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# Gay and Lesbian Travel Writing: A Present In Need of a Different Future

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GAY AND LESBIAN TRAVEL WRITING: A PRESENT IN NEED OF A DIFFERENT  
FUTURE

BY

MICHAEL VERDIRAME

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2014

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

GAY AND LESBIAN TRAVEL WRITING: A PRESENT IN NEED OF A DIFFERENT  
FUTURE

By

Michael Verdirame

Advisor: Professor Carrie Hintz

The first half of this thesis will detail the history of travel, as well as the primary reasons why people travel and why it is such a lucrative industry. This will be followed by an account of the history of travel writing, with a specific emphasis on the various types of avenues available to travel writers and the reasons why people feel compelled to write about their travels. The first half will then conclude with a content analysis of three current gay and lesbian travel publications available on different media platforms—*Passport Magazine* as an online magazine, *Man About World* as a tablet-only publication, and *Connexions Magazine* as a print magazine—with the intent to show that the articles found within do not address the plight of gay and lesbian travelers and residents in hostile destinations.

The second half of this thesis will be an attempt to highlight three destinations in particular that might present difficulties for gay and lesbian travelers, with their categorization falling under the heading of past, present, and future. Included will be a discussion of homosexuality under Nazi Germany as an example of past problems, specifically what is it like for a gay and lesbian visitor to travel to a place where homosexuals were formerly persecuted.

For the present day there will be a study of the example of Russia and the Winter Olympics, and how little coverage this event is receiving in gay and lesbian travel publications, despite the fact that many gay people are traveling there. Finally there will be an analysis of the case of Uganda and its anti-homosexuality legislation, and what this could mean for future gay and lesbian travelers to this country. Ultimately this thesis will conclude that while gay and lesbian travel publications should absolutely include recommendations for hotels and nightlife, if they do not include information on places that might be considered hostile or dangerous for gay and lesbian travelers, they are ultimately doing to their readers a disservice by delivering an incomplete product.

## Table of Contents

Gay and Lesbian Travel Writing: A Present In Need of a Different Future	1
Understanding the Quest and the Quest for Understanding: The Meaning of Travel	4
A Passport, a Plane Ticket, and a Pen: The Importance of Writing About Travel	13
Case Studies: <i>Passport Magazine</i> , <i>Connexions Magazine</i> , and <i>Man About World</i>	21
The Forgotten Yesterday: Homosexuality in Nazi Germany	34
The Invisible Today: Homosexuality in Post-Soviet Russia	43
The Uncertain Tomorrow: Homosexuality in Post-Colonial Uganda	50
Conclusion	56
Bibliography	60

## **Gay and Lesbian Travel Writing: A Present In Need Of A Different Future**

Last year in the city of Kampala, the capital of the East African nation of Uganda, a play entitled *The River and the Mountain* was staged in a small, little-known theatre. The play, written by British playwright David Cecil, centers on the story of a 29 year-old gay man living in Uganda. Throughout the course of the play the protagonist comes out as homosexual, and his mother, in an attempt to change her son, employs conversion therapy, a private dancer, and a witch doctor—all of which fail. The play ends with the protagonist being murdered by those who work for him, an intentional depiction by the playwright of the stigma and hate for homosexuality that exists in Uganda today. Miraculously, despite several attempts by the Ugandan government to block the production, a modest staging was able to open. However, shortly after the play's opening, David Cecil was arrested, charged with "disobeying lawful orders." In a statement to the press, Uganda's ethics minister Simon Lokodo said "This play is justifying the promotion of homosexuality in Uganda, and Uganda does not accommodate homosexual causes" (Broverman, [www.Advocate.com](http://www.Advocate.com), 2012). Shortly after his arrest, Cecil was released from jail after posting bail, but is not permitted to leave Uganda until his case is decided by a judge.

Part of the reason why staging this play was so important to Cecil, to the extent that he was willing to be arrested, was because of a bill that was introduced to the Ugandan Parliament in October 2009. The Anti-Homosexuality bill—dubbed in the news media as the "Kill the Gays" bill—was submitted by Parliament member David Bahati in an attempt to broaden the criminalization of homosexuality (already illegal in Uganda) by dividing homosexual behavior into two categories: "aggravated homosexuality," punishable by the death penalty, and "the offense of homosexuality," punishable by life in prison. Aggravated homosexuality is defined as



any homosexual act committed by someone who is HIV-positive, a parent, a person who engages in homosexual acts with minors or persons with disabilities, and repeat offenders. The offense of homosexuality includes same-sex sexual acts, involvement in a same-sex marriage, and the attempt to commit aggravated homosexuality. At the time the work for this thesis had begun, the bill had not yet been passed. However, on February 24, 2014, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda signed the bill into law, despite mounting international pressure urging him not to.

The preceding information was reported by *The Advocate*, the nation's leading gay and lesbian political magazine. While *The Advocate* is highly regarded, it is far from being considered a travel publication, with its content about foreign places having a political angle and not intended to provide information for anyone that might be planning to or interested in traveling to a particular place. To follow that logic would indicate that one might be able to look in any gay and lesbian travel publication and find all the important and relevant information for traveling to a place like Uganda. If one were to actually do that, however, one would find the opposite to be true. Finding any information on Uganda, or places like it, is almost impossible in gay and lesbian travel magazines. There are some that might try to justify this practice by claiming that information on these places is not what readers want, or that these places are too dangerous to encourage people to visit in the first place. While danger is definitely something to consider, ultimately these claims amount to nothing more than excuses.

It is easy enough to open a gay and lesbian travel magazine and find the best places to stay in the traditional travel destinations; London, Paris, San Francisco—information on which hotels are the best and which clubs are the most exclusive has never been more available. But what about those places that might be a little bit more off the beaten path, or perhaps not as friendly to gay and lesbian travelers as others? What happens when gay and lesbian travelers go

to places like these, and what is life like for gay people that live there? One would be hard-pressed to find any information on these destinations in gay and lesbian travel publications, despite the fact that people *are* travelling there, and that writing about human rights issues in other countries falls under the broad umbrella of travel writing. This is a practice which, this thesis will argue, must change. Additionally, it is important to note that any writing about these types of places has the potential to inspire people to take action to change the current circumstances affecting gay and lesbian travelers and citizens around the world, making it even more urgent that information about these places be made available.

The first half of this thesis will detail the history of travel, as well as the primary reasons why people travel and why it is such a lucrative industry. This will be followed by an account of the history of travel writing, with a specific emphasis on the various types of avenues available to travel writers and the reasons why people feel compelled to write about their travels. The first half will then conclude with a content analysis of three current gay and lesbian travel publications available on different media platforms—*Passport Magazine* as an online magazine, *Man About World* as a tablet-only publication, and *Connexions Magazine* as a print magazine—with the intent to show that the articles found within do not address the plight of gay and lesbian travelers and residents in hostile destinations.

The second half of this thesis will be an attempt to highlight three destinations in particular that might present difficulties for gay and lesbian travelers, with their categorization falling under the heading of past, present, and future. Included will be a discussion of homosexuality under Nazi Germany as an example of past problems, specifically what is it like for a gay and lesbian visitor to travel to a place where homosexuals were formerly persecuted. For the present day there will be a study of the example of Russia and the Winter Olympics, and

how little coverage this event is receiving in gay and lesbian travel publications, despite the fact that many gay people are traveling there. Finally there will be an analysis of the case of Uganda and its anti-homosexuality legislation, and what this could mean for future gay and lesbian travelers to this country. Ultimately this thesis will conclude that while travel publications should absolutely include recommendations for hotels and nightlife, if they do not include information on places that might be considered undesirable, they are ultimately doing to their readers a disservice by delivering an incomplete product.

### **Understanding The Quest and The Quest For Understanding: The Meaning of Travel**

In order to illustrate the impact that travel and travel literature can have on people and their beliefs and actions, it is necessary to understand firstly why people travel and what it means to them, and secondly why people then feel compelled to commit their travel experiences to paper. Travel has a long history spanning hundreds of years but it has not always served the same function or purpose for people. With that said, it is important to note that while all forms of travel can be categorized as having one ultimate goal, labelled very broadly as discovery, it is what the archetypal traveler has attempted to discover throughout the centuries that alters the purpose of their travel. Up to and including the present day, every trip and voyage is made with the intention of some form of discovery taking place, ranging from an archeologist uncovering the remains of an ancient civilization, to the standard leisure traveler on holiday in a tropical island, where the quality of the beaches and restaurants might be the extent of their intellectual curiosity. However, it has only been as recent as the last two centuries where the popularity of travel as something done for leisure has increased; in the centuries prior, travel primarily served one of two purposes—religious pilgrimage and global exploration.

Many people still take trips for the purpose of a religious pilgrimage today, with the most famous being the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, which all Muslims are required to make at least once in their life. While this type of travel may be the only trip many people make in their life, it is no longer expected to be, as it was for several centuries. In addition to religious pilgrimage, however, there is also the voyage of self-discovery, which also falls within the definition of a pilgrimage and can be traced in literature as far back as Homer's *Odyssey*. In the introduction to their book *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel*, Jas Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubies refer to Odysseus as "the ideal model of a traveller whose journey brought inner as well as outer fulfillment, return to a spiritual plenitude lost in the travails of life, as well as success in the sense of worldly achievement" (Elsner and Rubies 9, 1999). This concept of self-discovery through travel remains important today, and while modern-day pilgrimages have less to do with religion than they used to, they are still just as important as a catalyst for bridging gaps and overcoming differences. It is this self-discovery that is so severely lacking in contemporary gay and lesbian travel literature.

The other primary reason for travel was exploration, or what can be referred to as the search for the unknown and exotic. While a lot of this type of travel was done to discover new lands in order to draw accurate maps, exploration also included new experiences and encounters with cultures, wildlife, and plant life not previously known. In a unique blend of the two primary types of travel, Englishman Richard Burton disguised himself as an Arab and made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1853, documenting his experiences as one of the first non-Muslims to witness the sights and sounds of the religious pilgrimage. In his writings, he compares his experience to those of Muslims, stating "to confess humbling truth, theirs was the high feeling of religious enthusiasm, mine was the ecstasy of gratified pride" (Elsner and Rubies 1, 1999). In

Burton's travels, his discovery took place externally, as he is able to describe and share with others for the first time an experience no Westerner had ever had. He does proceed to admit, however, that his encounter with a culture so different from his own does evoke a feeling of nostalgia for his own culture, leading one to conclude that as he is now able to view himself and his origins in comparison to and in the context of another vastly different culture, that some level of self-discovery did in fact take place for him.

In his book *The Art of Travel*, author Alain de Botton describes the travels of German explorer Alexander von Humboldt. In the summer of 1799, von Humboldt set sail from Spain bound for South America, about which much was still unknown in Europe at the time. Throughout his years of exploration and discovery, von Humboldt was able to transform the state of knowledge. Among the many accomplishments resulting from that expedition was his ability to redraw the map of South America, his conclusion that magnetic intensity declined the further one got from the poles, and his comparison of the salinity of water from the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans while also developing a theory of sea currents. The main difference between von Humboldt's travels and that of the contemporary traveler is that he had no preconceived notions about the places he visited, as those places and their characteristics had not yet been explored, providing him the liberty to discover and draw conclusions as he went along. What is a modern-day explorer meant to discover when, with regards to new lands and cultures, everything has already been found?

