as a Foucauldian “regime of truth” reveals how it is embedded in and reproduces broader ideological effects and structures of global capitalism. Focusing specifically on the corporate Out Leadership Asia Summit and Hong Kong Migrants Pride, organized by migrant domestic worker (MDW) unions and LGBTQ+ activists, the article explores transnational discourses of “global homocapitalism” that frame LGBTQ+ identities in individual and economically productive terms. By contrast, Migrants Pride highlights the exploitation of work and the precarity of MDWs and forges intersectional alliances with the feminist social justice movement. These differing conceptions of LGBTQ+ lives and needs form a contested “politics of truth” that exposes the tense and incongruous relationships between local and global, neo-liberal and collective, and rich and poor that underpin the dynamics of privilege and marginality of LGBTQ+ subjects in Hong Kong. The article argues that Pride’s co-option is an uneven and shifting process across global contexts. Migrants Pride, by enacting queer resistance to discourses of “corporate Pride,” offers a case study of how Pride can be a platform for social justice activism.

KEYWORDS Queer activism; LGBTQ+ Pride; homocapitalism; Foucault; migrant domestic workers

Introduction

Pride, in visual, spatial, and linguistic terms, creates understandings of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ+) identities, frames political and social issues, and constructs representations of how LGBTQ+ lives are lived (Browne 2007; Bruce 2016; Conway 2022; Johnston 2005; Peterson,

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Wahlström, and Wennerhag 2018). Pride is an important site for defining the truths of LGBTQ+ lives: who we understand LGBTQ+ people to be, how LGBTQ+ identities are represented, and the issues and challenges that the LGBTQ+ community faces. Pride emerged as a defiant protest against homophobia, a celebration of LGBTQ+ identity, and a platform for building community and raising visibility. However, in recent decades, Pride, particularly in Global North contexts, has been a site for corporate advertising and sponsorship, leading to accusations that it has been co-opted by the market. Pride has therefore become a site for the logics of globalized capitalism to be reproduced, but also contested.

This article argues that LGBTQ+ Pride is a site for producing “regimes of truth” in Foucauldian terms (Foucault 2001a, 2001b; Weir 2008). Analyzing Pride in this way reveals how Pride produces and reproduces understandings of reality in social, political, and economic terms. This moves beyond simply documenting shared symbols and practices, such as a rainbow or a parade, or analyzing the tactics used or repertoires of action, to reveal how underlying ideologies both frame and are reproduced by Pride. Multiple authors have detailed how LGBTQ+ advocacy has been co-opted in the reproduction of globalized capitalism (Burchiellaro 2020a; Conway 2022; Duggan 2004; Rao 2015, 2020). However, Pride’s co-option is not inevitable. As Hong Kong Migrants Pride demonstrates, Pride can also be utilized as a platform for the contestation of global capitalism: presenting work as a form of exploitation, globalized capitalism as engendering inequality, poverty, and enforced migration, and these being sites for political struggle. Through this contestation of truth, Migrants Pride seeks to reclaim Pride as a platform for enabling intersectional, feminist, and queer activist practices.

This article focuses on two case studies of contrasting discourses of LGBTQ+ identities, rights, and community and helps to answer Rao’s (2015, 48) question “[W]here will resistance to global homocapitalism come from?” The first explores the conception of LGBTQ+ inclusion and tolerance articulated at the Out Leadership Asia Summit, an LGBTQ+ business advocacy event hosted and co-sponsored by the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC). The second is a disruptive, feminist, and queer contestation of global capitalism enacted at Hong Kong Migrants Pride, which is organized by a coalition of migrant domestic worker (MDW) unions and LGBTQ+ activists. Analyzing these case studies reveals how constructions of LGBTQ+ tolerance and inclusion, and of Pride, can be incorporated as part of a transnational business “regime of truth,” which presents particular understandings of work structures, LGBTQ+ identity, social relations, and legal rights as a fundamental truth.

Hong Kong offers a revealing case study to explore different Pride discourses because of its contrasting privileged and marginalized migration flows, its considerable socio-economic inequality, and its symbolic importance at the heart of global capitalism. Hong Kong reveals global capitalism

both from above and from below, with global elites existing in the same post-colonial space as the globally marginalized and exploited. Divergent experiences of LGBTQ+ life also exist, in parallel, in Hong Kong. While homosexuality in Hong Kong was legalized in 1991, there are few positive legal protections or rights for LGBTQ+ people. Hong Kong has a number of Pride and other LGBTQ+ community and advocacy events, including Hong Kong Pride, Pink Dot, and Pink Season. These events reflect and include the territory's different communities, including Western expatriates, local Cantonese, and other immigrant groups from the Asian region. The lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people in Hong Kong are fragmented along lines of wealth, race, nationality, and gender. These contrasting communities are particularly striking in the case of the Out Leadership Asia Summit and Hong Kong Migrants Pride, which take place in the exact same location in the city, with Migrants Pride weaving beside and beneath HSBC's headquarters in the Central business, shopping, and administrative district. The two events reflect different communities and very different understandings of politics and society, albeit around shared discursive framings and symbolisms of Pride.

The article begins by exploring the existing academic analyses of Pride and debates about its increasing commercialization, before investigating how Pride can become part of broader regimes of truth. The Out Leadership Asia Summit and Hong Kong Migrants Pride are then analyzed as contrasting versions of the truth of LGBTQ+ lives.

