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Resisting Marginalisation and Reconstituting Space through LGBTQI+ Events

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Abstract

The field of event studies has attracted a breadth of research on the triple-bottom line of economic efficiency, environmental integrity and social equity. The focus of many studies related to event tourism, however, has fallen upon the economic and environmental dimensions of events with far less attention on “social equity.” The potential of events tourism to facilitate justice and equity for marginalised and minority groups has been especially overlooked. LGBTQI+ communities utilise gay events, such as pride parades, as mediums to communicate their identities and seek support from broader society. This paper examines a unique festival space where LGBTQI+ communities can resist marginalisation and exclusion, counteract stereotypical images and representations, and reconstitute space to fully embrace their identity and their communities. This study draws on neo-tribal theoretical insights to examine the case of the Broken Heel drag queen festival, held in the rural Australian town of Broken Hill. The study analyses Instagram posts using a netnographic approach to explore the spatiality of this festival and participant practices on the journey and at the festival site. Results points to the importance of LGBTQI+ events such as the Broken Heel festival to counter marginalisation and promote social justice and sociality for LGBTQI+ people through individual and collective expression of emotional connectedness and non-heterosexual identities.

Keywords: Broken Heel Drag Queen Festival; LGBTQI+; neo-tribal theory; marginalisation; sociality; outback; Broken Hill; Australia

Introduction

Every year in September, around 6500 festival attendees, many dressed in drag, will travel from their homes (many of which are located in urban locations such as Sydney and Melbourne) to the remote outback town of Broken Hill, Australia, to celebrate drag, queerness and the LGBTQI+ communities in a festival with the name Broken Heel (Baird, 2019; see also <https://www.bhfestival.com/>). The location for the festival is quite unusual. Broken Hill is affectionately known as the capital of the outback, or Silver City, due its former success as a silver ore mining town. Located on the border of two states, New South Wales and South Australia, Broken Hill is inland and located near the desert. It is 1100km by road from Sydney and 900 km from Melbourne. In 2018, Broken Hill's population was just under 18,000 (Australian Government, 2019). When one *googles* images of Broken Hill and the outback, they are delivered a variety of images related to the Australian outback such as mines, photographs of red earth, remote, dry and arid landscapes, and sun worn farmers wearing iconic Australian hats (Akubras) and flannel (plaid) shirts. The Australian outback has traditionally been depicted as a rugged and predominantly masculine landscape (Little & Panelli, 2007; Scott & Biron, 2010). Broken Hill is a traditionally conservative and heteronormative space and the Broken Heel festival provides a humorous and provocative challenge to this image. Festival attendees delight in the irony of the festival location, its name and the challenge that it faces them.

This study examines the Broken Heel drag queen festival in outback Australia through a social justice and neo-tribal lens. In doing so, it examines how marginalised people, albeit those who are gathering temporarily, can coalesce and challenge the heteronormative imagining of space through these types of events. Public everyday spaces are charged with meaning and values (Malpas 2012), but overwhelmingly, such spaces are heteronormative and even heterosexually masculine (Pielichaty, 2015; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016). Gay spaces are heterogenous in their nature and may vary in terms of diversity, openness and exclusivity. Walters and Jepson (2019) suggest that event spaces not only cause and perpetuate social marginalisation, but also, can help to overcome it. They can serve as an important tool for building stronger community bonds, identity, and self-development. Hassanli, Walters and Friedman (2019) assert that events can act as counterspaces for individuals by facilitating their adaptive response to marginalisation. With this in mind, the paper aims to respond to the following two research questions:

- How do LGBTQI+ events like the Broken Heel festival reduce marginalisation and promote greater social justice?
- How useful is neo-tribal theory to examine the role that festivals play in advancing social justice and sociality?

The paper is structured as follows. We commence with an appraisal of the concepts of social justice, marginalisation and exclusion, and then go on to assess neo-tribal theory, spatialisation, resistance and transformation. We then set the context for the study, the Broken Heel Festival. Following the data analysis that uses a netnographic approach, the paper concludes with discussion and conclusions.

Social justice, marginalisation and exclusion

The notion of equity and justice has tended to focus on economic issues, drawing on cost-benefit analyses, visitor expenditures etc., but even those in relation to marginalised and minority groups appear to be strongly overlooked. These oversights have been noted; a study by Jamal and Camargo (2014) in Quintana Roo, Mexico indicated that profitability and return on investment is often favoured in lieu of local Mayan residents' cultural and economic wellbeing. Other studies have addressed the need for a greater inclusion of different community groups in tourism but have tended to focus on economic benefits (Gustavsson, 2014; Schellhorn, 2010) which are often supported by the state through policy means and/or investment in tourism infrastructure (Blake, 2001; Bojer, 2003). A range of studies has focused on issues of exclusion and dislocation, such as dispossession from Native lands, and exclusion from protected areas and local commons (Devine & Ojeda, 2017; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008; 2009). Environmental justice issues related to exclusion and physical health have also been examined, particularly, in relation to diverse populations and communities of colour (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Lee & Jamal, 2008). However, few studies have provided in-depth exploration of such justice issues related to LGBTQI+ communities (Dworkin & Yi, 2003; Ginwright & James, 2002).