In his book, de Botton elaborates on many reasons why he believes people continue to travel. Separating them into several categories, he illustrates these categories citing examples from the past as well as from his own experiences. With Alexander von Humboldt, he attributes the explorer's desire for knowledge on what he refers to as basic curiosity, to the extent that de

Botton quotes von Humboldt as saying “the study of maps and the perusal of travel books aroused in me a secret fascination that was at times almost irresistible” (de Botton 102, 2002). Conversely, during a trip to Madrid, de Botton struggled to find anything to be curious about, as his guidebook told him everything of importance that needed to be seen, dismissing what it deemed to be not worth seeing. If de Botton’s guidebook is going to answer all of his questions before he asks them, is he meant to think of new questions that have not yet been asked, or has travel been reduced to a checklist of sights that must be completed before one can move on? According to de Botton, curiosity can be likened to a chain of linked questions that extends out over time, beginning with a broad inquiry and getting narrower and more specific as more information is obtained. There will always be unanswered questions, but it is up to the traveler to find what is important to him, ask the questions to find the answers to what interests him, and retain that information to paint a more complete picture of the world; this process, de Botton claims, begins with curiosity.

Another category used by de Botton to explain the motivation of people to travel is the exotic. He uses the word to mean something different, something unfamiliar, which arouses the interest of the traveler merely from being something he has never before seen. For de Botton, this could mean something as simple as the unique shape of an electrical plug, or airport signs in a language that is not his own. In most cases, however, exoticism is measured on a grander scale, and is used to describe something that forces one to expand their view of themselves within the context of the world, realizing when one encounters something exotic that one is truly no longer home. For many, this fascination with and desire to seek out the exotic comes from a boredom with the mundanity of life where they are from, and for this de Botton cites the example of Gustave Flaubert, a resident of the town of Rouen in France in reality but a resident of the

Orient in his mind. In the mid-1800s, the “Orient,” or what is now called the Middle East, was considered exotic precisely because its characteristics and customs were so unknown to Westerners, and for Flaubert represented an escape from the overcast and rainy weather of France. Ultimately, however, a desire for the exotic elicits a need to understand, and for Flaubert, travelling to Egypt in the Middle East gave him the opportunity to challenge his own identity as a Frenchman, one that he had never truly felt comfortable with. Travelling to exotic places gives one the opportunity to hold a mirror up, and to see oneself in contrast with something different, consequently providing a higher level of self-awareness and understanding. As de Botton states, “when asked where he came from, Socrates said not ‘From Athens’ but ‘From the world’” (de Botton 98, 2002). We are all citizens of the world, but only experiencing the exotic and unfamiliar through travel can provide us with the mutual understanding necessary to foster respect and peace.

There is one other reason, according to de Botton, that motivates people to travel, and it is one that most people are not aware of when they do it. It is the same thing that causes people to stop their cars on the side of the road at a scenic overlook and take in the view (and perhaps take a picture). It is the desire, as de Botton describes it, “to be made to feel small” (de Botton 157, 2002), and while that might normally be assumed to be an unpleasant feeling, in the case of travel it is actually a feeling that provides grounding and perspective, and a realization that the world is much bigger than any single person. While de Botton admits to the struggle people have to describe these kinds of experiences, tending to pile up adjectives that ultimately feel inadequate, he finally is able to settle on one word he feels is accurately able to convey the emotion felt when seeing something so grand—that word is sublime, and is yet another category he uses to explain why people travel. The question remains, however, as to why a person might

deliberately seek out something that makes them feel small. The answer, says de Botton, lies in motivation: something that is big and mean is something to be feared, while something that is big but noble is something to be revered. Sublime places serve as a reminder that the world is a vast place, and there are many things outside of our control, and that while we all have a place in it, it is important to know exactly where that place is. Succinctly described by de Botton:

If the world seems unfair or beyond our understanding, sublime places suggest that it is not surprising that it should be thus. We are the playthings of the forces that laid out our oceans and chiseled the mountains. Sublime places gently move us to acknowledge limitations that we might otherwise encounter with anxiety or anger in the ordinary flow of events. It is not just nature that defies us. Human life is as overwhelming. But it is the vast spaces of nature that perhaps provide us with the finest, the most respectful reminder of all that exceeds us. If we spend time in them, they may help us to accept more graciously the great, unfathomable events that molest our lives and will inevitably return us to dust. (de Botton 176, 2002)

There are many who travel as a way to challenge themselves, hoping as a result to achieve a more comprehensive understanding not just about the world around them, but of their own personal perceptions of themselves and what they are capable of. In his book *Travels*, author Michael Crichton describes an arduous five day hike to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, one that took him far from his comfort zone and that almost found him quitting on several separate occasions. It was not until after he had completed the climb that he understood why he had decided to do it in the first place—to expand what had been his narrow definition of himself and his abilities. Prior to his expedition, Crichton believed himself to be someone who did not



like to try new things, and also as someone who was not mentally or physically tough. He states “Generally I found out I was wrong about myself—I liked what I thought I wouldn’t like. And even if I didn’t like the particular experience, I learned I liked *having* new experiences” (Crichton 168, 1988). This type of self-reflection can only be achieved through travel, with the goal of achieving a level of enlightenment that one is able to apply to daily life, and perhaps even spread to others.

Building on the concept of the unknown, it is important to note that people often travel in order to construct explanations for things they cannot explain, or to try to understand what they have been unable to understand prior to their trip. For the most part, people are uncomfortable with what they do not understand, and for many, travel provides them with the means to find explanations for things that cannot be obtained simply from reading a book. The problems occur, however, when people create justifications for beliefs or actions either because there is no definitive answer, or worse, they choose not to travel to find the information they seek. When visiting the ancient ruins of Uxmal in Mexico, Michael Crichton was forced to face the reality that very little of what archeologists claim to be the origin of the ruins has actually been substantiated, meaning no one really knows the truth. He subsequently acknowledges “the internal psychological pressure to make up a story, to explain the ruins before one’s eyes, is powerful indeed...Soon enough I, too, clutched my guidebook and walked through the ruins of Uxmal, pretending that I understood far more than I did” (Crichton 172, 1988). There is a danger that arises when people fabricate reasons for things they do not understand or are not familiar with, especially when those reasons morph into belief systems which are then perpetuated and disseminated through publications. Travel is the one remedy for individual

ignorance, but is only the first step to eliminating widespread misconceptions about foreign places and cultures.

Travel writer Rick Steves decided to take a trip of this nature in early 2008, when a friend of his contacted him and asked him what he could do to help build understanding between the United States and Iran, hoping to defuse tension that might lead to war. As the host of a popular travel show on television, Steves believed that if he was granted access to Iran and allowed to film an episode of his show there, he might be able to dispel some of the myths and misinformation that both cultures have of each other, simply because there is no real communication between the two. Acting as a figurative bridge between the two nations, Steves thought that fostering a better mutual understanding could in fact defuse some of the tension that had been building for years. Despite having to correspond indirectly with Iran in order to obtain the necessary visas—Iran and the United States have no diplomatic relationship, causing Steves to have to go through the Iranian embassy in Greece—he was eventually granted permission to travel to and film within Iran. The reason he was given was that contrary to the beliefs of most Americans, Iran actually does want to encourage visits by Western tourists, and they are very eager to contradict what they believe to be a negative portrayal of Iran and its people by Western news media. Documenting his trip on his television show as well as in his book *Travel as a Political Act*, Steves was eager to take the trip and even more eager to share what he had discovered with people upon his return.

What Steves learned from his trip to Iran was that Americans have infinitely more in common with Iranians than they have differences, and that while it is not a perfect place (Steves acknowledges that the United States is also not a perfect place) the only way to achieve a greater mutual understanding and respect is to communicate. Despite encountering several anti-

American murals painted on the sides of buildings in Tehran, Steves learns from a taxi driver that the phrase “Death to America,”—which can be commonly heard in Iran—is more akin to when Westerners use an expression to show frustration with something, such as “Damn this traffic!” When Iranians say “Death to America,” it does not necessarily mean they want to kill all Americans, but rather that they are exasperated by something that affects their lives that they have no control over. While Steves is aware that a mural proclaiming “Death to America” is extremely difficult to justify, he finds it to be incongruous with the attitude of the people he meets, which is mostly warm and welcoming. It forces him to wonder if Iran really harbors as much animosity towards the United States as most people believe, or if the message is being obscured by something that does not amount to much more than a catchy slogan. The answer to that question is not a simple one, but it is one that most likely would not have been asked if Steves had never visited Iran.

Steves titled his book *Travel as a Political Act* because not only does he believe that travel can be much more than rest and relaxation and a break from the everyday pressures of life, he believes that it *should* be more. He emphasizes the importance of connecting with people one might not ordinarily associate with, and in choosing destinations not only based on the available miles of sandy beach but on what might take one out of their comfort zone and what will challenge their preconceived notions not only of the country they are visiting, but also of the one where they are from. The goal of this type of travel, according to Steves, is change, and while much of the discussion thus far has centered on internal change, it is important to point out that an immense amount of external change can also be affected through travel. As Steves states so clearly, “travel becomes a political act only if you do something about your broadened perspective once you return home” (Steves 198, 2009). Travelers visit many places where the

gap between the rich and the poor is enormous, or where citizens are denied the basic human rights and freedoms that many Americans take for granted. As a result of travel, people can become more compassionate, more able to understand the consequences of continued neglect not only at home, but throughout the world. It therefore becomes necessary to find a medium where the lessons learned by the traveler can be shared, with the ultimate goal of increasing awareness or perhaps stimulating activism on behalf of those unable to fight for themselves. The most effective medium for this purpose is writing, specifically within travel publications, though the state of the industry today falls far short of achieving this goal, especially with regards to the gay and lesbian community.

### **A Passport, A Plane Ticket, and a Pen: The Importance of Writing About Travel**

It is a commonly held belief among the most prominent travel writers that travel and writing go hand in hand. If the desire to travel is at its core a journey of internal and external discovery, that desire is almost always coupled with the need to share what the traveler has learned and experienced on that journey. While the form and process of sharing may vary depending of the type of traveler—with slide shows of photos on Facebook, postcards sent from faraway lands declaring “Wish you were here,” and oral retellings of wild and crazy adventures all fulfilling the need of the traveler to share—the most complete and clear method of sharing lessons learned while traveling always has been and will be travel literature, as the time it takes to write and edit a travel piece is also the time allowed for reflection over the meaning of an experience. While Facebook and other forms of social media may be the new dominant tools for dissemination of travel experiences, the real-time nature of their content rarely, if ever, permits the type of evaluation only time can provide. From the time he was a young boy, author Paul

Theroux felt the desire to be on the move, to leave home and go far away. In the preface to his book *The Tao of Travel*, Theroux writes:

Too young to go, I read about elsewheres, fantasizing about my freedom. Books were my road. And then, when I was old enough to go, the roads I traveled became the most obsessive subject in my own books. Eventually I saw that the most passionate travelers have always been passionate readers and writers.

(Theroux vii, 2011)

It is clear that most serious travelers are not able to keep from sharing their experiences, something they have been doing for centuries, as some of the earliest works of literature can be considered travel narratives.