Methods

This article is based on primary research gathered at different Pride and LGBTQ+ advocacy events in Hong Kong. I interviewed 18 participants in Hong Kong, including lawyers, non-governmental organization (NGO) employees, activists, journalists, and corporate diversity professionals, in addition to attending Hong Kong Pride, Hong Kong Migrants Pride, and the Out Leadership Asia Summit. Alongside semi-structured interviews, ethnographic participant observation was a key research method. I wrote extensive field notes documenting my observations and reflections and took more than 100 photographs and videos. I also collected ephemera distributed at events, including leaflets, posters, literature, and branded Pride merchandise.

While conducting my research, it was clear that there were significant social and ideological divides and different perceptions and narratives about Pride and LGBT life in Hong Kong between elite, corporate, and international LGBTQ+ advocates and local Cantonese activists. It was important, therefore, not to treat interview data as objective truths, but to analyze these co-created narratives in relation to the broader ethnographic data (Blee and Taylor 2002, 110–111; Conway 2022). Moving between these different spaces and communities in Hong Kong, I traversed not only racial,

class, and linguistic divides, but also the contrasting worlds of international business and local queer activism. As white British-born gay man, I superficially resembled the expatriate and local elites. Therefore, participants from these groups often assumed that I agreed with their views, which I have also experienced when researching in other contexts stratified by class and race. Burchiellaro (2020b, 182) writes that for an LGBTQ+-identifying researcher, exploring the corporate world of diversity and grassroots queer activism can come with “a strategic possibility” for research access and “a sense of unease” about potential complicity in neoliberal diversity politics and suspicions about insider/outsider status from activists. From a feminist and queer perspective, it is therefore important to ask in whose interests are we researching (Skeggs 2007, 437) when analyzing and presenting different versions of truth and the implications for gendered and racial power relations.

LGBTQ+ Pride

Pride emerged in the United States (US) in the early 1970s to commemorate the New York Stonewall Riots in 1969, but also as a new and more radical form of protest, a means of raising visibility, and a celebration of gay and lesbian identity (Bruce 2016). Still commonly centered on a parade, Pride events have been described as “foundational rituals for LGBTQ+ movements across the globe; acting as collective responses to oppression, encouraging redefinition of the self, and expressing collective identity” (Peterson, Wahlström, and Wennerhag 2018, 17). Pride has become part of broader international political and commercial processes, used by states as evidence for worthiness for European Union membership (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014; Sloopmaeckers 2017); as major tourist events, such as Sydney Mardi Gras; and as public relations strategies for cities and states, such as Tel Aviv and Israel (Johnston 2005; Puar 2002; Schulman 2012).

Much of the academic analysis of Pride emphasizes its positive and transformational potential (Browne 2007; Bruce 2016; Peterson, Wahlström, and Wennerhag 2018). For many researchers, the engagement of businesses in Pride – for example, through sponsorship, participation, and rainbow branding – is not a significant concern. Joseph (2010) argues that corporate involvement is often at the request of LGBTQ+ employees and provides necessary funds and heightened visibility for LGBTQ+ causes. Kates and Belk (2001) contend that while commercial advertising has the potential to undermine the key socio-political purposes of Pride, in practice, Pride participants subvert and co-opt such advertising. Bruce (2016) writes that over-commercialization is not a significant concern for the Pride participants whom she interviewed, because such sponsorship enables Pride parades to occur and does not define Pride’s social purpose. While these claims have some validity, and co-option is not necessarily a simple binary, they are limited by the scope

of the research conducted; in the work of Joseph, Kates, and Belk and Bruce, data collection was limited to the US and Canada and to people who had chosen to participate in commercialized Pride events.

In recent years, Pride has attracted controversy, with its political and social purpose widely debated by LGBTQ+ groups and in the media (Schulman 2012; Tatchell 2019; Ward 2008). Pride has been criticized by queer activists for being too heavily reliant on corporate sponsorship and carrying corporate advertising; for allowing discriminatory state institutions, such as the police and the military, to be part of the parade; and for marginalizing groups, including Black, working-class, disabled, and trans people (Ward 2008). This corresponds with a broader literature that has analyzed how LGBTQ+ movements have been “mainstreamed” and co-opted by neoliberal capital (Duggan 2004; Rao 2015; Ward 2008), becoming overly focused on heteronormative and exclusionary definitions (Butler 2002; Scott 2013) and privileged “lifestyles” (Conway 2022), and complicit in defining a “civilized” LGBTQ+-friendly Global North and an “uncivilized” and homophobic Global South (Rao 2015; Weber 2016). Many queer activists now consider Pride to have become bereft of political meaning and purpose, even proclaiming “the death of Pride” (Lord 2017). I contend that the involvement and rebranding of business using rainbow symbolism and discourses of Pride is not an absence or a “death” of politics; rather, it is the replacement of a radical queer politics with a capitalist politics, reframing constructions of truth and reality in ways that obscure precarity and social injustice.

Pride and regimes of truth

Foucault (2001a, 131) argues that each society has a “regime of truth” by which understandings of truth are created and sustained and that this regime is defined by “the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true.” He explains that truth is socially constructed; what gets accepted as true emerges out of “a constant economic and political incitation ... produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatus” (Foucault 2001a, 127) and a hierarchy of institutional and individual actors “who are charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault 1980, 131). These powerful actors include states, corporations, media companies, and educational institutions. These societal discourses have power effects on individuals, who internalize the norms of truth and reproduce them in their thoughts, speech, and behavior. In contemporary global capitalism, these regimes of truth are framed by, and have reproduced, the logics of capitalism, including market-based competition, individualism, and the predication of personal value on productive labor. This constitutes a “political rationality” that renders the political economic, rather than radical, and the social individual, rather than collective (Lemke 2001, 191).