LGBTQI+ communities can be seen as examples of where marginalised people have established new platforms themselves to engage in a direct dialogue with wider society and the state, and, as such, contribute to individual as well as collective wellbeing of those LGBTQI+ communities. Enclavic spaces like LGBTQI+-friendly destinations and gay cruises offer spaces to build social networks, friends and supportive *communitas* (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018a). There are also other more ephemeral or temporary spaces where opportunities arise to resist and change dominant discourses, prejudices and injustice. These include public events such as pride parades, rainbow weeks or similar events. Whilst born from radical protests, pride parades or similar LGBTQI+ events celebrate social and self-acceptance and achievements that are enabled by legal and policy frameworks such as marriage equality laws. LGBTQI+ communities around the world are known to use gay events, such as pride parades, as mediums to resist discrimination, marginalisation and invisibility, communicate their identity and to seek support from broader society for the right to belong as equal members of society (Ong & Goh, 2018).

It is important to note that LGBTQI+ communities within the various spaces mentioned above are also highly diverse. Drag performers, for instance, are well established within LGBTQI+ cultures (Drysdale, 2019). Their performance spaces are usually confined to places (such as gay clubs or bars) or LGBTQI+ events (such as parades and festivals) (Drysdale, 2019). Drag shows can range from amateur acts at local gay bars to extravagant theatrical performances. Drag queen acts imply a theatrical performance of gender where often serious societal issues are showcased through sarcasm and humour.

Marginalisation and discrimination

Marginalisation has been referred to as a 'product of the cultural politics' that plays out differently in the context of locally-specific social relations (Hubbard, 1998, p. 56). LGBTQI+ voices remain largely marginalised (Verrelli, White, Harvey & Pulciani, 2019). The contemporary marginalisation of various individuals and community groups is not always an objective fact, but rather a power play bound by

their placement on the margins of social and geographical imagination (Hubbard, 1998; Smith & Pitts, 2007). Marginalised individuals and community groups are often subject to covert and overt discrimination, bullying and animosity. Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination also prevail in social arrangements, creating cultural, religious or sexual marginalisation, social exclusion and severe impacts on health and well-being (Kaniuka et al., 2019; Verrelli et al., 2019). The consequences of such marginalisation result in higher rates of psychological distress and depression (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016; Walters & Jepson, 2019). Dworkin and Yi (2003) argue that there is a distinct correlation between such social injustice and mental health among diverse groups. LGBTQI+ people, for instance, continue to experience poor mental health and elevated suicide rates, in addition to discrimination, harassment and violence even in Australia or other countries in the Global North (Kaniuka et al., 2019; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Robards, 2017). In fact, the mental health of gay, lesbian and bisexual people is amongst the poorest in Australia (Verrelli et al., 2019). As a consequence, members of LGBTQI+ communities often seek spaces that are inclusive, supportive and free of discrimination. In the tourism literature, such spaces are referred to as 'gay space' where members of the LGBTQI+ communities can address the social and emotional nature of their identity and relate to the identities of others (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018a). Such spaces qualify not only as leisure spaces (Blichfeldt et al., 2013), but also as the catalysts for political advocacy and human rights movements (Caudwell, 2018; Ong & Goh, 2018).

Neo-tribal theory

In recent years, LGBTQI+ events have spread beyond the cities into more regional and remote areas. Examples from around the world include ChillOut in Daylesford (Victoria, Australia), Pride on the Plains in Auburn (Alabama, United States), Agrogay Festival in Monterroso (Galicia, Spain) and even a Pride Parade in McMurdo Station (Antarctica). However, unlike fixed enclavic destinations and holiday spaces, or mobile but still enclavic LGBTQI+-friendly cruises, the spaces in which such events occur are temporary. One of the lenses through which events have been explored is neo-tribal theory. This section explores the term and some of the theoretical constructs employed, with the view to further understand its potential use in examining LGBTQI+ events from the perspective of social justice and well-being.

The concept of neo-tribes emanated from sociology. The term was coined by Shields (1992) and later defined by Michel Maffesoli's *Le Temps des Tribus* (1988; later translated as *The Time of the Tribes*, 1996) as being: 'without the rigidity of the forms of organisation with which we are familiar, [neo-tribe] refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form' (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 98). The uptake of the concept in sociology and cultural studies was largely due to its challenge to notions such as individualisation and social fragmentation, that were argued to have been exacerbated by the demise of bonds created by class and industrial society (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). Since its conceptualisation, the neo-tribal theory has been applied within marketing, consumer behaviour, health, tourism and leisure contexts.