Depending on how far back an independent researcher is willing to look, accounts of travel can be considered to be among some of the earliest forms of record keeping known to man. Cave paintings documenting the adventures of prehistoric man can be thought to be the predecessors of contemporary travel literature if one is inclined to make such a connection. The earliest travel book, however, is generally credited with being *History of the Persian Wars*, by the Greek historian Herodotus, which includes vivid accounts of places and rituals in foreign lands (George 11, 2005). In the centuries that followed, other traders and explorers from Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus to scientists like Charles Darwin have written diaries and letters that are also included within the history of travel writing. At the time these writings were produced, they served an important function for their readers, as the vast majority of them were unable to do that type of traveling themselves as a result of financial and technological limitations. This relationship between traveler and reader would serve as the origin of the phenomenon known as “armchair travel,” where a person stays at home or in one place but

experiences travel through books, movies, television and other forms of media. Armchair travel is still an important factor in the publication of contemporary travel writing, something that has turned travel literature into a growing industry.

Despite the proliferation of these early forms of travel writing, it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that this form of literature was able to flourish as an independent genre. It is during this time when a number of writers began to devote themselves almost exclusively to the art of writing about travel. While early travel writing was mostly a nonfiction record of events in foreign places, its contemporary counterpart began to incorporate other forms of nonfiction writing as well—the personal essay, journalistic reporting, and critical reviews, to name just a few—whose “primary focus is a particular place and whose primary purpose is to illuminate something about that place and about the experience of travel” (George 11, 2005). With that being established, it is important to note that unlike other forms of nonfiction writing, the quality that would classify a work as travel writing is that it is fundamentally about *place*. Additionally, while the definition of place may include many different things—such as geography, climate, topography, history, culture, and many more—for a work to be considered travel writing, any subject or narrative arc will always have a place as its chief protagonist, literal or figurative.

Building on that concept, many of the best travel writers have been able to utilize the elements of fiction writing to enhance their narratives. Tools such as character and dialogue, plot development, and conflict and resolution have proved invaluable to writers attempting to derive meaning from their travel experiences and then convey that meaning to their readers. It has been said that a travel story can be compared to any other type of story, one in which a relationship develops between the main character and a second main character. The difference between travel writing and other genres is that the second main character is a place, and that the

events that occur arise mainly from the effect that place has on the author. It is no surprise, therefore, that many of the most popular travel writers have also written extensively in other genres, including fiction.

The emergence of travel writing as an independent genre fostered a number of important developments within literary circles. The most important of these influences came with the legitimization of the first-person narrative as an acceptable form of storytelling. As already noted, travelers had been sharing personal dispatches from the road for centuries, but the first-person narrative—shaped like a work of fiction, with a beginning, middle, and end—has really only found its popularity within the last fifty years (George 11, 2005). For travel writing from a first-person perspective, many critics believe its defining moment came in 1975 with the publication of Paul Theroux's first book, *The Great Railway Bazaar*, in which Theroux as the narrator describes a type of travel that is not luxurious and does so through humor with the prickly voice of a curmudgeon. Many consider this book as the first to free travel writing from the confines of guidebook writing, and allow travel writers more flexibility in choosing the literary styles in which to convey their stories. In fact, first-person narrative remains the most pervasive form of travel writing to this day.

Another important development acting as a catalyst for the increased production and consumption of travel writing was the enhanced travel options resulting from the advanced ability to travel via high-speed planes, trains, boats, and other forms of transportation. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for the first time in history, means of travel became more affordable, accessible, and widespread, subsequently putting more parts of the world within the traveler's—and the travel writer's—reach. Destinations that had been considered to be only available to the daring adventurer were now possibilities for the average traveler, and as a result places that had been

thought of as off-the-beaten-path were now treated as fashionable by travel writers, with travel publications no longer restricting their content to traditional locations. The number of subjects available to travel writers was now greater than it had ever been, creating the general rule of thumb that if you could get there, you could write about it.

Today there are a wide range of avenues available to travel writers who are interested in publishing their work. Because the genre of travel encompasses so many various sub-genres—luxury travel, budget travel, international cuisine, as well as the subject of this thesis, gay and lesbian travel, to name just a few—writers are not restricted to publishing only in publications that are dedicated solely to travel. Many mainstream publications will include special sections for travel articles, as travel in some form is generally of interest to most potential readers, with some publications specifically commissioning travel articles that target a certain demographic or category of reader. For example, newspapers have dramatically increased the number of travel pages they include over the last few decades, with most of the major newspapers including entire sections for all types of travel articles. In the United States, newspapers typically publish travel sections every Sunday—the day of the week when readership is highest—ranging in length from four to thirty pages. Even smaller local newspapers often include some travel content in their daily editions.

In addition to newspapers, magazines focusing on travel have proliferated greatly over the last few decades, and magazines that do not focus on travel—such as general interest and lifestyle magazines—also tend to regularly include some form of travel coverage in their issues. Further, new travel magazines have emerged that cater to specific niches; virtually every major airline has its own publication that includes articles about the destinations to which it flies, and other magazines have found their audience by focusing on a particular place (i.e. Hawaii), type



of travel (i.e. luxury yachting), or type of traveler (i.e. backpackers). These more specifically targeted magazines have had a hand in fostering sub-categories within the travel industry itself, like the aforementioned gay and lesbian traveler, that enable those in the business of travel—like airlines and hotels—to tailor their products more accurately to fit the needs of their customers.

With the advent of the internet, the magazine publishing world has been able to expand, with many publications producing content for both print and online editions, and many others forgoing print editions altogether in favor solely of online or tablet-based issues. While the popularity of these online magazines has not increased to the levels that many people hoped or expected it would, there are still many websites that publish travel articles from freelance writers (albeit for little or no pay), and the medium still offers a wealth of opportunities for writers seeking to promote themselves through self-publication. In fact, in the interest of being inclusive of travel writing from differing forms of media, the forthcoming content analysis will include articles published in both online editions of magazines and tablet based travel publications.

Travel writing can also be found more and more within traditional outlets like books and anthologies. In fact, the book publishing world has launched a number of series specifically devoted to travel literature, reflecting an increase in the genre's popularity (George 13, 2005). While many major publishers produce works of literature on a regular basis, these tend to come from writers with already established reputations, as the audience for this type of writing is typically smaller than that of fiction or traditional non-fiction. However, in recent years, many book publishers have begun producing travel anthologies of previously unpublished original stories, representing one of the most promising outlets for writers looking to break into the travel writing business. Still, authors like Paul Theroux and Bill Bryson have garnered much of their

popularity by writing travel books, as opposed to writing shorter pieces for magazines and newspapers.

One of the oldest and most pervasive types of travel writing can be found in guidebooks, which continue to grow in scope and specialty, offering writers a wide range of opportunities, from proposing and writing new books to updating subsequent editions of already published titles. Guidebook publishers are constantly on the lookout for excellent writers and fresh ideas from knowledgeable travelers, and while writing found in guidebooks generally tends to be less introspective than the writing found in the other forms of media previously mentioned—thus not entirely fulfilling the goal of self-discovery elaborated on earlier—it does provide the travel writer with practice in paying attention to detail, as he or she is required to visit many places over a shorter period of time and therefore must absorb large amounts of information very quickly.

While it is clear that many forms of writing fall under the umbrella of travel writing, most articles found in travel publications can be separated into three categories: service stories, destination stories, and personal essays. Service stories are primarily intended to provide a reader with information that will enable them to travel more efficiently and more enjoyably; examples of service stories include how-to stories, equipment reviews, restaurant reviews, and more. The majority of pieces published today are considered to be destination stories, which are intended to profile a specific place and convey to the reader what it would be like to live in or visit that place. There are many sub-types of destination stories, including historical articles, food specific pieces, and pieces targeted for a specific group such as families or travelers with disabilities. Finally, personal essays are personal reflections on the larger meanings of a travel experience, and while place may tend to take on a supporting role in this type of travel writing, it

is nevertheless an essential part of what the author means to share with the reader (George 14, 2005). While it is possible to go into much more detail, it is obvious even from this brief summary that articles in gay and lesbian travel publications with a somewhat political and human rights angle do in fact fall within these categories and should therefore be included.

The question now becomes: why are gay and lesbian travel publications *not* including content of this nature? According to notable travel writer David Duran, many travel publications do not include pieces about these places because they do not want to encourage people to travel there. While that may seem reasonable, the truth is that gay and lesbian travelers *are* traveling to these places, and it would be extremely helpful if they had some information beforehand to prepare them for what to expect when they get there, which is one of the main functions of travel publications. Additionally, as previously stated, travel writing is also about the people we encounter while on the road, and there are gay and lesbian citizens in every country; if by reading a travel article we are trying to get an idea of what it might be like to live in a particular place, that would most definitely include the gay and lesbian people that live there. By outright ignoring a potential segment within the travel writing genre, gay and lesbian travel magazines are doing their readers a disservice, delivering a product that is incomplete.

Travel writer Chuck Thompson has many theories on why travel publications are reluctant to include content on the realities of travel. In his book *Smile When You're Lying*—a book he wrote with the intention of sharing travel stories that would never be found in a traditional travel magazine, and usually the stories his friends found the most interesting—Thompson briefly expounds on some of these theories. First, travel writers are generally prohibited from expressing a point of view that will not be shared by the travel industry at large. While superlatives are the norm in many travel articles, this does not often leave room for dissent

or perceived negativity. Second, according to Thompson, is the overwhelming pressure on travel publications to be politically correct, leading him to claim “the writer who dares make anything other than holistically supportive judgments of any foreign culture (not counting Arab) risks career suicide...it’s nearly impossible to generate any frank assessment of foreign cultures and experience” (Thompson 7, 2007). He goes on to acknowledge that while travel is one of the biggest industries in the world, it is precisely for this reason that the traveling public has a right to the truth in what they read, as they should be able to make informed decisions about the places where they choose to spend their money.

**Case Studies: *Passport Magazine*, *Connexions Magazine*, and *Man About World***

In order to determine whether Thompson’s theories are true, it is helpful at this time to do a study of certain issues of gay and lesbian travel publications that are current as of the time of this writing, which are the issues closest to February of 2014. In the interest of providing as much diversity as possible across media platforms, the publications chosen will be from print, digital, and online magazines. The first, *Passport Magazine*, will represent the online platform; the second, *Connexions Magazine*, will be used for the print example; finally, the tablet-only publication entitled *Man About World*, will be used as the digital example. The intention of this exercise is to review the content of each of these publications to determine the extent to which its features and articles contain anything that might be construed as political or human rights related, or if any of them showcase any destinations that might be considered hostile to gay and lesbian travelers.

*Passport Magazine* is self-described as “America’s only Gay and Lesbian Travel Magazine,” and prides itself on being “the source for unbiased travel articles and insider information for savvy travelers” according to the description found on its subscription page on

Barnesandnoble.com. On its own website, under a heading that reads “About *Passport Magazine*,” it refers to the magazine as “your online leader for gay travel destinations, travel videos, gay travel guides and news. We focus on providing useful and up to date information on gay travel, culture, style, adventure, and romance!” ([www.passportmagazine.com](http://www.passportmagazine.com)). In fact, it is those five words that appear prominently above the title on the cover of every issue. The magazine is published in the United States, although it is distributed throughout the world, and is available in multiple formats, including print, online, and tablet versions. It publishes nine issues a year, and is available via yearly subscription for \$19.95, with the individual cover price of each issue positioned at \$4.95. The issue that will be the focus of this analysis is from March 2014, the most recent available, and is subtitled “The Swimwear Issue!”