I contend that institutional involvement in Pride events can be considered as contributing to forming a regime of truth with significant socio-political implications. Transnational corporations, as agents of global capitalism, create visions of the world, and of reality, that are constructed and articulated through business practices, advertising, and corporate advocacy work (Burchiellaro 2021; Hooper 2001; Rao 2015, 2020). This, in turn, wields significant influence in shaping in how employees, clients, and governments understand and experience the world (Ahonen et al. 2014; Rose 2012). In the context of Pride, corporate involvement in and occupation of what were formerly queer activist spaces and corporate celebration of diversity and inclusion are both products of what Rao (2015, 2020) terms “global homocapitalism.” In this way, Pride becomes a site through which transnational corporations conduct “a political project that endeavours to create a social reality that it suggests already exists” (Lemke 2001, 203).

Conceptualizing Pride as part of a regime of truth is not synonymous with claiming that Pride has been fully captured by capitalist governmentality; rather, Pride can be a site for ideological contestation, or a “politics of truth,” whereby political and social confrontations become struggles about what is accepted as the truth (Foucault 2001a). As Foucault (1998, 95) famously remarked, “where there is power, there is resistance”; power is not only disciplinary and repressive, it can also liberate. In this way, “resistance is both an element of the functioning of power and a source of its perpetual disorder” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 147). Contesting a particular regime of truth is therefore possible. Queer protests at and against Pride for being too commercialized are examples of these contestations, as are Pride events that eschew corporate involvement and critique capitalism.

Foucault (1980, 133) argues that the political imperative of our times is to try to change the “political, economic, institutional regime for the production of truth” in order to constitute a “new politics of truth.” Macleod and Durrheim (2002, 42) argue that feminist interventions in a Foucauldian politics of truth can expose how “the personal is political” to reveal “subjugated power relations and subvert hegemonic discourses at micro and macro levels.” Feminist and queer contestations can seek to do this by articulating the “truths” of the lives of women, racialized others, and LGBTQ+ people and revealing the attendant social injustices and precarities of these lives. This contestation enables subaltern subjects and communities to name “the system” and to make “known that which others would prefer to keep from public view” (Cox and Fominaya 2009, 2). Through this subversion of discourses, feminist and queer activism can articulate an alternative “new politics of truth” (Macleod and Durrheim 2002, 56). This poses the question of whether Pride can still be a platform for radical queer and intersectional politics,¹ or whether it has been fully co-opted by commercial interests to construct a partial and exclusionary vision of LGBTQ+ rights and identities.

Pride and LGBTQ+ organizing in Hong Kong

Pride in Hong Kong is a key site of struggle over the politics of truth for LGBTQ+ rights and representation, as well as contestation between contrasting conceptions of society, progress, and reality. There has been growth in the number of LGBTQ+ advocacy events since homosexuality was decriminalized in 1991, and the territory now has an annual Hong Kong Pride, Pink Dot, Pink Season, and numerous corporate and academic advocacy events. There are divergent framings and understandings of LGBTQ+ communities, rights, and activism at these different events (Kong 2011). Hong Kong Pride started in 2008 and is organized by local Cantonese activists. It draws on the territory's history of political protest, has a close relationship with the pro-democracy movement, and makes open demands for legal protections and equality. The mainly Western expatriate organizers of Pink Dot were keen to emphasize the "soft approach" that they adopted, one that did not "demand change" but was family and corporate friendly (interview with Betty Grissoni, November 12, 2018). The UK-born organizer of Pink Season, Philip Howell-Williams, explained that his series of events were "not directly political" and focused on sport, parties, and some discussion of legal rights in corporate contexts (interview, November 14, 2018). Hong Kong Migrants Pride started in 2015 and emerged out of a broad coalition of MDW support groups and local LGBTQ+ activists, particularly those involved in Hong Kong Pride (Lai 2018).

Hong Kong is a site of considerable corporate and financial power in the global economy. Within this nexus, HSBC is a powerful economic, social, and political actor. Its headquarters occupy a commanding position in the Central district, and, as the information panels at the foot of the building make clear, the bank's history is interwoven with the colonial history, identity, and development of the territory. Primarily operating between London and Hong Kong, the financial institution regularly serves as a mouthpiece for the collective interests of Hong Kong and the broader global corporate sector. As Sam, a UK-born HSBC employee and co-founder of the Hong Kong HSBC Pride group, explained,

HSBC in Hong Kong is in an absolutely unique position. Our influence in this city is absolutely unchallenged – we are almost a monopoly in the banking sector. Just the sheer scale of the organisation and its deep roots into Hong Kong are very evident and so we have all eyes on us at all times. (interview, November 19, 2018)

HSBC is heavily involved in local society. On the weekend of Migrants Pride, HSBC closed many of the streets surrounding its headquarters to hold the annual HSBC Community Festival. This sought to highlight the charitable funding that HSBC distributes in Hong Kong, but also to symbolize the deep interconnection between the bank and Hong Kong society. HSBC's

presentation of itself and its interests is interconnected with constructions of what is in the interests of Hong Kong and the people who reside there. As such, the corporation is a powerful actor in the politics of truth in Hong Kong.