The rationale for the formation of a neo-tribe is the desire to coalesce because of a shared sentiment or passion. This is built upon the notion of *communitas* (Turner, 1974) and it has been suggested that 'the link is more important than the thing' (Cova & Cova, 2002, p. 595). The individual may be a member of multiple groups (Cova & Cova, 2002; Kozinets, 1999) and groups may consist of

those with shared personality traits or values, and may act in a collective manner (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar, 2007). The tribe is often heterogeneous in terms of age, sex, income etc., and involves individuals who are linked by a shared passion or emotion towards an activity or lifestyle. Using Maffesoli's concept of *tribus* (tribes), Bennet (1999) argued in early research that the identity of participants in the British dance music scenes he studied were fluid and constructed rather than fixed and were not indicative of a particular social class, but rather denoted a form of sociality (hence they formed neo-tribes).

Research by Hardy and Robards (2015) reinforced such sociality. They argued that neo-tribal 'tourists' may be fruitfully segmented by commonalities of intangible aspects, such as 'a shared sense of sentiment,' 'tourist ritual,' 'collective bonding,' and 'belonging' (Hardy & Robards, 2015, p. 443). They discussed Rvers (recreational vehicle travellers) as a neo-tribal culture (with sub-cultures within) and suggested explorations of their symbolic and behavioural characteristics to better identify such intangible characteristics of sociality (a suggestion we take up in our case study). Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013) proposed two aspects of neo-tribal existence: symbolic characteristics such as group membership, and behavioural characteristics manifested through language, rituals and interactions at performance sites. Tourism research has demonstrated the important role that one of these aspects, namely ritual, can play in developing a space within which rituals and co-creation of identity and belonging may occur (Goulding & Shankar, 2011; see also Hardy & Robards, 2015; Kriwoken & Hardy, 2018).

Spatiality, resistance and transformation

Neo-tribes were once defined as being fluid and unstable (Maffesoli, 1996), being formed by ephemeral groupings of people, and as groupings that lacked rigidity in their organisation (Maffesoli, 1996). Ephemerality as a constant has since been challenged, most notably by Robards and Bennett (2011), who suggested that neo-tribes could exist as enduring groupings of people. Hardy and Robards (2015) and Hardy, Hanson and Gretzel (2013) built upon this and suggested membership ranged from long-lasting groupings with members who had prolonged involvement, to members with fleeting involvement in highly fluid groupings. Kriwoken and Hardy (2018) suggested that neo-tribal formation could be either spontaneous, where groups develop from people with similar passions coming together; or, alternatively, they may be facilitated, such as being created by a company who wishes to promote their products or services. While the neo-tribe was originally conceptualised as a group of people who come together in physical space (according to Maffesoli, 1996), the advent of the internet has led to the inclusion of virtual gatherings (explored by Robards and Bennett, 2011 and Cova, Kozinets and Shankar, 2007).

The role of space as a conduit for the formation and well-being of these various groupings of neo-tribes is an important consideration (Vorobjovas-Pinta 2018a; 2018b). Vorobjovas-Pinta's (2018a, p. 9) work indicated that space must be tangible and equally shared by its members to maintain neo-tribal centrality: 'space is the connective thread, as visible in its consistent interplay with fluidity in membership, shared sentiment, and rituals and symbols.' The spatial element is a significant fulcrum of neo-tribal coalescence and provides a symbolic stage for neo-tribal performance as well resistance (see Armour, 2018; Canosa, 2018; Hart, 2018). Neo-tribes can be transformative, playful and empowered regarding product and service development (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar, 2007). Maffesoli's (1996) portrayal of postmodern structures of society questions the traditional

perceptions of politics and, in particular, morality, and supports an argument that neo-tribal social justice is informed by pragmatic morality, that is built upon the collective and proximate mores, aesthetics and experiences.

Neo-tribal sociality has also been understood to be a highly emotional matter driven by the collective manifestations of activism and a desire to challenge institutional and societal stasis (Lippens & Kearon, 2005). Insights can also be gained from the study of reactions to anomie and moral disorientation during the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society, as most famously contained in Durkheim's (1893/2014) *The Division of Labour in Society* (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2017). Neo-tribes have been demonstrated as being able to re-define roles, challenge stereotypes and resist entrenched norms, creating their own personas and products (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar, 2007, p. 4). We argue that the Broken Heel festival is a neo-tribal event that, while fleeting and temporary, can work to reduce marginalisation and facilitate social justice through a range of practices that resist and transform entrenched norms, prejudices and conceptions set in the rural aesthetic of outback Australia.

Case study: The Broken Heel drag queen festival

This case is not intended to explore the emergence and the meaning of the 'drag' in the binary gender system. It engages with the drag queen culture as a performance and as a theme that attracts people from different walks of life to attend the Broken Heel Festival in Broken Hill, New South Wales. The concept of 'drag' is rather fluid but generally refers to cross-dressing practices, where people of the (usually) opposite sex impersonate an uber-masculine (drag king) or an uber-feminine (drag queen) character to engage in the political work of drag (Rupp, Taylor & Shapiro, 2010). Indeed, 'drag queens often rely on the 'real' male body beneath the performance of femininity' (Drysdale, 2019, p. 25). It is a common misconception that drag queens are mocking women and femininity (Bishop et al., 2014). Rather, they are challenging traditional binary gender and sexual identities (Rupp, Taylor & Shapiro, 2010).