Beyond the standard advertisements for luxury cruises and underwear, as well as the table of contents, the first piece of writing encountered in this issue is the letter from the editor, a man named Robert Adams. In his address he discusses a phenomenon he refers to as spring fever, the anticipation of “the blossoming flowers, budding trees, and warming sunlight that stirs emotions of wonder, love, and desire in our hearts and minds” (Adams 6, 2014). He declares the goal of this particular issue is to celebrate the potential of spring and all the joys and adventures it provides. He then goes on to outline what the reader can look forward to in this issue, including an article about Berlin, which he refers to as the “gay capital of the world.” There is no mention of current events, nor is there a hint that any of the destinations covered in the magazine might be somewhat hostile to gay and lesbian travelers; or with the case of Berlin, that they might have been in the past, and that there is an important history to keep in mind when traveling to these places. Overall, the editor’s letter is not particularly profound, which would be acceptable as long as it is not an indication of what will be found in the rest of the magazine.

The first feature encountered in the magazine is a regular article entitled “What’s New In…” which highlights a different city in every issue, directing travelers to the locations within that city that are newly popular among locals and tourists. This issue focuses on Berlin, and while this type of article might not be ideal for mentioning the history of a place, the author—Dan Allen—does in fact mention bits of history as related to the city of Berlin when it is relevant to the site he is describing. When discussing new exhibits in museums and galleries throughout Berlin, he details some of the history surrounding the context of the exhibits, such as the fact that 2014 marks both the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of World War I. However, when profiling the Schwules Museum, which he calls the “world’s first gay museum,” he fails to mention any of the history of gay and lesbian people in Berlin and why a museum like that might be significant in a place like Berlin and in Germany. Immediately following the mention of this museum, Allen goes into describing the gay nightlife in Berlin, telling readers how the most popular nightclub has recently relocated to a bigger, more impressive space. The rest of the article makes little more mention of history, with the predictable recommendations for hotels and restaurants filling out the rest of the content. Not only does Allen miss his opportunity to discuss, however briefly, the past experiences of gay and lesbian people in Berlin, and why it is important considering all that is “new” in the city, there is really no discernible reason why the editor would refer to Berlin as “the gay capital of the world.”

Another regular column, entitled “Passport Concierge,” profiles an employee of a premier establishment in a particular place, most often a hotel or restaurant; usually this person is a local who knows the area well and can make recommendations based on extensive knowledge as well as it being part of his or her job. In this issue Jimmy Im interviews Hiram L. Cabral, a W

Insider at the W Retreat and Spa on Vieques Island, off the coast of Puerto Rico. As a gay man himself, Cabral claims to feel a certain responsibility for the comfort of his LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) guests, and considers himself a representative of the gay community on Vieques. The interviewer, however, limits his questions about Vieques to finding out Cabral's suggestions for "the coolest places to go for cocktails," "the best places to work out," and "the most popular gay dance clubs in the city" (Im 20-22, 2014). The closest Im gets to anything about the history of the island or of its gay and lesbian citizens is asking about museums, which according to Cabral are not specific to gay and lesbian people. With Cabral being a prominent member of the gay community on Vieques, it is obvious that Im missed the opportunity to probe him with questions that might have dug a little deeper, choosing instead to ask the standard fare, consequently providing gay and lesbian travelers absolutely no real insight into what it is like to be gay in Vieques, and only setting up what would ultimately be the most typical and unenlightening of trips.

The first of two feature articles written in the magazine is entitled "Andalucia: Road Trip," and it is written by Stuart Haggas. In it he describes driving around Andalucia, a region within Spain that is comparable in size to Minnesota. While describing his experience in the village of Torremolinos, Haggas once again adheres to the cliché reduction of the gay scene to one paragraph about a beach popular with gay and lesbian visitors and another about an area known as La Nogalera, containing gay bars with reputable cabaret and drag shows. While he does discuss the history of certain parts of the region, nowhere in the article does he speak to the history of gay and lesbian people there; he does not even obtain one quote from a gay resident of Andalucia. While many would argue that the most important thing about a destination is not the sexuality of its residents, and that there are many other things that could and should be of

interest, it is not so farfetched to assume that an article featured in a gay and lesbian travel magazine might contain more mention of gay life in a place than a beach and its bars. This article, however, does not do anything to meet such an expectation.

The second feature article—also the second piece by Jimmy Im, giving him a chance to redeem himself from the glaring omissions of his earlier work—is entitled “Gay American Expats,” and is meant to seek wisdom from Americans that have relocated abroad, as the author himself did a decade ago. He begins by expounding on the wonders of living in a foreign country, supporting the argument presented earlier that travel provides an individual with a better understanding of the world and of themselves, providing “invaluable moments of clarity of self-identity that may not have materialized had they never left their own country” (Im 36, 2014). This is followed by six individual interviews with American expats in locations such as Bangkok, Berlin, London, and more. He asks most of the same questions to all his interviewees, including the standards of how long they had been in each city, and their favorite gay bars. Additionally, however, Im does manage to slip some politically relevant questions into his interviews, worded as “anything politically notable?” and “What challenges are there, if any, for being gay?” While this does indicate a tremendous advancement from his previous article, the problem arises from the fact that while he asks every expat about bars and clubs, he does not ask them all about politics and challenges. If he found it important enough to ask some people about politics, he could have asked all of them. It is also important to note his subjects are Americans in other places, and not locals, making the answers he receives from that of an outsider. While this article represents a step in the right direction, it still leaves *Passport Magazine* lacking in terms of providing complete and relevant information for its readers.



The rest of the magazine is comprised of mini-features, including a photo spread of scantily clad men modeling the latest swimwear (hence “The Swimwear Issue!”) and blurbs about the latest in must-have travel technology and the most highly recommended books for that month. There is an interview with gay actor Leslie Jordan, as well as a profile of the founder of the world’s first gay brewing company, Chris Shaw (written by the prolific Jimmy Im). There are reviews of restaurants in Switzerland, boutique hotels in San Francisco, and a calendar of gay and lesbian events taking place this month around the world. For the most part, however, the content of this issue comes across as superficial, best exemplified by the swimwear spread occupying such a large and prominent space in the magazine. There is nothing of true depth and substance to be found in this issue, aside from the somewhat secondary questions about gay politics asked by Mr. Im of his expat subjects, constituting concrete evidence that *Passport Magazine* is not living up to the promise it makes to its readers.

The final verdict for *Passport Magazine* is not all bad, however. In one of their regular features entitled “Globe Trotting,” author Joseph Pedro writes of his visit to Antwerp, Belgium, intended to coincide with the end of World Outgames 2013—a sporting and cultural event which brings together people of all sexual orientations to participate in a week of sports and activities—and the beginning of Antwerp’s annual Pride celebration. In the article he mentions witnessing what is called a “kiss-in,” in which participants protest an injustice by having hundreds of couples kiss simultaneously. This particular kiss-in was staged to protest the treatment of LGBT citizens by the government of Russia, and was followed by a march and protest in front of the Russian Consulate in Antwerp. While this is the only mention of Russia and what is happening there in the entirety of the magazine, it must be noted that it is there. As a result, one cannot

wholly conclude this issue of *Passport* to be a total failure, though this only serves to highlight the missed potential of the content found within it.

*Connexions Magazine* is a relative newcomer to the genre of gay and lesbian travel publications, having previously considered itself a lifestyle magazine and only transitioning exclusively to travel with a change in ownership that occurred in the last few months. Having a significantly smaller circulation than *Passport Magazine*, *Connexions* is the work of a small but dedicated group of individuals, and it is not uncommon to find the contributors in each issue authoring several of the articles contained within. On their website, they define their mission as follows: “Connexions Magazine celebrates the lifestyle of the LGBT traveler. Making connections to travel like a local, whether on a quick weekend getaway or a luxury vacation, Connexions transports our readers through dazzling photography and insightful content about travel, dining, culture and style to destinations and memorable travel experiences across the globe” ([www.connexionsmagazine.com](http://www.connexionsmagazine.com)). While the similarities between the goals of *Connexions* and *Passport* are evident, it is the promise to make connections to “travel like a local” that may prove the most difficult to deliver on. A subscription to *Connexions* costs \$19.99 per year, and includes access to all published forms of the magazine—both digital and print—as well as exclusive discounts on the destinations features in each issue. It is published quarterly, with a minimum of four issues per year. The issue being used for this study is the most recent available, dated the Winter of 2013.

Much like *Passport*, this issue of *Connexions* begins with a letter from the editor-in-chief, Shelly Straub, in which she lists the articles that are forthcoming in the magazine and states how excited she is to be working with a new publisher, DJ Doran. It is the note from the publisher, however, that sets this issue apart from the *Passport* issue, not just by its presence but

for what it contains. Introducing himself to readers, Doran claims taking the job forced him to ask an important question: “What is the future of LGBT travel and how can we improve our publication?” He goes on to share that as a man in his forties, he longs for something more when he travels than the thumping music of a dance club and the “sweaty gyrations of a bunch of shirtless twenty-somethings on a dance floor” (Doran 4, 2013). While he acknowledges that dance clubs are an important part of the travel experience for many, he believes there exists a more diverse appetite for information than what can currently be found in gay and lesbian travel media. As a result, he promises to fill *Connexions* with fresh and edgy content that will provide the gay and lesbian traveler with the best travel experience possible, one that is safe from discrimination. With this being his first issue, and while it remains to be seen if he can live up to his lofty goals, it is encouraging to see that there are others that recognize the lack of useful information in gay and lesbian travel magazines.

The first full feature article in this issue is entitled “Alabama’s Seaport City—Mobile” and is written by author David Duran. He describes a recent visit to Mobile, starting with an undeniably cliché and utterly predictable visit to a gay bar, where his impression of the lack of conventionality in Mobile results from the fact that the bartender at the gay bar happens to be heterosexual. He does not even come close to delving into what it is like to be gay and live in Mobile, though he does rather cryptically declare that he was not yet ready to venture outside of Mobile into greater Alabama, a reluctance he does not explain, leaving one to only assume that he would be uncomfortable visiting places that might be less tolerant of homosexuality—an angle that would make this article infinitely more compelling and useful. This piece reeks of a missed opportunity to provide the reader with any truly unique insight into Mobile, leaving one

to fumble through what clumsily reported information is contained in its paragraphs, rendering it a complete failure not only as a gay and lesbian travel article, but as a travel article itself.

The next feature article is entitled “Connexions Out and About—Road Trip: America” and is written by the magazine’s publisher, DJ Doran. After an exasperating seven-page read full of grammatical errors and misspellings—in which the reader finds out that forty-five year old Doran does not want to read about the nightclubs he mentions in his previous letter from the publisher because he has an unexplainable aversion to them and has never actually been to one—the only redeemable quality to be found is Doran’s reaffirmation of the importance of travel, which is enough to motivate him to give up his job and place of residence to purchase a mobile home with his partner and drive across the United States. What motivates him to take such drastic action is a mystery, and the reasons for the changes in his plans are usually glossed over with phrases like “life got in the way” and “it didn’t ‘feel’ right,” which only serve to portray him as flaky rather than a pioneer. While the goal of this article does not necessarily lend toward the kind of politically motivated subject matter this review is seeking to find, it is clear that Mr. Doran is off to extremely slow start delivering the kind of fresh and edgy content he promised the new Connexions—under his leadership—would provide.