In recent years, HSBC has engaged with LGBTQ+ issues. In 2013, HSBC employees established an LGBTQ+ employee group, HSBC Pride. Since 2014, the Out Leadership Asia Summit has been hosted at HSBC's headquarters in Hong Kong, with the skyscraper lit in rainbow colors for the week.² In 2018, HSBC Pride was a prominent presence at the Hong Kong Pride march, with more than 100 staff wearing HSBC-branded rainbow T-shirts and marching with large HSBC Pride banners (field notes). Hong Kong's LGBTQ+ events represent and produce different types of truth. For example, HSBC's discursive construction of LGBTQ+ identities and inclusion, and the rainbow public face that it presents to the city, diverge from the aims of Hong Kong Pride. As Sam said, though HSBC had "a very visible presence at Pride," "I don't see us becoming a sponsor" of Pride, whereas HSBC does sponsor Pink Dot. This was because, Sam explained, Pride was perceived as being "too political," "too aggressive," and too closely associated with the pro-democracy movement in the territory, unlike Pink Dot (interview, November 19, 2018).

The Out Leadership Asia Summit and the "business case" for socio-political change

In 2018, the Out Leadership Asia Summit's closing event involved senior executives from a number of financial, legal, and media organizations in Hong Kong and across Asia, as well as prominent actors in Hong Kong and the region's LGBTQ+ advocacy community. The event began with "uplifting" videos highlighting Out Leadership's LGBTQ+ advocacy work in the corporate sector and showcasing the role of HSBC and other corporations in making LGBTQ+ employees feel accepted, valued, and able to be "out" at work.

At the opening event, senior HSBC executives, all of whom identified as heterosexual, emphasized the corporation's commitment to diversity simply by pointing to the fact that the bank operated across numerous territories. Kevin Martin, HSBC Asia's group general manager, said, "The bank was founded more than 150 years ago to finance trade between Europe and Asia and we have always brought different people and cultures together. Diversity is at the heart of our business model" (field notes). Another executive agreed that "HSBC's roots are forged in diversity. Without diversity, we could not understand and service the needs of our 48 million customers around the globe" (field notes). This proclaimed "truth" about HSBC's commitment to diversity obscured the historical and contemporary power relations inherent in the group's powerful role in shaping colonial and postcolonial capitalism.

At the closing event, the mostly white speakers from Hong Kong's financial, legal, and media sectors emphasized their corporations' global role in advancing diversity and inclusion. Roundtable-style discussions between prominent LGBTQ+ corporate employees in Hong Kong portrayed a dynamic, positive, and hopeful future for LGBTQ+ employees in the territory. As one speaker remarked, "I think we've turned the corner" for LGBT rights in the territory (field notes). Speakers at the event were selected to portray the important influence that corporations have in advancing LGBTQ+ rights. A prominent Taiwanese LGBTQ+ rights activist was interviewed on stage, saying that "corporate support is extremely important" and thanking the corporate sector for its support in the forthcoming Taiwanese referenda on same-sex marriage (field notes). I subsequently discovered that HSBC, like most other transnational corporations, had made no financial contribution or public statement about the referenda in Taiwan. Perhaps the most incongruous and revealing scene at the Summit featured gay US Olympic athlete Gus Kenworthy, who had been flown in for the occasion, speaking about leadership, courage, strength, and being an LGBT "role model." Kenworthy's presence emphasized the impression that this was an event mostly populated by and aimed at Western and global elites, framed in terms that assumed an empowered present and progressive future for LGBTQ+ subjects, and one that was enabled by transnational corporations and embodied by their professional employees.

The Summit's final reception was a glamorous affair, with rainbow-themed canapés to match the skyscraper's lighting scheme. At the reception, I asked a human rights advocate where he had gone after he had spoken on the stage earlier in the afternoon. "I couldn't stand to listen to their hypocrisy," he replied, and then spoke at length about how HSBC had refused to publicly call for pro-LGBTQ+ legislation in Hong Kong or to formally support legal action, such as the QT case (field notes).³ At the event, various "truths" of LGBTQ+ progress and the ability of transnational corporations to deliver and protect such progress were articulated, but in private conversations and based on evidence of previous corporate action, and inaction, it was clear that there was a more complex and contradictory reality behind the carefully curated narrative of institutional support for LGBTQ+ inclusion at the Summit.

"It's always business that makes change happen," a UK-born Hong Kong corporate executive remarked to me during the Summit's drinks reception. She was echoing a remark made by an HSBC executive from the stage, who had said that "nothing will change in Hong Kong unless we lead that change" (field notes). She had been discussing with me the broader pro-democracy protests and the prospects for legal advances in LGBTQ+ rights in Hong Kong. As her comment implied, she was skeptical of the potential for pro-democracy or LGBTQ+ activists to effect change, but confident that

transnational corporations in the territory would do so. This understanding of the political, legal, and social reality, as being predicated on and refracted through corporate power, is also at the heart of how LGBTQ+ identities and rights are understood as valid only when they become part of what has been termed, by both advocates and critics, the “business case for diversity and inclusion” (Ahmed 2012; Burchiellaro 2021; Rao 2020). This business case conceptually defines “diverse subjects,” including people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals, as valuable to the workplace because they increase corporate profitability, both through employee productivity and widened access to new consumer groups and markets. Thus, it becomes a self-evident truth that it makes “business sense” to advocate for and celebrate LGBTQ+ individuals as employees and customers.