Background and context

Broken Hill, the 'city in the desert', is a mining town in the far west of outback New South Wales, Australia (Australian Government, 2019). The town is best known for being one of Australia's oldest mining towns. It is also known as a birthplace of global mining giant BHP (Broken Hill Proprietary). The population of Broken Hill is just under 18,000 with a median age of 45 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). It should be noted that being a mining town, a large proportion of people (not included in the statistics) are the so called FIFO (fly-in fly-out) mine workers, who come to work at the mines from all around Australia for extended periods of time. Broken Hill's cityscape offers a unique mix of architecture: 'historic government buildings reflect the New South Wales colonial government style of architecture, the residential buildings reflecting those of South Australia, and, commercial buildings, such as hotels, display characteristics similar to Melbourne's late Victorian architectural period' (Australian Government, 2019).

In 1994, an Australian movie was released titled *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. Directed by Stephan Elliot, the movie followed the story of Tick (whose drag character was Mitzi) and their friends Adam (Felicia) and transgender Bernadette, who travelled from Sydney to Alice Springs in order to perform

at a hotel where Tick's ex-wife worked. Their journey encountered many hurdles including homophobic abuse, violence, and racism, but became a transformative journey of self-discovery and reconnection, as Tick was able to reconnect and come out to his son. The movie received significant acclaim, grossing over \$18 million in Australia and winning many awards, including an Oscar for Best Costume design. While it was criticised by some for creating humour that appealed to homophobic and sexist-stereotypes (Cook, 2010), it has been heralded for its positive portrayal of LGBTQI+ themes and its challenge to the notion of masculinity that has been inherently linked to the notion of the Australian outback. It has since become a cult classic, resulting in a highly successful musical and significantly for this paper, provided the inspiration for the Broken Heel Festival, located in Broken Hill which is regarded as the 'spiritual home' of the movie (Broken Heel Festival, 2019). The impact of the movie has been studied from within the film research genre; it has been lauded as marking a new genre of 'ocker' (typical Australian) comedies (Kunze, 2013) and referred to as the 'glitter cycle', whereby the central characters attempt to deviate from the norms of society (Rustin, 2001).

The first Gay Mardi Gras or Broken Heel Festival was organised in 2014 as a tribute to Priscilla, Queen of The Desert. The three-day festival grew to become a major highlight in Broken Hill's event calendar attracting over 6500, of whom 70% do not live in the town. Indeed, many festival goers will travel for several days from cities such as Sydney (a 1100km drive) and Melbourne (a 900km drive) in order to attend the festival (Baird, 2019). The festival now runs over three days and is hosted by Philmah Bocks and Ester Le Rovere. One of the most visible aspects of the festival is the parade, called the Main Drag in Drag, held on day two in the centre of Broken Hill.

Method: A netnography approach

For this study, an observational netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2019) was used to explore the role of the festival in reducing marginalisation and promoting social justice, as well as evidence of neo-tribal sociality. Netnography uses ethnographic techniques to explore communication, attitudes and behaviour online (Kozinets, 2015). In this case social media in the form of Instagram was used to access the data, via the use of search tools such as hashtags and handles in the form of the symbol @ (Gretzel, 2017; Gretzel & Hardy, 2019). A third technique, the use of location enabled tags for Broken Heel was also facilitated – this is where the Instagram user enables the location of the photograph to be visualised. The use of these three tags enabled an understanding of the festival, as we were able to use two types of data –text and visuals. The richness of this process facilitated the discovery of emergent themes and patterns as well as the discovery of 'black swans', defined as data points that challenge assumptions (Kozinets, 2015).

Data gathering and analysis

Data was gathered and collated one week prior to the festival (6th September 2018) until one month after (14th October 2018). The decision to conduct two layers of data collection was taken in order to assess festival goers' online sentiment as they drove through the outback, and also to explore their online sentiment while at the festival. Several parameters underpinned our approach. Only posts whose account was public were used. The second requirement was to only collect posts that contained handles directed towards public sites, such as (@) or hashtags (#), or who were geo-located. We collected posts which were tagged with the following handles and hashtags: #brokenheel, #brokenheelfestival and @brokenheelfestival. The focus on hashtags has been justified

in previous research as they are regarded as marking a post's contribution to a conversation on Instagram, thus acting as a rich semiotic indexing system (Djerf-Pierre, Ghersetti & Hedman, 2016). The process of tagging may be regarded as an intent to publicise posts and in the absence of consent (which is not possible when collecting large online data sets). The requirement to only use these posts provided some assurance that the account holder was seeking to maximise their exposure. Further requirements when analysing the data were that the posts be de-identified, either visually or by deleting the username, and only the captions of the posts were explored; comments were not included in this analysis. This process resulted in the collation of 546 posts related to the festival. First, all posts were screened – posts with groups of friends and no landscape or township vistas were deleted as this research was focussed on the depiction of drag and/or queerness in space. This process resulted in 61 posts being retained as they contained images of the festival goers travelling to, from, or taking part in the festival, and space was clearly visible within it.

