

Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: 20 Years After Vienna

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In 1993 first President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, affirmed that all freedoms (and hence oppressions) are interdependent. This speaks critically to intersectionality, the study of the interactions of multiple systems of oppression or discrimination, and its intersections with privilege. Intersectionality influenced South Africa's groundbreaking Constitutional equality clause, which guarantees the rights of all peoples, including on the grounds of SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity).

Our challenges are not about the issues, which have not changed substantively. We are still dealing with sexualities and genders and their intersections with a range of oppressions and privileges. Our challenge centres on the approaches taken, the imperialist or colonial gaze, how we conceptualise issues, how these lenses shape/d activism. This includes the narrow LGBTQQI discourse, completely ignorant of and sidestepping ancient same sex practices on all continents, including woman to woman marriage in Africa. It also includes classifying the rape of lesbians, ostensibly due to their sexuality, a hate crime, and so divorcing it from its rootedness in gender-based violence and an analysis and challenge of Patriarchy, effectively deradicalising a revolutionary moment. This silofication of our discourse and struggle speaks to a weakness of the global imagination.

We need to indigenise our struggles, and note that violences are structural-cultural, and due to Patriarchy, women are at the centre of this war on our bodies and minds. While we focus on choice, autonomy, desire and pleasure, we need to remember that we need socio-economic-cultural rights to be truly free.

"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." – Steve Bantu Biko, Speech in Cape Town, 1971