At the Summit, Kevin Martin explained that “we must develop a safe and supportive environment where everyone can bring their whole selves [to work] to whatever they do and achieve their goals” (field notes). This has also been a consistent theme of HSBC’s articulation of its involvement in LGBTQ+ issues. Diana Cesar, chief executive officer of HSBC Hong Kong, explained that HSBC’s lighting the building in rainbow colors each year demonstrated “our commitment to achieving a truly open and diverse working environment” (Marketing-Interactive 2016). Thus, the business case forms a key part of global capitalism’s regime of truth – one that is premised on the commodification of LGBTQ+ subjects as productive employees who increase profit for business. Even the residency rights won for same-sex partners of corporate employees in the QT case were justified by one legal executive at the Summit not as a triumph for LGBT rights, but as a logical step that increased Hong Kong’s economic competitiveness: “[The QT case] was important to Hong Kong’s ability to attract and maintain talent” (field notes). However, despite the outward display of rainbow colors by HSBC, this business case was inward facing and defined as creating a better working environment for HSBC (and other corporate) employees. For HSBC, LGBTQ+ identities, rights, and individuals exist within a regime of truth that confers value only through productive professional work and understands the achievement of authentic LGBTQ+ subjectivity in and by work.

The importance of the business case to the framing of LGBTQ+ rights and commitment to LGBTQ+ equality was apparent in the readiness to de-prioritize and adapt positions if they conflicted with commercial interest. In 2016, Sam and others in HSBC Pride organized the painting of the HSBC’s symbolic bronze lion statues in rainbow colors. Sam explained that this generated a “phenomenal [positive] response” on social media (interview, November 19, 2018). In 2018, the painting of the lions was also hailed as a proof of the bank’s commitment to “leading” progressive LGBT rights change: “We’ve lit the building. We’ve put rainbow lions outside,” remarked

an HSBC executive at the Summit (field notes). However, an online petition protesting the rainbow lions was initiated by the Christian Evangelical activist Roger Wong, who also criticized HSBC at its annual shareholder meeting for equalizing same-sex employee benefits without consulting shareholders (AFP 2016). Media coverage of these protests prompted some “very senior clients” to approach senior managers and express their concerns about HSBC becoming involved in LGBTQ+ issues (interview, November 19, 2018). As Sam explained, while HSBC’s official response was to deploy a “boilerplate” statement about valuing diversity and inclusion, he admitted that it had made senior managers “a little bit uncomfortable.” That led to a “dampening of our overt messaging,” and as a result, HSBC had not subsequently done anything as “big and bold” as painting the lions: “I can’t touch the lions again!” he exclaimed (interview, November 19, 2018). The truth of HSBC’s (and wider corporate) commitment to LGBT rights was proclaimed by corporate elites first by the painting of the lions in rainbow colors and then by pointing to this as evidence of leadership and change, yet this concealed the reality of caution and compromise in response to homophobic opposition.

LGBTQ+ rights, identities, and Pride were selectively articulated at the Summit as only valuable in relation to the business case for LGBT inclusion. Yet in reality, this business case was circumscribed by client opinion and perceived political risks. The corporate sector was even thanked for taking political stands for LGBTQ+ rights in the region when it had not done so. HSBC (and other corporate actors) represented its actions, curated an image of activism, and articulated a narrative of achievement when such achievements had not happened, or at least not in the purported terms. The Summit celebrated change and congratulated campaigning that had not actually occurred. This supported a regime of truth that was embedded in capitalist understandings of individual worth and of a belief in the market and its institutions to lead and deliver progress.

The erasure of subaltern LGBTQ+ lives is an important criticism of corporate inclusion and diversity discourses (Ahmed 2012; Rao 2015). However, Burchiellaro (2021, 764) argues that paying attention to the “lived experience” of LGBTQ+ corporate employees is equally important so as not to underplay the “agency of diverse subjects in negotiating inclusion” or to oversimplify criticisms. As previously discussed, Sam at HSBC was aware of the controversies and compromises that the corporate sector had made in Hong Kong. He also commented that the HSBC Community Festival’s slogan was “too woolly,” both literally and figuratively (Figure 1), and “wishy washy.” Sam had limited agency over HSBC’s messaging and activities, and saw business risks in overt protest. While recognizing the pragmatic compromises that corporate employees make, it is important to be clear about the ideological effects that these decisions have.



Figure 1. “Weaving the Community Closer Together.”

Beyond HSBC’s framing of truth lay a more complex and contradictory reality. HSBC makes particular claims to expressing, defining, and embodying Hong Kong: its history, society, and best interests. Yet privileged migrants, with limited connection to Cantonese and local LGBTQ+ communities, primarily articulated the discourses of LGBTQ+ lives, rights, and progress. The tenor and content of this politics of truth drew on understandings of identity; logics of legal, political, and social change; and individual narratives, which were premised on axes of privilege in the Global North. These narratives were also entirely focused on subjective experiences and opportunities afforded by being a professional employee in a transnational corporation. The Out Leadership Asia Summit at HSBC defined a regime of truth that simultaneously appeared to account for all LGBTQ+ people transnationally and locally, yet excluded and obscured the experiences, needs, and possibilities for substantive change for local and non-professional LGBTQ+ people.