The visuals captured for this study contained people in drag or dressed in a costume, in an outback setting or in the township of Broken Hill. Our analysis involved a concurrent assessment of both text and the imagery used in the Instagram posts. This approach was taken as the research team found that the text was often written to be a juxtaposition to the photographs, thus it would not have been appropriate to temporally separate phases of analysis. The analysis of the extracted data involved hermeneutic circles of reading, re-reading and discussing. Focus was given to the content of the visuals, rather than their composition (Albers & James, 1988; Gretzel & Hardy, 2019). The assessment used a metaphoric rather than metonymic perspective (Stepchenkova & Zhen, 2013, p. 591), so that the images were not assessed at face value, but rather were assessed as 'symbols that collectively allude to a meaning that lies outside of the particular picture'. The coding was done by one coder and cross-checked by a second. Neo-tribal theory helped the coding and analysis by keeping in mind the major themes presented in the previous section, including marginalisation and exclusion, discrimination, resistance and transformation, as well as spatiality and sociality as construed by neo-tribes.

Reflexivity and positionality of the researchers

Assessing the entire posts (visual plus text in the Instagram posts) not only facilitated a rich qualitative assessment, it also allowed the researchers to situate themselves within the research. The lead author of this paper is a member of the LGBTQI+ community. This allowed for an insider positionality, whereby the author was already familiar with the vernacular of gay culture and the experience of being a gay man in a predominantly heteronormative society. The insider approach also yielded an emic perspective which conveys the meaning of the internal language, symbols and a defined culture (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Robards, 2017). An emic perspective adopts a stance as if looking 'at things through the eyes of members of the culture being studied' (Willis, 2007, p. 100) and endeavours to capture particular groups' 'indigenous meanings of real-world events' (Yin, 2016, p. 16). The second author, whilst not identifying as LGBTQI+, has a background in social aspects of sustainable tourism and experience in ethnographic research. During the data collection process, the second researcher kept a reflexive journal to document their initial thoughts prior to data collection and then the changes in opinion with regards to the function and role of the road trip and outcomes of the festival.

Results

Results from the analysis are discussed under three major thematic topics that emerged from this analysis: 1) Challenging the outback imagery; 2) Appropriating the sociality and heteronormativity of the road trip; and 3) Reclaiming gay space in an outback town.

Challenging the outback imagery

The pictures and the accompanying captions of the 61 posts that were examined appeared to purposely challenge and disrupt the traditional view of the outback. For instance, the text accompanying one post stated: 'Life outback is never a drag, darlings. Dig it? [...]'. The accompanying image contained a photograph of two drag queens posing against an old, rusted, iron structure with the red sand of outback Australia and large blue skies in the background, thus challenging the stereotypical notion of the outback (Figure 1).

--- Insert Figure 1 here ---

Irony and sarcasm often became apparent when both the text and the images from posts were viewed at the same time. Numerous posts described how their drag outfits, wigs, feathers, 'outrageously high heels', and their presence as 'wild women', etc. enabled the festival participants to disrupt the 'soft edges' of outback ideal. For example:

*Just what this country needs. Another cock in a frock on a rock #queenofthedesert
#brokenheelfestival*

*Broken hill it's been real, we came, we saw, we wore many wigs! 🏴‍☠️❤️👄 Here's me and
some wild women [drag queens] at Silverton 🥰 thanks for the memories [...]
@brokenheelfestival and everyone we met*

*There are no soft edges here in Broken Hill, the historic mining town in Outback New South
Wales. The outfit of the day #ootd around here is a Visi-Vest, except for this past weekend
when the Broken Heel festival was on and feathers, glitter and outrageously high heels were
de rigueur. They even had a special train for the event - the Stiletto Express 🚂 #brokenhill
#mining #visitnsw #outback #australianoutback #outdoors #brokenheelfestival #explore
#seeaustralia*

The images that were assessed featured drag queens and the flamboyantly dressed people in the rough Australian outback, often with sweeping, red earthed landscapes as a backdrop. The flamboyant 'dress-code' that is so unique to the metropolitan LGBTQI+ scene created a stark contrast to the Australian bushland. It could be interpreted as a challenge to the traditional portrayal of the outback as it is being 'queered'. Clothing and appearance codes for the LGBTQI+ communities have been documented as serving as semiotic markers and non-verbal means of communication of one's identity and stance (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005). Indeed, Schofield and Schmidt (2005, p. 319) further elaborate that clothes and appearance provide LGBTQI+ communities with the potential to act out their possible identities and pertain to the 'theatrical self': 'if you're a man in drag, you don't sit there quietly, you make a scene about everything'. This is indeed what the Instagram images

were depicting. For example, one image captioned ‘a cock in a frock on a rock [...]’, depicted a bearded person dressed in a sparkly dress with over-the-top make-up and a glittery wig, climbing clumsily over a red rock in the picturesque outback (Figure 2).