Mercifully, the next feature article is also the last one in this issue, and is entitled “The Sweet Truth About Antwerp,” and is also by David Duran, giving him a chance at redemption from his earlier misstep. It is also a chance to see if Mr. Duran can provide any insight into Antwerp that the reader did not receive in the article found in Passport Magazine. In the first half of the article, Duran manages to tackle the fresh and edgy subject of waffles, followed by the equally groundbreaking topic of chocolate; imagine the originality of an article about Belgium that mentions Belgian waffles and Belgian chocolate. Additionally, while Duran was in

Antwerp at the same time as Joseph Pedro from Passport Magazine—during the World Out Games and annual Pride celebration—he makes absolutely no mention of the protest against Russia that Pedro talks about, an omission that would only be noticed by a reader that had compared both articles. Knowing that Duran does not address the protest ultimately serves to destroy Mr. Doran’s credibility in his promise to deliver content that contemporary gay and lesbian travelers want to read. Duran does, however, end the article with the obligatory mention of the nightlife and club scene in Antwerp, delivering credit for consistency, if nothing else.

The rest of the magazine is littered with short features and advertisements, which provide the reader with great difficulty in being able to discern which is which. A blurb about Rehoboth Beach (incidentally, spelled Rehobooth Beach in the headline) has no author, leaving one to wonder if it is an ad paid for by that city’s tourism board or an actual article about that place. There is also a feature showing photographs of the wedding of Wendy and Joelle, which while very nice, leave the reader wondering who Wendy and Joelle are and why their wedding photos are included in a travel magazine. The final semblance of any cohesiveness in this magazine is ultimately lost when the reader encounters an interview with a film producer who is living with alcoholism, with the only distinguishable relevance to a gay and lesbian travel magazine being that the film producer happens to be gay. With a mere four issues a year being published, a reader spending \$19.95 for a subscription is not unreasonable in expecting a publication of much better quality, and after reading this issue of Connexions, it is easy to understand why the vastly imperfect Passport Magazine has a higher circulation.

The final gay and lesbian travel publication to be used for this review is entitled Man About World, and is available only on the iPad, either by subscription or purchase of an individual issue. On its website, in a section called “What We Believe,” Man About World

declares that “We believe that our freedom to travel comes with a responsibility to advance the cause of freedom for LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and asexual) people all over the world” and that “we enjoy great nightlife, great parties, and great sex...but they’re just three of the many reasons why we travel” ([www.manaboutworld.com](http://www.manaboutworld.com)). Additionally, the magazine claims to be a media sponsor of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, with fifty percent of revenue on any commission they make from the sale of merchandise donated to that organization. One issue of Man About World costs \$7.99, with a month to month subscription bringing the price down to \$4.99 issue, and an annual subscription costing a whopping \$39.99. With only nine or ten issues being published each year, this makes Man About World the most expensive publication in this review. Coupling its price with the promise it makes about its content, it is clear that Man About World has the most to lose in terms of its reputation if it does not live up to the expectations it has set for itself.

The most recent issue of Man About World available for review as of this writing is the January/February edition for 2014. The interactive nature of a magazine on a tablet makes Man About World slightly different from the previous two magazines, beginning with the cover of the issue which is actually a video—with sound, and a theme song of sorts—of a man running down a beach. After scrolling past the cover, readers are given instructions on how to read the magazine, as readers are able to scroll in different directions depending on what interests them. They can skip ahead entirely to the next section if they wish, or if they is something they would like more in-depth information on they can scroll down or tap links within the articles to bring up related websites. Additionally, some articles contain slideshows that a reader can scroll through. The advantage to this is obvious, as it allows readers to choose to view as much or as little of each feature as they want, and also provides more options to the reader than the traditional print

publications, such as booking a room at a featured hotel simply by clicking on a link, or watching a video about a place rather than just pictures.

Like the previous two examples, Man About World begins their magazine with a letter from those responsible for it, in this case, founders Billy Kolber and Ed Salvato. While the primary focus of this letter is a preview of what the reader will find throughout the issue, including a list of the top “14 gay places to go in 2014,” what is most notable is the lack of any mention of what their website promises to deliver, namely gay travel that does not focus on nightlife and sex. In fact, while discussing this particular feature, Billy and Ed (as they sign their letter) state that their destinations were chosen using the criteria of “cultural events, festivals, sex-focused parties, and even natural phenomena you shouldn’t miss.” They go on to promise the standard hotel and restaurant recommendations for each destination, but nowhere in the letter do they mention anything about the citizens of each place or the realities facing a gay and lesbian traveler to each place. It bears repeating at this point that while there is nothing wrong with what they have chosen to include, it is ultimately incomplete and does not fulfill the promise they have made to their readers.

The aforementioned feature follows the letter from the founders, with each destination divided into three sections: “When to go” (each destination receives its own month in 2014), “Why go here”, and “Points Whisperer,” in which the authors give tips on how to leverage frequent flier points to get to each destination. After reading through each destination, only Philadelphia received any mention for a politically related event—the LGBT equality forum, though there is no explanation of what that event actually is. Of particular note is the inclusion of Berlin—which was also profiled to varying degrees in both Passport and Connexions—without any mention of the history of gay and lesbian people in that city, or where a gay traveler

can go to learn about that history while they are there, something that is important for every visitor to do when they travel to Berlin. In fact, the focus of the section on Berlin is Ostertreffen (Easter Meeting), a leather and fetish event known for a massive sex party, which completely contradicts the founders assertion that sex is not a focus for them. Additionally, a section that recommends Jordan as a place to visit does nothing to warn gay and lesbian travelers about the prevailing attitudes towards homosexuality in the Middle East, with no recommendations on how to interact in public, information that all travelers should know before they choose to visit a particular destination.

The second of two of what can be considered to be the features of Man About World (there are no traditional articles but rather sections devoted to a particular theme) is entitled “Long Weekend,” profiling three specific destinations with information similar to what was covered in the previous feature as well as more detailed recommendations for hotels, restaurants, activities, and nightlife. While this feature does include the standard information, it does get an honorable mention for giving practical advice and information to gay and lesbian travelers directly related to gay life in that place; for example, travelers are advised not to publicly display affection on St. Croix, and are warned of occurrences anti-gay discrimination that has taken place in the Cayman Islands in recent years, allowing travelers to make an informed decision as to whether they will want to spend their money in these places. While this is without a doubt a positive step forward, it still leaves Man About World with a lot of ground to make up, especially if it is serious about keeping the promises it makes on its website. Unfortunately, these two features make up the bulk of the content that is included in this issue, with the rest of what is found comprised mostly of pictures, advertisements, and questions from readers about the best times to visit certain places and where to stay when they get there. The reader is



ultimately left with a feeling of having read a magazine that is more concerned with style than substance, making it extremely difficult to justify the high cost for a subscription.

While this review has been disappointing, it ultimately proves the argument being made by this thesis: gay and lesbian travel writing, as it exists in popular media today, is a fundamentally incomplete product, leaving the most important part out. There are many things the average gay and lesbian traveler should know that is not being included in these publications, rendering them woefully unprepared should they choose to visit certain destinations. To argue that these magazines are not covering these places because they do not want travelers to go there borders on irresponsible, because travelers are going to these places, and it is the duty of these publications to provide the information that is needed for those who choose to make the trip, especially according to the promises that are made by the editors and on their websites. Additionally, it is just as important for the plight of the gay and lesbian citizens of these places to be exposed, enabling those wishing to take action and help the tools and information with which to do so. Until then, gay and lesbian travelers will have to seek information elsewhere, creating the potential for encountering the pitfalls of not having information tailored to their specific needs or circumstances. The next phase of this thesis, featured in the next section, will take a closer look at three destinations—Germany, Russia, and Uganda—that would provide a mutual benefit to both gay and lesbian travelers and their citizens if they were covered in travel publications the way they should be, but currently are not.

### **The Forgotten Yesterday: Homosexuality and Nazi Germany**

There are many reasons why gay and lesbian travelers should visit Germany. In addition to the events highlighted in the publications that were discussed in the previous section, featured by prominent gay and lesbian travel magazines, there are cultural, culinary, and ecological

experiences that are unparalleled, unique to this part of the world. Germany has a contemporary reputation as being a country of acceptance, of sexual freedom, a place where people from all over the world can go and be themselves without fear of violence or reprisal. This quality has even caused the editor of *Passport Magazine* to refer to Berlin as “the gay capital of the world.” This, however, was not always the case.

Beginning in the years leading up to World War II and lasting long after the war officially ended, gay and lesbian people living in this region suffered unimaginable horrors, with many being interred in concentration camps alongside the other groups the Nazis deemed “unfit,” enduring excruciating torture and rape for the purpose of what the Nazis called “reeducation.” Untold numbers of gays and lesbians perished in those camps, but for those who managed to survive, life became a constant daily struggle; many were forced to hide who they were for fear of public shaming or random violence, and many chose to enter into sham marriages, feeling they had no other option than to create a fictional life in order to protect themselves from harm. It was only very recently—in the last 30 years, barely a blip by the standards of history—that gays and lesbians were recognized by both Germany and France as deportees entitled to the same reparations from the government provided to other survivors of the Holocaust. Additionally, it is also a very recent development that homosexuality was no longer considered illegal in these countries, with the last of the anti-homosexual laws being changed in 1969.

The problem is—as this thesis argues—one would never know this from reading the pages of a gay and lesbian travel publication. With Germany being as open and accepting as it is today, without a clear knowledge of history, a traveler may take for granted all the liberties they are able to experience in these countries. While it is important to celebrate freedom wherever it

is, providing context for such freedom is just as important, making the sacrifices of those who came before—those who made it possible for such freedom to exist—not be in vain. In addition, understanding the past might motivate those so inclined to take action against the injustices of the present, some of which will be discussed later in this section. Ultimately, by elaborating on the history of these countries, as well as shedding light on the problems of today and tomorrow, the goal of this section is to underscore the importance of the inclusion of such subject matter in gay and lesbian travel publications, and to illustrate the void a reader experiences with their absence.

It may surprise many to learn that prior to World War II, Germany was considered to be one of the more progressive places in the world in terms of homosexuality. While it is true that homosexuality had been officially illegal since 1871—with the passage of a law known as Paragraph 175—there were actually quite a few gay bars and establishments that could be found throughout Germany, and specifically Berlin, with the political ideology of Germans at the time causing them to be more concerned with money and the economy than social issues. Additionally, Paragraph 175—which criminalized homosexuality, bestiality, some forms of prostitution, and underage sexual abuse—had many opponents—from politicians to physicians—that tried unsuccessfully on multiple occasions to have the law repealed. In his book *The Pink Triangle*, author Richard Plant describes a perfect storm of events leading not only to war, but the use of homosexuals to advance the Nazi agenda, for while homosexuality was largely tolerated, it was still viewed as a fundamental flaw or weakness, a notion that was perpetuated by many of the physicians of that time. By portraying one's political enemies as homosexual, one was able to discredit them, subsequently providing one's own party with the legitimacy of strength. This was a tactic used by the Nazis to justify their desire for what they considered to be

biological purity, and what would ultimately inform their practices when they would eventually come into power.