Hong Kong Migrants Pride and the politics of truth

In 2018, Migrants Pride took place days after the Out Leadership Asia Summit and in close proximity to HSBC’s headquarters, revealing a different version of truth than that articulated at the Summit. MDWs were not considered to be part of the LGBTQ+ community, or Hong Kong society more broadly, at the Out Leadership Asia Summit. However, every Sunday, thousands of MDWs

gather on the sidewalks, in the parks, and beside the Central district's financial and government institutions and luxury shopping malls. Here, they sit and socialize, eat, apply make-up, cut hair, and relax on their day off. Despite this very visible presence, they are generally overlooked, misunderstood, and often maligned by broader society in Hong Kong (Chang and Groves 2000; Constable 2018; Lai 2018). Invisibility is a key issue for MDWs, because, as Enloe (2014, 330) writes, MDWs "slip out of sight so easily." LGBTQ+ MDWs face further marginalization and prejudice within the migrant community itself, as well as being vulnerable to dismissal and deportation because of their sexuality.

Migrants Pride aimed to challenge the absence of consideration of LGBTQ+ MDWs and to make them visible as a distinct community in Hong Kong. It evolved from decades of transnational and local feminist organizing among MDWs in Hong Kong. This organizing includes support and social groups, legal advice, and trade union organizing. Shiela Tebia-Bonifacio, chair of the MDW women's support group Gabriela Hong Kong, explained that Pride was a good platform to raise visibility and pursue a serious political purpose, but also that "we saw the need to make it fun, so it will reach more LGBT migrants" (interview, February 3, 2019). She added,

We are educating the people of Hong Kong that this is the plight of LGBT migrants and even though they are a minority they are part of Hong Kong and they play an important role in the lives of many Hong Kong families. (interview, February 3, 2019)

Equally, Tebia-Bonifacio was keen that the other "elite" LGBT activist communities should take notice of the issues that LGBTQ+ MDWs face. MDW activists also became aware that participating in and being visible at other LGBTQ+ events, such as Hong Kong Pride, was difficult because MDWs can only take part on Sundays, when they have a day off work (interview, November 19, 2018).

Hong Kong Migrants Pride march began in front of City Hall with a few hundred MDW activists wearing T-shirts that were color coordinated to represent the different colors of the rainbow. Carrying rainbow flags and banners, those on the march began with the slogan "Pride, freedom, change!" and went through Statue Square, in front of HSBC's headquarters, and across the sidewalks and walkways beside the luxury shopping malls and hotels (Figure 2). The march coincided with the HSBC Community Festival, which meant that many of the streets were cordoned off. As we walked, one of the participants in the Pride march said to me,

HSBC is dominating all the streets with their Community Festival, and it shows what they think the community is – it isn't migrant domestic workers! We're all sat outside it ... and Migrants Pride is taking place next to it and we're walking beside and through it. (field notes)



Figure 2. The Migrants Pride march in front of HSBC's headquarters.

The Community Festival's theme was "harmony" and "bringing people together" (Figure 1). By contrast, the Migrants Pride march was disruptive with its colorful display and the marchers shouting and singing "No to discrimination and social exclusion!," "We're here, we're queer, and we want to say hello!," and "Long live international solidarity!" While Migrants Pride did not attack or criticize HSBC directly, its noisy disruptiveness and open queerness contrasted with the calm, harmonious, and anodyne atmosphere of the Community Festival.

The Migrants Pride march ended with a rally adjacent to HSBC's headquarters, in front of the walkways and shops of a designer shopping mall (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The Migrants Pride rally.

As retail assistants, security guards, and shoppers looked on from the mall's shops and walkways at the scene below, the Migrants Pride rally presented an arresting sight amid the luxury and wealth on display. MDWs gathered in front of large banners that described migrant domestic work as "modern-day slavery" and demanded labor rights, such as "humane accommodation and 11 hours uninterrupted rest" and "dignity and freedom" for LGBTQ+ MDWs (field notes). Representatives from different national and community MDW groups made speeches in their languages and English about migrant rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and the exploitative labor policies in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Hong Kong. Over the course of the afternoon, the women sang feminist songs about the importance of women's rights and development, danced, and ran T-shirt printing and make-up workshops.

Migrants Pride contested and revealed the spatial, colonial, and corporate power relations in Hong Kong and, in doing so, destabilized the homocapitalist regime of truth. Shortly before the march, a group of MDWs held what was described by one of the organizers, Alma Quinto, as a feminist art and activist "guerrilla workshop" in Statue Square, which faces HSBC's headquarters (interview, November 19, 2018). This square contains the solitary statue of Sir Thomas Jackson, a founder of HSBC and a powerful figure in Hong Kong's colonial past. Quinto explained that few knew its history or reflected on the ongoing power relations that it symbolizes. At the workshop, MDWs made small traditional Filipino dolls dressed in national costumes and depicted with raised fists. Some made figures in gendered female dress, but others made trousers signifying their chosen pronouns or trans identity. The figures were placed in front of Jackson's statue. Quinto explained that with these figures, "migrant workers create and write their own stories ... people can see them, can learn about the stories of these workers" and that this challenges the "one-dimensional" image that MDWs have in Hong Kong (interview, November 19, 2018).