--- Insert Figure 2 here ---

Roadkill is a problematic image of outback roads in Australia and this issue was also tackled by some festival goers. A picture captioned ‘found a desiccated Skippy 🤔🤔 Drag in the Desert for The Broken Heel festival! [...]’, featured a high heeled person dressed in a pink sparkly dress, in a stereotypical feminine pose, holding a tail of a kangaroo carcass. The imagery of the highly colourful person in a dress challenged the stereotypical notion of a farmer having to deal with dead livestock and wildlife. At the same time, it also challenged the stereotypical imagery of red and khaki colours used to depict the outback aesthetic.

The posts examined under this theme challenged the traditional idyll of the outback and resisted stereotyping through irony, sarcasm, posturing and commentary on how their drag costumes and identity challenged traditional views and perceptions of the outback. The spatiality of the outback setting, from the road trip to the festival site, provided an opportunity to actively challenge stereotypes and ‘perform’ their resistance, as noted in posts such as: ‘if you’re a man in drag, you don’t sit there quietly, you make a scene about everything’. The festival goers were challenging, resisting and appropriating the outback for themselves, resisting marginalisation and dispossession in the process. These performative acts of resistance and re-possession occurred not only at the site, but also during the road trip itself.

Appropriating the sociality and heteronormativity of the road trip

The act of the road trip has been documented as contributing towards ‘the alleviation of drudgery, loneliness and isolation’ (Laderman, 1996, p. 41). From a neo-tribal perspective, road trips have been documented as an activity that enhances sociality. Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013) recognised the highly mobile and social worlds that exist amongst tourists travelling on the open road. They also documented the significance of self-actualisation as a motivation and/or outcome of road trips; for many travellers, the road trip offers an escape from the routines of daily life and offers an opportunity for new beginnings and transitional journeys (Hardy, Gretzel & Hanson, 2013). We saw evidence of this in our data. For example, see Figure 3:

--- Insert Figure 3 here ---

However, while the road trip offers the opportunity for self-actualisation, escape from the routine of daily life and new beginnings, the field of tourism studies and the notion of tourism have been critiqued for being inherently heteronormative (Waitt, Markwell & Gordon-Murray, 2008). Furthermore, in Australia, road trips tend to also be associated with danger and masculinity in the Australian imagery. Wolf (1993, p. 224) in her seminal work on the metaphors of travel argued that there is an ‘intrinsic relationship between masculinity and travel’. Biber (2001, p. 27) situated the road trip within the context of Australian cinematography as being ‘within the fantasies of violence, freedom and liberation; fantasies that are performed in opposition to competing fantasies of family, law and control.’ These themes were disrupted by the Broken Heel participants who could be

regarded as a temporary neo-tribal group of LGBTQI+ travellers who, each year, reconstitute the outback idyll and resist stereotypic images of masculinity and traditional family sociality. The journey itself is highly symbolic and relevant to reclaiming space and infusing it with LGBTQI+ qualities. For this study, the Instagram posts pertaining to the road trip to Broken Hill depicted non-masculine travellers on the road, heading to a particular destination. For example:

178klms to Broken Hill #brokenheelfestival #brokenheel


Quick stop at Orange and we're back on our way to Broken Heel Festival. #brokenheelfestival @brokenheelfestival [...]


The notion of self-discovery could be seen in almost all of the posts. Images of drag queens with a backdrop of the outback offers not only a notion of resistance, but also hope for acceptance. There was a clear indication that festival goers sought a destination where they could be themselves – Broken Hill. The journey formed a seminal role in reclaiming their identity and resisting stereotypes such as machoism and masculinity evident in traditional representations of the outback. For example, an image captioned 'what should we do in Broken Hill? #roadtrip #dramaqueen #brokenheelfestival', depicts a young well-built man wearing very short shorts with a naked torso and a jacket with shoulders covered in black feathers. The pose and the hashtag 'dramaqueen', immediately destroyed the notion of a road trip as being 'macho' and 'violent'. Similarly, another picture captioned 'off we go! #brokenheelfestival #pink #ontheroad', depicted two women in pink wearing boas and pink cowboy hats holding hands and posing next to their ute (Figure 4).