Paragraph 175 would serve as the legal basis for all actions taken by the Nazis against homosexuals, in an attempt to achieve what they believed was “reeducation,” as well as the infliction of torture and inhumane medical experiments primarily on gay men, although lesbians were not entirely exempt from Nazi policies. Paragraph 175 went through many incarnations over the years, beginning in 1871 and lasting well beyond World War II, when the final version of it was ultimately revoked in 1994. The version that was used by the Nazis to justify the arrest and internment of homosexuals in concentration camps is the one from 1935, which despite the loss of the war by the Nazis in 1945, remained in effect in West Germany until 1969. As a result of this, even after the liberation of the camps, many homosexuals did not feel liberated, as they were still forced to keep their true identity a secret for fear of physical and legal repercussions. In many cases, gay men were unable to reestablish relationships family and friends, as those they had been close to before the war refused to associate with those known to be homosexual. Others proceeded to marry and have children as a way to continue to function within society without stigma. Subsequently, information on the treatment of homosexuals during the war has been extremely difficult to obtain and compile, as most gay men that survived were afraid and unwilling to share their experiences until very recently.

The main clause of the 1935 version of Paragraph 175 reads as follows: “A male who indulges in criminally indecent activities with another male or who allows himself to participate in such activities will be punished with jail” (Plant 206, 1986). The law goes on to include the more specific instances in which a male engages in such activities with an underage male, a male forces another male to engage in such activities with a threat of violence or through an abuse of a

superior working or military relationship, or the case of male prostitutes who solicit sex for monetary gain. The text concludes with a mention of males who engage in criminally indecent activities with animals, a crime which the law states might result in the alleged offender being deprived of his civil rights. It is the vagueness of the term “indecent activities” which gave the Nazis the leeway they needed to enforce this law as they saw fit, as the mid-1930s saw their rise to power within Germany as a political power, with this law providing them with a valuable tool with which to dispense their enemies, or even those within their own party they deemed to be dangerous or no longer useful. It was not uncommon to find men being arrested for what could have been merely an innocent gesture of friendship, such as a pat on the back, or a hug. It was even said that men could garner suspicion by simply glancing at another man for what was arbitrarily considered to be an inappropriate amount of time. Despite the fact that homosexuality is generally more difficult to visually determine than other qualities such as race or religion—characterized by visual cues such as skin color or garb—it became easy for the Nazis to fabricate accusations of indecent activities between males, given the wide breadth the wording of Paragraph 175 allowed for interpretation.

It is interesting to note that while lesbians were not technically exempt from the laws against homosexuals, Paragraph 175 did not specifically ban relations between two women. While some German officials sought to correct what they viewed as an oversight in the way the law was written, they would ultimately never be successful in persecuting lesbians in the same way they were able to persecute gay men. There were many reasons for this, not the least of which being that these same officials thought it extremely unlikely that German women would voluntarily participate in sexual relations with another woman—on the contrary, they believed that German women showed nothing but contempt for the concept of lesbianism. In addition,

unlike with gay men, there was no evidence at that time of lesbians forming their own individual community, with no bars or social clubs and gatherings targeted specifically for lesbians in the way these types of establishments existed for gay men. Finally, it was widely believed that women could be tender with each other—showing affection in the form of a touch or embrace—without it arousing suspicion or being indicative of what they believed were indecent activities, making any claims against women of a same-sex relationship extremely difficult to prove (Plant 114-6, 1986). While there were a few cases against lesbians during that time, they did not come close to matching the charges made against gay men, and most lesbians were able to emerge unscathed from the rule of the Nazis.

While Paragraph 175 provided the means by which the Nazis were able to carry out their philosophy of purification through eradication, specifically with regards to homosexuals, it must be noted that the majority of the policies and practices of the Nazi party towards homosexuals were the brainchild of Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the SS and second in command to Adolf Hitler. To this day, historians and biographers are unable to understand the reasons for the extreme hatred Himmler had for homosexuals, but most readily agree that it bordered on obsession for him, causing him to draft policies against homosexuality not only for the general public, but for those within the government and Nazi party as well. As mentioned previously, Himmler used accusations of homosexuality to eliminate political enemies, and advocated the harshest penalties for anyone suspected of participating in same-sex encounters. It is ironic, however, that Himmler only pushed for punishments against German homosexuals, instructing those under him to leave homosexuals of any other ethnicity alone. The reason for this, according to Himmler's ideology, was that homosexuality led to degeneracy, hence weakening the bloodline for the future prospects of a particular race. While his intention was to rid the

German population of homosexuality in order to strengthen it against its enemies, he believed homosexuality should be permitted to flourish elsewhere, subsequently making them ripe for German conquest (Plant 99-100, 1986). Himmler's skewed logic also had other exceptions, making his war against homosexuals seem ultimately about convenience—important when it was useful and less relevant when it was not—rather than an outright hatred of one group of people.

In fact, Himmler did not harbor hatred of one group in particular, but rather towards many different groups of people—people that were labelled contragenics. Contragenics is a term “the linguist Richard J. Deppe has coined to encompass all those groups the Nazi regime resolved to eliminate: Jews, anti-fascists, gays, Jehovah's Witnesses, non-conforming clergyman, Gypsies, etc.” (Plant 15, 1986). What made homosexuals different from these other types of contragenics is that they were a group that was forced to organize in secret even before the crusade against them by the Nazis, as a result of the widespread disapproval of homosexuals that existed among the general population throughout the world. When the enforcement of Paragraph 175 began in earnest in the mid-1930s and throughout the course of the war until the concentration camps were liberated, homosexuals found it extremely difficult to elicit any sympathy from anyone, and were often treated poorly by other prisoners despite enduring the same conditions, because they were viewed to be at the bottom of the hierarchy of persecuted groups that existed within the camps. Even after the war, if a homosexual had been sentenced to six years in prison but had only served four years in the camps, they were forced to complete the final two years of their sentence, as they were the only group not considered to have served their time when the camps were liberated.

This attitude towards homosexuals by the Nazis and the other prisoners was reflected in everyday life within the concentration camps. The Nazis often turned prisoners against each

other, rewarding some at the expense of others as a way to keep order within the camps and to keep the prisoners from organizing and rebelling against their captors. Homosexuals within the camps represented a very small number when compared to other groups—like Jews and anti-fascists—and therefore were not considered to be a major threat by the Nazis. In addition, because the category of homosexual consisted of men from all walks of life—from professionals to hustlers—with very little else in common, it became extremely unlikely that they would be able to organize themselves into a group able to fight for what little rights the Nazis would be willing to give, such as extra food or less strenuous work assignments.

The roles of the prisoners assigned to keep an eye on the other prisoners within their camp—called Kapos—were usually assigned to criminals or anti-fascists. As a result, these particular groups tended to favor their own, leaving the other groups—Jews, gays, and others—at the mercy of not only the Nazis but the Kapos as well. If inmates were unable to secure the most exclusive assignments, the likelihood of their survival decreased dramatically, and as homosexuals were often given the most difficult tasks in factories and quarries, very few made it out of the camps alive. Further, none of the groups within the camps were interested in associating with or cooperating with homosexuals, and while it was not unheard of for a Kapo to keep an attractive young man as his “dolly boy,” gay men in the camps had very little negotiating power (Plant 179-80, 1986). Finally, outside assistance for homosexuals was practically nonexistent, as family and friends did not want it known that they were connected in any way to someone accused of homosexuality, and therefore refused to acknowledge any relation or communicate in any way with gay men being held in the concentration camps.

As a result of their social standing within the camps, life for homosexuals was exceptionally hard. They were often forced to carry out tasks with no purpose, such as building



walls all day only to be made to tear them down when they were finished. They were brutally beaten and sodomized, and many were shot dead for no reason, as Nazi officers would simply claim they had been trying to escape. In addition, they were often the subject of terrible medical experiments. While many gay men were sent to bordellos within the camps and forced to have sex with women as part of their “reeducation,” many others were subjected to torture in order to determine if their “condition” could be cured. One doctor in particular, Carl Vaernet, experimented almost exclusively on homosexuals, with his method of attempted conversion consisting of “castrat[ing] several homosexuals, inject[ing] them with huge doses of male hormones, then wait[ing] to see whether they would begin to exhibit signs of interest in the opposite sex” (Plant 177, 1986). There was absolutely no evidence, then and now, that this experiment had the desired effect, making the experience of homosexuals in concentration camps particularly disturbing.

Because so few homosexuals were able to survive the concentration camps, and because of the shame they continued to experience after they were freed, it is only recently that the experience of gay men came to be known throughout the world. Widely considered to be the first published account of life in the camps by a gay survivor, *The Men With The Pink Triangle* was written by Josef Kohout under the pseudonym Heinz Heger. It also details the treatment of homosexuals by the government after the war was over; specifically, it tells how homosexuals, still considered to be criminals under Paragraph 175, were not considered eligible for the reparations given to other Holocaust survivors. Originally published in German in 1972, it was the first account of homosexual life in Nazi Germany to be translated into English, and many scholars have stated their belief that this book represented a turning point in self-awareness for homosexuals throughout the world, as it was only with its publication that the pink triangle

became a symbol of gay identity. Ironically enough, Kohout's book can also be considered a travel memoir, as it deals primarily with the experience of a protagonist affected mostly by the circumstances of the place they are in.

Another more contemporary memoir was written by Pierre Seel, a book he called *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual* (1995). What is most striking about this book, and what sets it apart from Kohout's recollection, is the knowledge that over twenty years later after that first book, homosexual victims of the Holocaust are still fighting to be recognized and to receive the reparations they are entitled to. Pierre Seel died in 2005 without ever achieving the acknowledgement by the government he fought so hard for, despite choosing to reveal secrets he had kept for so many years, secrets that forced him to relive the horrible atrocities he endured in the concentration camps. As time goes on, and less gay survivors of the Holocaust remain to tell their stories, the experience of homosexuals in Nazi Germany is at risk of being forgotten forever. Those who did speak out paid a terrible price in order for those who would come after to be able to live as they please, and love who they want. Is it not, therefore, the responsibility of any gay and lesbian travel publication to encourage any visitors to this part of the world to learn about those who came before, in order to appreciate the freedoms they enjoy today? By omitting this from the recommendations found in the articles on Germany—including the ones on Berlin discussed in the previous section—gay and lesbian travel magazines are perpetuating the practice of the government that persists to this day: ignoring the experience of gay Holocaust victims, as if it were somehow less valid than that of other surviving groups.

### **The Invisible Today: Homosexuality in Post-Soviet Russia**

It might be of comfort to some that these events happened long ago. Many believe that human beings have progressed far beyond this type of homophobic violence, that people are

more tolerant, open, and accepting than they were sixty years ago. Without discounting the progress that has in fact been made over that time, to say that events such as those that took place in Nazi Germany against homosexuals would not happen today is simply incorrect. They happen every day, and continue to happen in places around the world. There are still many places where it is not safe to be openly gay for fear of violence or, in some cases, criminal prosecution. In those places where homosexuality is against the law, gay and lesbian citizens find it especially difficult, as if they are unfortunate enough to become the victims of a violent assault, they have little or no recourse with the authorities, since often the police will do nothing to protect them or not even try to seek out the perpetrators. Additionally, to report the crime means revealing the reason for the crime—that they were targeted for being gay—which could create the potential for further violence down the line. One such place where homophobia and anti-gay violence has been on the rise is Russia, resulting from the passage of several anti-gay propaganda laws being passed in various parts of the country.

