

Life, Acceptance, & Gefilte Fish

Henrik J Klijn

“Get all the scales off.”

To illustrate, my dad started to scrape the fish, using long, forceful gestures.

“Are you writing this stuff down? You cut here—behind the gills—throat to belly.”

Deftly, he sliced down the rib cage. “That red bit is the bloodline—too wild—best discarded.” I wondered if that’s how he viewed my lifestyle “choices.” That I was, somehow, discarding our bloodline.

Yonah’s Gefilte Fish

1 kilogram carp

1 cup matzo meal

1 chopped onion

My mom called the night before, panicked at growing unrest in Johannesburg. “And bring Walter with you,” she said.

My dad lost both parents at Sobibor in Poland, while my mother’s grandmother was killed in 1900 by the British at the Irene concentration camp outside Pretoria. Our home was, nevertheless, a happy cocoon. He, frequently pensive though never *verbissen*—bitter—and she, an indefatigable writer channeling good vibes in a bad vibes country.

In the mid-80s, South Africa was a police state. A June 12th, 1986 decree awarded the apartheid regime sweeping authority, indemnity from prosecution, and the right to search and arrest without charge or warrant. The derogation of civil rights gave the increasingly desperate government carte blanche to use force. It also meant the “swart gevaar” (Black danger) was of greater concern to the regime than queerness. And so, those questioning their sexual orientation and gender identity flew under the radar. Not persecuted per se, but also not recognized. Another albatross around the neck of a naughty nation.

Arriving, the guest room was prepared, the duvet folded open invitingly, tiny chocolate on each pillow, hotel-style, mom clearly intent on signaling *geselligheid*, an Afrikaans word about good feels, without English equivalent.

2 eggs

2 teaspoons sugar

Pinch of white pepper

Dad’s culinary excursions were somewhat end-times. Once entering the garage, Mom and I were met with eight half-plucked guineafowl, suspended from the rafters, feet tied, throats slit, blood collecting in eight neatly placed bowls. Buckshot-riddled—inedible—my dad’s chipped molar put paid to his frontiersman-hunter iteration, much to mom’s relief. She, unbeknownst to him, detested gefilte Fridays too.

“I add schmaltz for flavor. And Spanish paprika in half the mixture—for us—your mom’s favorite spice is butter.”

He laughed at his joke. “It’s ok. We don’t all have to be the same.”

On November 5, 2024, Donald Trump won his second term in a sweeping victory. Having lived through several iterations of political mayhem, which include growing up in Apartheid South Africa—and Trump 1.0—it’s hardly paranoid to anticipate LGBTQ+ rights being threatened. Again.

A critical aspect of Roe v Wade’s undoing was the zealotry with which the Supreme Court put paid to precedent. In his concurring opinion, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote [the court may use similar rationale](#) to “reconsider” Obergefell, the ruling that entrenched same-sex marriage.

But here’s the snag: more Americans—especially younger ones—now identify as LGBTQ+. Yet, for the first time since 2015, support for LGBTQ rights fell while same-sex marriage support dropped two percentage points, according to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) “2023 [American Values Atlas](#).”

Another number stands out. In 2020, two-thirds of Republicans supported marriage equality. “But now, among young Republicans aged 18 to 29, it’s less than half; a cratering of support,” Melissa Deckman, CEO of PRRI, says. It’s notable because we assume unfledged progressives will mollify greyheads over issues.

This coincides with the FBI’s “[2023 Crime in the Nation Statistics](#)” finding that, even as violence in the USA declines, hate crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity are rising—more than 1 in 5 of any hate crime is motivated by anti-LGBTQ+ bias.

And the USA is hardly isolated in its skittishness around LGBTQ+ recognition and rights. Several [European Union countries](#) are fueled by fresh far-right sentiment. Attacking LGBTQ+ rights is a powerful electoral and ideological tool in Hungary and Poland, while in Italy, Georgia

Meloni's far-right government wants to [block legal recognition of families with same-sex parents](#).

[Slovakia's populist president](#) has doctrinal ties to Prime Minister Orban, who decimated LGBTQ+ rights in Hungary.

[Research by Dutch](#) health service GGD in 2023 shows only 43% of young people accept homosexuality, compared to 69% in 2021. Correspondingly, incidents of anti-LGBT+ violence [regularly make Dutch headlines](#).

Authoritarian regimes such as Saudi Arabia and Russia penalize—with the death penalty in Saudi Arabia and Iran—the already marginalized LGBTQ+ community, thereby attempting to erase sexual diversity.

In 32 of the 54 African states, homosexuality is forbidden, with ultra-conservative religious fever—inflamed by US-brewed white evangelical Christianity—sweeping the continent, infecting once-tolerant places such as Senegal.

South Africa, one of the most liberal constitutions worldwide, barred US pastor Steven Anderson specifically over his anti-LGBTQ+ remarks. Anderson, who operates the [Faithful Word Baptist Church](#), regularly spews that homosexuality should be punishable by death.

Brazil, with elevated trans visibility in companies and institutions, simultaneously has the highest number of [trans](#) deaths worldwide.

The result is queer battle fatigue at constant code-switching in spaces where negative stereotypes of LGBTQ individuals run counter to appropriate behaviors. And exhaustion at

microaggressions, like when you book a king bed but get twins, because “I just thought... since you’re men...”

“I’ll make large flat cakes with the mixture, but you can probably make something a little more, you know, elegant.”

I wasn’t sure if he was trying to be inclusive or sarcastic. His voice sounded sincere, so I went with inclusive. “And you can take a Tupperware-full for you guys,” he said. Or something like that.

Pinch of salt

4 T vegetable oil

“You know, the key is knowing when and what to fight,” Dad said after dinner over *pousse-café*. “Everyone dies. Just pick a worthy hill. And never learn to milk the cow.”

He smiled at me. “It’s all ok. I’m thankful you found your someone.”

It was the last time we spoke.

Henrik Y'honahtan Klijn succumbed to eternal sleep a week later. After nearly a lifetime, my rights remain a worthy hill.