--- Insert Figure 4 here ---

Reclaiming gay space in an outback town

The Instagram images and text that we explored depicted drag queens and kings and their supporters, flamboyantly dressed and carrying rainbow and transgender community flags through one of the main streets of Broken Hill. Some festival attendees carried posters or were dressed as characters from the movie. Some captions read:

Believe it or not, they're all waiting for a bus called Pricilla that's full of fabulous Queens
 #brokenheel

Serving Fem Queen Realness  #dragqueen #trans #transsister #brokenhill
#bhfestival #brokenheelfestival2018 #silverstiletos #silvercitystiletto #empowerment #pride
#Aboriginal #trans girl #queenoftheoutback #desertdiva

About to sashay down the main drag of Broken Hill [...] @brokenheelfestival parade


Generally, pride parades and similar events temporarily occupy the traditionally heteronormative spaces and create LGBTQI+ pockets of public visibility and presence of sexual otherness (Browne, 2007). The Broken Heel Festival is no different in this regard. Its participants resisted marginalisation and actively appropriated and transformed the outback town to a heterogenous LGBTQI+ space where they could 'sashay down the main drag of Broken Hill' and situate themselves as part of the

outback community. For example, Figure 5 illustrates the attendees marching in the parade, called the Main Drag in Drag, on one of the main streets in the centre of Broken Hill. This involves an element of being oneself amongst the like-minded people, whilst, at the same time depicting queering of a public – heteronormative – space. Interestingly, the post justifies the value of the event by emphasising the number of tourists this event brought to town and the economic value of the event.

--- Insert Figure 5 here ---

Discussion

The nexus between neo tribal festival behaviour and social justice

By seeking to challenge the utopian imagination of queerness, the subjects of this study intrinsically call for greater social justice and inclusivity for people who were, and still are, unable to be their true selves. Gorman-Murray and Waitt (2009) approach this issue through the social cohesion perspective by emphasising the need to look beyond economic and public order and focus on interrelationships, tolerance, acceptance, and trust at the local community level. The visual depiction of drag queens coalescing in an outback town illustrated how events can be used to achieve social justice, through challenging space, re-imagining of imagery, re-imagining the reputation of a township, and ultimately challenging the notion of marginalisation and the potential achievement of social justice.

Broken Heel festival attendees may be seen as a neo-tribe brought together by mutual and proximate mores. Social justice is sought through an emotive and rather pragmatic morality built upon shared values, aesthetics and experiences. Furthermore, it is driven by the collective conquest of space and is imbued with the collective manifestations of activism that challenges the heteronormative and masculine status quo of outback Australia. Neo-tribal membership has been defined as fluid and ephemeral in its nature: members ‘form, dissolve and reform alongside fluctuating consumer values’ (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018a, p. 5). Indeed, whilst the majority of the festival-related visuals feature people in drag and pride parades, a number of posts depict arrival and departure moments of the festival. Furthermore, the preparation and transformation of an individual into drag can be understood as straddling this inside/outside boundary. This observation builds upon the argument that space plays a fundamental role for the neo-tribal existence (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018a; 2018b). Neo-tribes have been said to coalesce around spaces that have been pre-designed for them. These are comfortable, inherently familiar and convenient spaces. However, this research found that a neo-tribe might also occupy a space that is unusual, uncomfortable and non-conforming to the traditional ‘values’ of a neo-tribe.

The festival examined in this study is unusual in that events are generally developed by communities within which the event will be held (Duffy & Mair, 2018); but in the case of the Broken Heel festival, a community that lives externally and remotely has facilitated the event and travels to the event location. Consequently, the notion of the neo-tribe is especially pertinent for this festival. Neo-tribes are a fleeting gathering of people who come together for a shared passion and purpose and then return to their everyday realities. Such attendance is socially constructed by the festival attendees

themselves as a rite of passage and as an expression of the collective values. For Hetherington (1997), liminality is linked to the notion of 'heterotopia', a site, where normative assumptions are brought into question through the performance of alternative identities.

In the case of the Broken Heel festival, drag performances occur in a traditionally heterosexual space. Consequently, the coalescence of a neo-tribe of drag queens and their supporters in the rough 'macho' Australian outback is both transformative and resistant. This aligns with research that has recognised that festivals and events can act as spaces where a community can express itself and in doing so, can contribute to social justice (Derrett, 2003; Duffy & Mair, 2018; Ong & Goh, 2018). It also concurs with Markwell and Waitt (2009, p. 148) who suggested that the sexualised LGBTQI+ festival spaces 'can disrupt, subvert or 'queer' conventional boundaries of sexuality imposed by the dualism of Western thought (straight/gay), and at the same time reinscribe them'.