On May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013, in the city of Volgograd in Russia, twenty-three year old Vladislav Tornovoi was out on the town drinking with some friends when he allegedly revealed to them that he was gay. The next morning, Tornovoi's naked body was found outside an apartment complex. According to the website [www.vocativ.com](http://www.vocativ.com), "his skull had been crushed with a piece of broken pavement. His genitals were mutilated, his ribs broken and he had been sodomized with beer bottles with such force that they damaged his internal organs. Before they left, his assailants set fire to his battered body" (Cavaliere, [www.vocativ.com](http://www.vocativ.com), May 21, 2013). His attackers have since been arrested, and when questioned as to their motives, they merely claimed they did it because he was gay, believing that was enough justification for murder. In an act reminiscent of the happenings during World War II, his friends and family were quick to dismiss

the possibility that Tornovoi was gay, blaming the news media for inventing the lie in order to sensationalize the story. Regardless of whether Tornovoi was actually gay, this unfortunate event serves as a snapshot of the reality facing gay and lesbian people in Russia today, an undeniably homophobic society with a situation that is exacerbated by anti-gay legislation, which paints homosexuals as predatory pedophiles, intent on corrupting the country's youth. What is even worse is that none of this information has found its way into the pages of gay and lesbian travel publications, and it is reasonable to argue that without the attention received as a result of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, it may not have made the news at all.

Perhaps not surprisingly, homophobia and anti-gay legislation has a long history in Russia. Most historians tend to divide periods in Russia's past into what is known as Soviet and Post-Soviet, referring to the time during which Russia was under Communist rule and the time after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite the philosophical differences with regards to government between the two periods, there remain many similarities in terms of attitudes towards homosexuality, with anti-gay sentiment extending all the way back to the 1830s. Prior to this homosexuality was primarily considered to be a moral or religious issue, with the only existing regulations prohibiting same-sex relationships between men in the army or navy (Lapina 17, 2013). In 1832, however, the criminal code was expanded to include anal intercourse between all men (*muzhelozhstvo*). It is interesting to note the commonality shared between Russia during this period and Nazi Germany, as female homosexuality was viewed as a medical problem, while male homosexuality was treated as a criminal offense. They believed the reason for this, like the Nazis, was that women were more predisposed to emotion making their relations more innocuous, while relations between men were the result of a conscious choice between less emotional creatures, indicating a rational tendency towards prurient behavior.

The October Revolution in 1917 ushered in a period of leniency for homosexuality in Russia, as all previous laws leftover from the Tsarist period were abolished, including the anti-homosexuality laws. It was not until 1933, a period commonly associated with the toughening of the Soviet regime, when the most severe criminalization of male homosexuality began. According to Veronika Lapina, “growth of the urban population [in cities] triggered actions on the part of the government termed “chistka” (cleaning) which aimed to eliminate all the ‘social anomalies’ from the urban space that posed a threat to the morality of the nation” (Lapina 20-1, 2013). As a result of this attempted purge by the government, virtually all traces of homosexuality or same-sex desire was eradicated from the public consciousness, including in art and media. Additionally, trials of homosexual men were never publicized, perpetuating the image of a moral and chaste working-class society that was desired by the government. Consequently, homosexuality in Russia became somewhat taboo, still existing but forced underground, causing homosexuals to live double lives: the public one where they appeared to be moral, upstanding citizens, and a private one where homosexual desire and socialization could be fulfilled, behind the closed doors of a bathhouse or private apartment.

This underground period lasted until approximately the end of the 1980s, which saw the overall liberalization of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). This new era saw the emergence of an LGBT movement in Russia, only to see that movement fade again in the mid-2000s. Despite this new movement, however, the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1993 in Russia did not occur as a result of the movement, but rather from the pressure of international public opinion, which also consequently improved Russia’s image on the world scene. It was this legislative maneuver by the Russian government that is credited with the eventual fading of the LGBT rights movement, as the most powerful uniting force for action no longer existed.

Recent years, however, have seen the reemergence of a pro-LGBT movement, resulting directly from the abrupt implementation of legislation beginning in 2006 prohibiting what is referred to as the propaganda of homosexuality. It was not until the passage of an anti-propaganda law in St. Petersburg in 2012 that the state-sanctioned homophobia in Russia started to make international headlines (Lapina 43, 2013).

Following this, on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Russian president Vladimir Putin signed into law the same anti-propaganda law to apply to the entire country, and not just specific regions and cities. According to the website [www.policymic.com](http://www.policymic.com), the wording of the law states that “propaganda is the act of distributing information among minors that: is aimed at the creating of non-traditional sexual attitudes; makes non-traditional sexual relations attractive; equates the social value of traditional and non-traditional sexual relations; or creates an interest in non-traditional sexual relations” (Grekov, [www.policymic.com](http://www.policymic.com), August 8, 2013). If you are a Russian citizen found guilty of violating this law you could be fined on a sliding scale depending on the level of the offense and whether the offender is an individual, public official, or organization. If you are not a Russian citizen, there exists the additional possibility of jail time and deportation. While those responsible for the passage of the law have claimed it is meant to protect the interests of children, subsequently portraying homosexuals as pedophiles with no interests other than using children to satisfy their deviant sexual appetites and thereby “recruiting” them into their fold, the general consensus around the world has been that this law is an outright attack on homosexuality, aimed at bringing back the policies of Soviet Russia which were meant to keep the population pure and relegate homosexual activity underground, unspoken of in public by anyone wishing to keep Russia’s image untarnished. The backlash received by Russia in the aftermath of the passage of

the law—especially when viewed in the context of the impending Winter Olympics—has had the opposite of the desired effect, however.

There are many theories that have been posited to try and explain why homophobia is so rampant within Russian society. According to author Brian James Baer in his book *Other Russias: Homosexuality and the Crisis of Post-Soviet Identity*, “homosexuality in Russia today belongs in large part to a broader, much contested discourse on democracy, liberalism, personal freedom, and modernity” (Baer 3, 2009). For many, the rejection of homosexuality and outright homophobia found within the legislation in Russia is believed to be a rejection of what is considered to be a Western concept, with sexual freedom and the expression of sexuality thought to have originated in the West and therefore contrary to the ideal of the Russian identity. To be clear, as stated previously, it is not necessarily the act of sex between males that is the primary target of the actions taken against homosexuals in Russia—although that certainly plays a part—but rather the expression of a homosexual identity that makes those trying to preserve the notion of “Russianness” uncomfortable. While men have been having sex with other men since the dawn of the human race, it is only within the last century or so that the concept of the homosexual has begun to be defined. Leaving the subject of the homosexual identity as a topic for another paper, its relevance to this discussion is that it has developed as a contradiction to what many Russians are trying to form as their own identity, something distinctively different from the West, with an emphasis on hard work and the concealment of anything related to sex or sexuality.

Building on this concept, Baer elaborates on the perpetuation throughout Russian society of what is considered to be normative, and how colloquial language has adapted to treat homosexuality as abnormal. He states:

Russian society tends to be very normative. And so, although homosexuality was finally removed from the official list of clinical pathologies by the Russian Psychiatric Association in 1999, it is still common to hear homosexuality referred to as “abnormal love [*nenormal'naia liubov*]” and heterosexuals as “normal people [*normal'nye liudi*].” In fact, the Russian slang for “straight” is *natural*, “natural.” The association of homosexuality with abnormality has in Russia produced its own logic, according to which homosexuals are capable of all kinds of abnormal activities because homosexuality itself is abnormal. In other words, homosexuality becomes a repository for virtually anything considered outside the norm. (Baer 9, 2009)

As a result of this, it becomes extremely difficult to separate the homosexual identity from the negative connotation it has gained throughout the years, subsequently grouping homosexuals in with other behaviors considered to be deviant and abnormal, such as bestiality and pedophilia. If this way of thinking is also going to inform the actions and decisions of lawmakers in Russia, it is imperative that Russia continue to receive pressure from the international community to not only repeal these anti-propaganda laws, but also to change their concept of homosexuals as abnormal, even if it means adapting an idea from the West and sacrificing a small part of their attempt to create a Russian identity that is separate and distinct merely for the sake of being so.

What does all this mean for gay and lesbian travelers to the region? Or for the gay and lesbian people that live there? If one were to peruse the pages of a gay and lesbian travel publication, it would be hard pressed to find out for sure. As stated previously, a foreigner can be fined, imprisoned, or deported for displaying or distributing anything that is considered to be homosexual propaganda. But what exactly would qualify as homosexual propaganda? Perhaps



the prominent display of a rainbow flag in a shop window, or marching in a gay pride parade (most of which have been banned since the passage of the law, despite attempts by citizens to hold the events as planned). The point is, the arbitrary quality of the law makes it impossible to know for sure. It may be possible for gay and lesbian travel publications to return to the mantra of not wanting to include articles about places they would not recommend their readers visit, but especially with the recent Winter Olympics in Sochi, to believe that gays and lesbians are not going to Russia would be naïve at best and ignorant at worst. More importantly, there is a story in Russia, and it is the obligation of these publications to tell it—not just according to the promises made by their editors and publishers, but to raise awareness of the plight of the citizens of Russia, as well as preparing their readers on what to expect when—not if—they visit.

### **The Uncertain Tomorrow: Homosexuality in Post-Colonial Uganda**

The final stop on the tour of places with a history and reputation of hostility towards gay and lesbian people taken by this thesis—places not to be found anywhere in the pages of gay and lesbian travel publications—was also our first stop: Uganda. As mentioned previously, Uganda is in the midst of a political battle with the future of its homosexual citizens at stake, as the so-called “Anti-Homosexuality Bill” (known colloquially and throughout the media as the “Kill the Gays Bill”) was passed by the Parliament of Uganda on December 20, 2013, and signed into law by the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, on February 24, 2014. What the long-term implications are for the gay and lesbian citizens of Uganda remains to be seen, since the implementation of the law is such a recent development that there is no information available about the extent to which it will be enforced. It is safe to assume, however, that the prospects for a safe visit by any gay and lesbian visitors to the country seem quite bleak.

As an LGBT activist living in Kampala, David Kato feared the worst would happen if the bill was passed. Having endured the brutality of the police firsthand as a result of his homosexuality, suffering a broken shoulder that was still the source of occasional pain, Kato was unsure of what the future would hold for gays and lesbians in Uganda. Kato was the advocacy and litigation officer for an organization called Sexual Minorities Uganda (also known as SM-UG), whose goal is the achievement of full legal and social equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Uganda (Edwards 32, April 2010). Kato felt it was his responsibility to stay in Uganda and fight, not merely to ensure his own safety but to advocate for the younger generation of gays and lesbians in Uganda. One of the worst aspects about the passage of this law is that it also calls for those aware of any homosexual activity to report any offenders within twenty-four hours, a quality reminiscent of the tactics used in Nazi Germany where accusations of homosexuality were used as a way to eliminate one's enemies. Kato feared that this would motivate most gays and lesbians to go underground, cutting them off from the emotional support they so desperately need, and potentially leading them to attempt suicide. Sadly, David Kato was murdered in his home on January 26, 2011. While he would not live to see the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, he would also not live to complete his mission of making Uganda a safe place for its LGBT citizens.