MDWs articulated an alternative truth of (post)colonial and capitalist power relations and how these relations produce and depend on migrant domestic work. The guerrilla workshop questioned the regime of truth that constructed Hong Kong as a diverse "global city" and corporations as empowering and inclusive of both migrant workers and LGBTQ+ employees. For Quinto, the small figures, with their fists raised in defiance in front of the large statue of Jackson, highlighted the MDWs' lack of power "against this backdrop, this towering backdrop of colonial power and also male dominance" (interview, November 19, 2018). As the participants placed their figures by the statue and took photographs raising their fists next to it, other MDWs came to ask what they were doing, as did the security guards from HSBC's headquarters. Quinto explained,

No one questions the statue ... and now we're putting up Filipino statues, but only for a very short time. It is transient because the life of domestic workers here is transient. We cannot be permanent. Sir Thomas Jackson is permanent.

Through the adoption of feminist activist practices, such as using art and crafts traditionally made by women and queering this through dress, the truth of Filipino LGBTQ+ MDWs' lives was made defiantly visible in the same space as the nexus of Hong Kong's colonial, postcolonial, and corporate power. The dolls' transience and scale symbolized the precarity and power of MDWs, but, as Quinto added, "It was very symbolic of defiance ... we conquered Statue Square!" (interview, November 19, 2018).

Empowering and politicizing LGBTQ+ MDWs, as well as the MDW community more broadly, was an important aim of the Pride march. This politicization presented LGBTQ+ rights in intersectional terms, combining sexuality with migrant rights and labor rights. As the founder of Filguys,⁴ Marz Balaoro, explained,

For those who are still not aware of their rights then they are belittled ... so it's important that they know their rights and campaign for them. You should understand that you are born differently and you should be open, you should also have this ability to cope with the situation [of LGBT experience in Hong Kong]. (interview, November 19, 2018)

The central message of Migrants Pride – of the slogans, literature, songs, banners, and speeches – was to articulate LGBTQ+ migrants' issues in intersectional terms with migrant, labor, and LGBTQ+ rights combined with a critique of global capitalism. One MDW speaker explained to the rally,

I couldn't be myself and proud at my old employers' homes because they would ask me why I dressed like a man wearing trousers. I felt very troubled because I knew if I came out to them, I might lose my job. (field notes)

LGBTQ+ visibility and rights were combined with a broader critique of heteronormativity, exploitative labor practices, global inequality, and demands for social justice. As the official leaflet for Migrants Pride explained, "We are no different from our MDW sisters and brothers who suffer under racist, sexist and inhumane conditions." These narratives sought to disrupt discourses about Hong Kong as an international city and place of opportunity for migrants, and work as a fulfilling and safe place to be "out" for LGBTQ+ migrants. Instead, they presented an alternative framing of work and Hong Kong as exploitative and oppressive.

As they marched, different MDW campaign and support groups, including Gabriela and Filguys, carried banners protesting plans to charge migrant workers in Hong Kong an additional insurance tax. A trans migrant sex worker group handed out leaflets explaining that migrant sex workers had the fewest rights of all groups in Hong Kong, with trans sex workers in

particular subject to abuse and deportation. Migrants Pride volunteers handed their leaflet to onlookers, explaining their purpose: "March with Pride towards equality, justice and a world without discrimination and violence," the leaflet explained. "We still have a lot of struggles to win as LGBT and as migrants ... [M]igrants are forced to migrate because of poverty." In Hong Kong, the government "refuses to recognize domestic work as work," and MDWs faced unequal pay, precarious visa circumstances, and unfair working conditions. The leaflet outlined how LGBTQ+ migrants were vulnerable to becoming "victims of domestic abuse, violence and discrimination."

Migrants Pride used Pride as a platform for feminist and queer activism, and articulated contrasting narratives of truth. Drawing on their "subaltern knowledge" to name "the system" and reveal "new ways of seeing the world" (Cox and Fominaya 2009, 4, 2, 1), LGBTQ+ MDWs became alternative "subjects of truth" (Legg 2019). By talking about themselves, their experiences, and their intersectional identities and needs, LGBTQ+ MDWs produced "a knowledge of resistance and struggle" (Macleod and Durrheim 2002, 42). Articulating the truth of LGBTQ+ MDWs' lives is important because they can be obscured in broader narratives of LGBTQ+ rights struggles, alongside homocapitalist versions of truth. For these reasons, Migrants Pride was an important platform to make visible LGBTQ+ MDWs, the truths of their lives, and the "complex web of local and international complicities that produce today's exploitation of domestic workers" (Enloe 2014, 333). Migrants Pride's location and route was also symbolic, taking place next to HSBC's headquarters, its Community Festival, and at the heart of colonial and contemporary corporate power in Hong Kong.

Comparison and analysis: Pride and the politics of truth

The politics of truth at the Out Leadership Asia Summit and Migrants Pride drew on contrasting experiences of work in late capitalism. For corporate Pride, LGBTQ+ individuals were considered only in professional and privileged terms. For Migrants Pride, visibility and raising awareness of precarity was an important goal. Understandings of progress were also contrasting; corporate Pride expressed belief that business can deliver progress, whereas Migrants Pride was critical of the inequality and exploitation inherent in capitalism. Adopting a Foucauldian analysis reveals these complex power relations and suggests the tools by which liberation can be achieved.