Challenging the rural stereotype

The landscape of the Australian outback has been dominated by the heteronormative traditions of living and have been predominantly constructed and negotiated around the concept of hypermasculinity (Coad, 2002; Little & Panelli, 2007). Little and Panelli (2007, p. 180) elaborate that sexual identities and aspirations in the Australian outback are 'in tune with nature, and conventional constructions of masculinity and femininity are supported'. The flamboyantly dressed festival attendees stand in a stark juxtaposition with the traditional depiction of the rough Australian outback, thus disrupting the 'outback idyll'. In a similar vein, Gorman-Murray, Waitt and Gibson (2012) discussed the disruption of the Australian 'rural idyll' and positioned it as an outcome or a symptom of a metropolitan lifestyle. The captions in the Results section illustrate the sentiment of the disruption and embrace the queering of the 'outback idyll'. The outback/metropolitan juxtaposition can act as a catalyst for social justice to spread in the rural/outback settings. Furthermore, it could be understood that the subjects themselves are aware of their disruptive nature. They promote the awareness of difference and offer a view that Australian outback should not be perceived in the traditional terms of masculinity and/or femininity. Such an emphasis might serve as a reflection of social change in the community. Indeed, the depiction of drag in the Instagram posts not only queers the existent perceptions of the uber-masculine outback Australia, but also contributes towards the normalisation of such visual representations. By challenging the rural outback imagery, we can destigmatise the prevalent perceptions of non-heterosexual people and deconstruct the gender role stereotypes that outback Australia currently imbues. Fundamentally, the inner confusion stemming from the incongruous collage of 'drag' and 'outback' can (re)shape our social justice value stance.

Redefining the road trip

In their work on Route 66, Caton and Santos (2007) suggested that the journey was viewed by road trippers as an evolving corridor, and that meaning came from participants' experiences of driving the road and viewing the landscape. In particular, Caton and Santos (2007, p. 381) found their participants 'believed that particular elements of value from the past could be retained alongside or combined with newer developments to achieve optimal utility.' Similarly, in the case of this research, the juxtaposition of drag against the backdrop of the outback acts as a symbol of hope for acceptance in the future. This has synergies with the work of Noy (2004) who suggested that tourism can be illustrated as a 'springboard' for tourists to construct their identity through the images and

stories that they share with others. In the case of those travelling to Broken Hill, their Instagram posts acted not only at the individual level of identity construction, but also as a springboard to encourage broader social acceptance of the LGBTQI+ communities.

Our findings also have synergies with Wang's (1999) concept of existential authenticity – defined as a state where tourists feel more connected to their real selves while travelling, than they normally would in their everyday lives. In the case of those traveling to Broken Hill, two opportunities arose for this to take place. The first was during the liminal experience of the 500-1000 km road trip, which afforded the opportunity for festival goers to be their true selves, that were, in turn, portrayed through their Instagram posts. Secondly, once festival attendees arrived at Broken Hill, the festival itself offered a further opportunity for existential authenticity to occur. The gathering of the festival attendees was a symbol of liberation from the heteronormative strictures where neo-tribal sociality was enabled by the celebration of common identities, traditions and interactions.

Conclusions

The highly specific nature of the study described in this paper provides valuable insights into how event spaces like the Broken Hill drag queen festival can enhance social justice and well-being of LGBTQI+ people. Events such as pride festivals usually aim to contribute to a wider cultural cohesion by challenging and actively opposing the notions of marginalisation and exclusion, discrimination and xenophobia, resistance and transformation, as well as spatiality and sociality. This research illustrated a further point – that LGBTQI+ events enable neo-tribes, formed by people from disparate walks of life, to be mobilised and collectively express their emotional connectedness and non-heterosexual identities. In this case the event goes one step further; it disrupts the heteronormative image of the outback Australia. For this neo-tribe, the event is the catalyst for reimagining and reconstituting the heteronormative space (Ammaturo, 2016; Markwell & Waitt, 2009). Neo-tribalism thus plays a significant role not only in terms of solidifying community bonds through membership, shared sentiment, rituals and symbols, but also in terms of challenging stereotypes and resisting entrenched norms.

The study contains several limitations. Firstly, we need to fully understand the spectrum of opinions that exist beyond the social media platform of Instagram. The analysis only evaluated posts with predetermined hashtags and handles and contained posts that described the event in a positive light, thus the research might be skewed towards one general opinion. The hashtags we explored may not have captured the negative connotations associated with the event. While we only used posts that were expressly outwardly directed (e.g. non-private accounts with hashtags to link the post to public fora), we were unable to use private photographs in this research due to the sensitive nature of the research.

Future research should also assess the spectrum of stakeholders involved in the event. For example, this study does not capture the views of the locals, both those that attend and those that do not attend the event. It is unclear how they feel about the influx of non-heteronormative event goers. Future research could seek to understand how the Broken Hill community perceives the event and whether its fleeting group of neo-tribal members have contributed towards the achievement of

social justice. And lastly, this study did not address how the road trip and festival constitute a form of 'secular pilgrimage' and belonging in a liminal space for a short period of time, annually. Future research is needed to advance understandings of the importance of annual LGBTQI+ events in addressing social injustice and facilitating the legitimacy, well-being and recognition of diverse LGBTQI+ groups (i.e., that LGBTQI+ people are heterogeneous with particular cultural groups and orientations, rather than the stereotyped notions that often exist of this marginalised population).

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