The information obtained in the previous paragraph did not come from a gay and lesbian travel magazine but rather a publication entitled *The New Internationalist*, a magazine known for featuring articles on a wide range of issues facing the world today—including human rights violations—with the goal of raising awareness on the plight of those who may not otherwise have a voice. The article this information was taken from *could* have come from a travel magazine, as it had all the elements required to make a travel piece—essentially, its main

character was a place: Uganda. Beyond that, there are no other major criteria required to qualify it as a travel article. It is nearly impossible to not classify it as relevant to the gay and lesbian traveler, as the main subject is the plight of gay and lesbian people in Uganda, which also includes anyone that chooses to travel there. So why is it so extremely difficult to find an article like this in a gay and lesbian travel publication? Is it more important to keep travel stories light, emphasizing instead the fantasy and leisure aspects of travel over the dangers and pitfalls that might occur? Author Chuck Thompson would certainly agree that this is the case, but it still does not free these publications from their obligations to their readers, especially when they promise to provide information on these types of places.

Last year, on a website called *Out Traveler*, there was featured an article by gay travel writer Clark Harding entitled “An American Gay in Uganda: Visiting the Earth’s Most Homophobic Place.” *Out Traveler* is a gay travel website owned and maintained by the same parent company of *Out Magazine* and *The Advocate*, two LGBT publications focused on printing stories of a human interest and political nature, respectively. *Out Traveler* used to have a print edition that was published four times a year, but budget constraints have reduced its existence to a website with a mix of articles and links to websites of gay-owned establishments and gay-themed events; as it did not have the criteria required for the preceding content analysis (subscription base, separate issues published at regular intervals) it was not included. The article, published on the website on July 30, 2013, is actually about a trip that Harding took to Uganda in early 2010, before the anti-gay movement began in earnest with the proposal of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. Harding switches back and forth between his trip and the present situation in Uganda, viewing his experience in the context of what is going on there today, but despite a few inane observations about the homosocial interactions between men in Uganda—

hand-holding and other things that would be considered signs of affection in the West—he does not actually talk to or interact with any gay men or lesbians in Uganda, mainly because it was not the purpose of his trip. He had travelled to Uganda to interact with the primates in the region, or, as he put it, to have his “Sigourney *Gorillas in the Mist*” moment (Harding, [www.outtraveler.com](http://www.outtraveler.com), July 30, 2013). He was not there because of what was going on, and only became aware of the attitude towards homosexuality in Uganda shortly before he was to depart. While it is easy to look back on a trip to a place that later became extremely dangerous for people like Harding, his hindsight does very little to provide insight on what it would be like to travel to Uganda today.

As stated previously, the Anti-Homosexuality bill divides homosexual behavior into two categories: “aggravated homosexuality,” and “the offense of homosexuality.” Aggravated homosexuality is defined as any homosexual act committed by someone who is HIV-positive, a parent, a person who engages in homosexual acts with minors or persons with disabilities, and repeat offenders. The offense of homosexuality includes same-sex sexual acts, involvement in a same-sex marriage, and the attempt to commit aggravated homosexuality. As it stands, the law dictates, among other stipulations:

Three years in prison for failure to report a homosexual within twenty-four hours of learning of his or her crime; seven years in prison for “promotion,” which would include not only advocacy but also even simple acknowledgement of the reality of homosexuality; life imprisonment for one homosexual act; and for “aggravated homosexuality” (which includes sex while HIV-positive, sex with a disabled person, or simply sex, more than once, marking the criminal as a “serial offender”), death. (Harris 4, 2013)

According to this, not only is it illegal just to be gay, but any person who simply admits to the existence of homosexuality can be detained. In addition, the lawmakers who drafted the bill were careful to frame the argument against homosexuality as “a comprehensive consolidated legislation to protect the traditional family” (5). As a result of painting homosexuality as a threat to the family, something that is extremely important to the Ugandan people, the bill has garnered phenomenal support within the country.

There are two main catalysts for the strong support of state-sanctioned homophobia in Uganda. Similar to the situation that exists in Russia, Uganda is desperately struggling to assert its own identity, not just within Africa but throughout the world. As a former colony of Britain—during the time when colonization of African countries by European powers was the most prevalent—Uganda took on a lot of British laws and customs, consequently merging their perceived identity with that of Britain. Now that Uganda is an independent country, there is a lot of rejection of anything British—and ultimately Western—as an attempt to move away from the time they existed as a colony and towards a new, uniquely African identity. In fact, much of African gay politics focus on a single debate regarding homosexuality’s authenticity within African cultures and identities. Most anti-gay rhetoric is based on the idea that homosexuality is a Western import imposed on African cultures that corrupts the fundamental values of “Africanness,” especially reproduction, or what is thought to be the “natural” process of creating a family; being gay is considered un-African (Cush 76, 2010). Those that oppose this way of thinking believe that homophobia is an attempt for struggling countries to mask other social, political and economic issues (Ray 70, 2010). They argue that homosexuality is innate, and one’s humanity is not a right that a state can give or take away. Furthermore, many argue that same-sex sex and gender “abnormalities” were present in African societies prior to colonialism.

The other major catalyst is not related to identity, but is instead a group with an enormous amount of influence in a part of the world trying to discover its own identity: American evangelicals. According to Daniel Englander, the most notable and most powerful of evangelical groups is called the Fellowship—also known as the Family. The Fellowship’s influence in Uganda has existed long before the country’s crusade against homosexuality began, and to this day no country in the world has received more money from this group. Many believe the reason for the Fellowship’s interest in Uganda is to exert influence over policies in a place that will accept them—a place that is particularly vulnerable to anything that seems as though it might maintain order—especially when their power to influence policy is so weak in the United States. If they can be successful in Uganda—and they have been so far—they can then broadcast those successes back home as a way to prove their way of thinking works. In fact, Parliament member David Bahati—credited with the introduction of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill—is known to have a close relationship with the Fellowship, having dined with American and international members of the Fellowship only days before presenting the bill to Parliament. Englander writes “when asked if there was a connection between the Fellowship and the Bill, Bahati replied ‘There is no “connection.” They are the same thing. The Bill is the Fellowship’” (Englander 1271, 2011). Further, American evangelical leaders have encouraged the use of anti-gay rhetoric by Ugandan pastors, and as a result of the popularity of homophobia, the use of this rhetoric has become a tactic used by the pastors to increase the number of parishioners in their respective congregations.

What does all this mean for gay and lesbian travelers to Uganda? It is clearly not a safe place for homosexuals, although some would argue that the fact that a law like the Anti-Homosexuality Bill can be passed would make it unsafe for almost anyone with a mindset of

acceptance and openness. Despite this, popular travel guidebook publisher Lonely Planet named Uganda as the top country to explore in 2012 (Garcia, [www.advocate.com](http://www.advocate.com), November 8, 2011). While they did make note of the law—only proposed at the time—and acknowledged the fact that Uganda “has very little tolerance for homosexuality, which is illegal,” they still recommended that people travel there, without providing any suggestions for safe travel tips for those who might need it the most. To be fair, there are many reasons to travel to Uganda, as there is a rich cultural history in addition to the unique natural wonders only touched upon by Clark Harding in his article. But what specific things should gay and lesbian travelers know if they are going to go to Uganda? Should they avoid going there altogether, or are there certain things they can do to ensure they are not the victims of the rampant extreme homophobia that is found there? Perhaps more importantly, what is life like for the gay and lesbian people that live there, and is there anything a gay and lesbian traveler can do to assist with their plight? While all these questions could and should be answered by the people who have the access, the platform, and the voice—gay and lesbian travel writers—it is nearly impossible to find the answers in gay and lesbian travel publications, making an unfulfilled promise to readers seem more like, in the case of Uganda, an unfulfilled obligation to the human rights community and the human race in general.

### **Conclusion**

There are many reasons why people travel. Some people travel because they have to—their job requires them to attend meetings in faraway places, or they are responsible for overseeing several different locations over a wide area. For some, their family members may be spread out throughout different parts of a country, or the world, and the only way to see them is through travel. Some people travel in search of a better life, as is the case with international

migration, and some people travel to escape circumstances that might prove dangerous if they stayed. Some people travel for leisure—to relax on the beach with a cocktail—or to learn something—a language or a craft—by immersing themselves in a new culture, wandering around a museum, or simply sitting in a crowded square and people-watching. Travel encompasses all of this and more, and there is no single most important reason for travelling, as each reason is just as valid as the next. Additionally, travel has never been easier than it is today, with wide-body jets enabling us to circumnavigate the globe in a matter of hours instead of months, and the price of travel generally falling within even the most modest of budgets. For gay and lesbian travelers, there is an added dimension to the type of travel taken, as it is important to know what to expect with regards to homosexuality when they choose to visit a place, whether it is which nightclubs are the most popular, or if travelers should be discreet about their sexuality in order to fall in line with local attitudes.

There are also many reasons why people write. Sometimes writing is meant to be kept as a record of events, and sometimes it is meant to act as a catharsis for the writer. At the same time, there are many reasons why people read. Reading can be cathartic for the reader as well, providing a brief respite from the mundanity of everyday life, perhaps acting as a vacation for those unable to travel in the way they might want to. It is no surprise, therefore, that travel and writing have almost always gone hand in hand, serving as an outlet for both writer and reader to share in unique experiences which, in many cases, could not be shared otherwise. Additionally, what separates travel writing from other types of writing is the use of place as a character, a technique often ignored by writers, despite the fact that a place can have characteristics and personality just like a human character. For those writing about travel, they are afforded the luxury of being able to write about a wide range of topics, as the umbrella of travel writing is



extremely broad, and almost any writing with an emphasis on place—from food writing to war correspondence—can be considered a travel piece. It then becomes the responsibility of travel publications, however, to ensure that all types of travel writing are being included within their pages, especially if they claim to be all-inclusive. It is for this reason that gay and lesbian travel publications, by their very definition, should cover all aspects of travel, with a particular focus on what is relevant to gay and lesbian travelers. The sad reality, as this thesis has shown, is that they are not even coming close.

Homosexuals in Nazi Germany were arrested, tortured, and murdered simply for being homosexual. Today, if a gay person in Russia is suspected of disseminating what is considered to be propaganda, they could be fined, imprisoned, or—in the case of foreigners—deported. Moving forward, after the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, a gay person in Uganda receiving the most severe penalty after a conviction could be put to death. These are just a few of the many examples of the trials that gays and lesbians have faced, are facing, and will continue to face. These examples represent the yesterday, today, and tomorrow of gay people all over the world, and yet, if one limited their reading solely to gay and lesbian travel publications, one would have not even the slightest inkling about any of it. With travel being the huge global industry that it is, it is imperative that those in the business of providing information about travel be as inclusive and all-encompassing as possible. This is especially true for gay and lesbian publications, given the added complexity involved for gay and lesbian travelers. Not only do these publications have a responsibility to their readers—for which they are falling woefully short—they have a responsibility to be the voice for those who cannot speak for themselves. It is time for a change in the industry—time for gay and lesbian publications to utilize the platform

they have to make a difference and make good on the promises they have made to their readers.

Gay and lesbian travelers, and gay and lesbian citizens around the world, deserve better.

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