The contested politics of truth about LGBTQ+ lives, rights, and futures in postcolonial Hong Kong are framed by the stratified lived experiences of global capitalism. Migrants Pride and the Out Leadership Asia Summit had very different visions of work and of the truth of LGBTQ+ lives at work. For privileged migrants, the business case for LGBT inclusion promises fulfillment

in life in capitalist production, where the achievement of LGBT rights is inextricably linked to career progression and employee productivity. Individuals are empowered by “coming out” and bringing their “whole selves” to the workplace. Migrants Pride also engaged with the lived experience of capitalism but advocated a politics of justice for subaltern LGBTQ+ subjects, who are structurally and discursively marginalized in Hong Kong. For MDWs, “coming out” at work could result in abuse, dismissal, or deportation. Migrants Pride reframed work as a place of exploitation and precarity and migration as the result of global inequality.

Migrants Pride and the Out Leadership Asia Summit had different conceptions of progress and how it could be achieved. Many of the attendees at the Summit considered transnational business to be a leading force for progressive change for LGBTQ+ communities. HSBC executives even repurposed the history of colonial development and transnational business as evidence of their expertise in and commitment to “diversity.” This obscured the role of the market and its institutions in creating inequality. The speakers at the Summit considered only an economically and racially privileged subset of LGBTQ+ people in their narratives of progress. By contrast, Migrants Pride revealed the colonial, racial, and gendered lineages of global capitalism, made LGBTQ+ MDWs visible as precarious workers, and made demands for rights in intersectional LGBT, migrant, and economic terms.

Analyzing Pride as a site for the production of regimes of truth allows a nuanced understanding of “the complexity of oppressive power relations that may take on diverse forms in modern society” (Macleod and Durrheim 2002, 57). Analyzing LGBTQ+ “corporate Pride” as a regime of truth reveals how queer politics and diverse subjects can be co-opted and placed in service to capitalist production. However, Foucault also defines the tools and practices by which these power relations can be contested by a politics of truth. As he explains, there is “no single locus of great refusal, no soul of revolt,” but rather shifting points of resistance that “inflare certain parts of the body, certain moments in life” (Foucault 1998, 69). For Macleod and Durrheim (2002, 56), resistance requires feminist alliances, and liberation involves a “freeing from the assumption that prevailing ways of understanding ourselves and others are necessary and self-evident.” Migrants Pride enacted this politics of resistance, drawing on broader feminist social justice activism that seeks “to challenge oppression in [activists’] everyday lives and animated by a vision of an alternative social order” (Maiguashca 2011, 543), and also queer activism that seeks to disrupt and queer dominant norms of space, identity, and social hierarchies, offering a radically different vision of a queer future (Gamson 1995; Highleyman 2002; Shepard 2011). The Out Leadership Asia Summit and Migrants Pride are examples of the politics of truth and the struggles for social justice in global capitalism.

Conclusion

Pride is widely viewed as the most significant platform for LGBTQ+ communities, visibility, and activism. Yet Pride's ideological effects have not been fully conceptualized, nor has there been significant analysis of Pride outside of Europe and North America. Existing research also takes a far too sanguine position about commercial involvement in Pride. Analyzing Pride as a site for a politics of truth reveals how it produces and reproduces understandings of reality in social, political, and economic terms. Examining Pride in this way moves beyond simply documenting practices such as events, parades, or rainbow branding and focuses on the ideologies in which such symbols are embedded. Analyzing regimes of corporate Pride and Migrants Pride in Hong Kong reveals how these shared symbols and practices can be used with different ideological effects. Exploring the politics of truth in Pride exposes the broader socio-economic structures and context in which LGBTQ+ activists and also corporate diversity and inclusion employees work. The emergence of transnational corporations as ostensibly progressive agents of change is a significant yet undertheorized and underexplored global phenomenon (Wang, Gibson, and Zander 2020). Close attention should be paid to how Pride, and the discourses of Pride, are enacted in global contexts, for they can obscure and reinforce inequality and exclusion, but they can also be reclaimed as a radical, intersectional, and queer transnational activist platform, raising visibility, politicizing, building community, and demanding increased rights and socio-economic justice.

Pride is a site for the politics of truth, of articulating the reality of LGBTQ+ lives and the socio-political (and legal) struggles of LGBTQ+ individuals. For MDWs in Hong Kong, it is a platform for queer and feminist activism: a defiant statement in the face of stigma and shame and a platform for socio-economic, legal, and political demands. Migrants Pride helped to build community and aimed to overcome the invisibility of LGBTQ+ MDWs in both corporate Pride and urban spaces. Through feminist, queer, and social justice activism, Migrants Pride offers us an alternative regime of truth. By revealing marginalized and precarious lives and making demands for political and legal rights, Migrants Pride re-politicizes the rainbow and Pride.

Notes

1. Crenshaw (1991) explains the importance of considering Black women's intersectional dimensions of race and gender and how they shape the multiple experiences of employment. I extend this definition to apply to the dimensions of sexuality, class, and migrant experiences.
2. Out Leadership is a US-based transnational membership organization for "senior business leaders," with a stated aim to "create a return on equality,"

focusing specifically on LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion (see <https://outleadership.com>).

3. The QT case refers to the 2017 legal case *QT v. Director of Immigration* brought by a professional immigrant same-sex couple and supported by a number of transnational corporations. The judgment resulted in the legal recognition of pre-existing same-sex marriages and civil partnerships for (non-domestic worker) immigrants in Hong Kong (Suen 2019).
4. Filguys is the Filipino Transmen and Lesbians Association, established in Hong Kong in 2006.

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