

Pink capitalism in
giovanni's room by
james baldwin



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The emergent evolution in the traits of human personality, both physically and psychologically created a new and unique dimension to extend the nebulous boundaries of exploration. While grouting the breaches that occurred during the understanding of the intricacies of man as a social animal, several portals which were clogged by factors such as constraint and confined exemplars of psychology, opened, which later were deemed as the fundamental tools to understand human behavior at certain levels. The conventional notions that were congealed over time are now being challenged and surmised continuously through a different angle, which not only facilitate the chances to understand the complexities in a lucid and clear way but also provides an ease to gaze it through a semipermeable sheet.

“ Capitalism is a social system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights, in which all property is privately owned.” - (Rand 8)

Capitalism, which propagated the feeling of individual rights and which acted as a flare to signal that the shackles of communism were getting fragile. This started a new kind of wave, a form of slow yet incessant revolution that transitioned not just the way people contemplate but also sparked an individualism ebullition. People no longer wanted to constraint and confine their potential working for higher classes or communists but followed the principal of private ownership, producing their own goods by the means of production. This lead them to earn greater profits based on their caliber.

Such an economic system, though consumerist in approach strengthened the idiomatic decision making capacity. This brawny system commemorated

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an autonomous identity in making, governed by their own rules, extending the boundaries of thought process in order to make greater profit.

Capitalism as a system which is economic and consumer based has the main attributes of private property and wage labor. On the other hand communism which has a vaguely predisposed slavery tendency further restrain the independent thought process, is one of the few factors which curb the rise of a relative autonomous identity. In the nineteenth century, when Capitalism was emerging running parallel to communism and other political and economic systems, its impact was diminutive and was limited to few of the bourgeoisie classes. As Capitalism took its toll on a global level, there was a deep appetency for an identity which can be labeled as an independent one, free from all sorts of manipulation including the physical and psychological one.

The queer subculture, a nebulous body that remain abstruse until the end of nineteenth century, emerged with the emanation of capitalism as it gave the individuals a relative autonomy. As the economy boomed, more and more people developed a sense of self-governing practice, that build a common psychological factor. One of the underlying and basic factor was a true sense of liberation, which irrespective of political, economical or social arena was exposed. People no longer wanted to be near the periphery and ruled by an external force due to the influence of capitalism. This facilitated the cognitive factor and pushed people to step out of the closet, stripping the fabricated identity and exposing their genuine self.

James Baldwin meticulously sketches a gray portrait of the colorful and vibrant queer community. He was among the few novelist in the twentieth century who raised his voice against the injustice on the gays and lesbians community. Amidst the outrageous and draconian incidents which surfaced, persecuting the homosexuals or framing them for the sexuality or deeming homosexuality as a mental disorder, Baldwin audaciously dissented the imprudent and anachronistic law that labeled queer people as criminal. The dissemination of the queer culture like a wildfire, though intermittent due to judicial hitches and also due to religious intolerance conjured up the thick masses that was sidelined to the periphery yet impeded in number. Baldwin meticulously picks up the intricacies and complexities in the LGBT lifestyle and people and weaves them as the central theme of the novel.

Giovanni's Room as a whole gives the cryptic insight, a cipher deliberately and wisely left in the fragment of time when society of America deemed homosexuality as a crime. Baldwin not only tries to transcend a nebulous, almost non-existent subculture of gays in the society but also emphasizes the double subjugation on gay black people as he himself was an African-American writer. The novel subtly yet with discretion builds itself by knitting a love story between two young men, David and Giovanni in the heart of Paris. Baldwin who dedicated his novel *Giovanni's Room* to his former unrequited love Lucien Happersberger, a Swiss artist who was married at the age of seventeen. A story that explores the fundamental feeling of love between two young men and with a parallel track explores the conundrum and complexities associated with a love that grows outside the boundaries of society.

Baldwin tries to decimate the boundaries, psychological constraints and stigma that adheres to homosexuality. With the hefty amount of sexual references between the same sex in the novel, it is clearly visible that Baldwin amidst the controversies and stigma surrounding homosexuality dauntlessly. A simple but estranging love story that oscillates between the iconoclastic and conventional rules keeps the novel cohesive and at the same time breaking through the preconceived notion of the then puritanical society. The idea cultivates slowly and steadily of how tedious it is to be a closeted person in a society where belonging to a certain sexuality out of choice is a criminal offense.

Capitalism as a socio-economic system entered the market after the failed feudalism. Tracing back to the basics of how capitalism as a system emerged and evolved and how it became a fundamental entity to surpass the constraints to go global, disseminating its veins not just in the First world but also the Third world community. The middle age feudalism comprising multiple diminutive dictators owning lands marked with specific rules. The lower class or the peasants used to work in the land at the expense of protection from external forces. This system curbed the further possibility for the peasants and the dictator class to evolve and produce innovative ideas which further congealed the growth of the lower class and hence economy as a competition flunked due to its self contained characteristic. As a result, the peasant class revolted and used their own crops to sell instead of exchanging them for protection becoming lords themselves.

Capitalism has now become an imperative tool in the global economy as one of the ideal, effective and ingenious system even after its shortcomings. To narrow it down:

“ Capitalism is a social and economic system where both the means of production and any associated trade are privately owned.” (Web)

Since Capitalism is a convoluted system interconnected to various other system, as for the smooth functioning of the society, it is important to advocate an amalgamation of various other systems. The historical development of Capitalism as a ' free labor' system where workers were free laborers in two ways. Firstly, they have the ability to work and have the freedom to sell their labor for wages to whom they want to. Secondly, they are free from the dictatorial power subjugating them but it solely depends upon the labor power. The ' free labor' system which was based on the amount of labor power and which subscribe the use of wages gave rise to an autonomous identity, as freedom released the previous shackles and fetters of people psychologically.

This system of ' free labor' gave people a sense of understanding the self caliber they possess, and how they can be independent based on the labor they do. This sense of relative autonomous identity gave people a new hope to step out of the closets, in other words, their self made inextricable complex web. Due to this, the compressed communities at the periphery start to sprang up like mushrooms and one such sidelined subculture was the gay and lesbian culture. The queer community which was submerged until eighteenth century with no such mythological or historical evidences in the

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history emerged in large masses. The 1970, was one of the momentous year for the gay and lesbian subculture as well as the women community which finally achieved true liberation and changed the sexual panorama of the nation.

As the queer subculture impeded due to the perks of true liberation and gained momentum due to equal amount of homophobic events that took place, an equal magnitude of counter force was applied by the community in opposition. These counter attacks, literary or physically produce an atmosphere to curb the inequality by uprooting it. The ramifications resulted in the emergence of gay bars and queer market products for two reasons. Firstly, to raise awareness that homosexuality was not a mental disorder and should be removed from the psychiatric perspective and secondly they sabotaged the entire brawny belief system that manipulated the twentieth century era.

Not only the term capitalism got another angle to be gazed and contemplate upon but a relationship was formed between the free labor system of capitalism and homosexuality. As the wage based system demanded a 'sociable' factor, more and more people start acknowledging their sexuality in a larger context instead of confined room, where the homosexual desires were born in isolation and assassinated then and there. As the concept of capitalism unfolded and propagated globally, the gay and lesbian subculture gained momentum resulting in the competition at the economic arena. It resulted in the in the interconnection of Capitalism and Homosexuality and the construction of Pink Capitalism or Rainbow Capitalism.

Pink Capitalism, from a critical perspective is a term which delineates the assimilation or incorporation of the LGBTQ movement and various sexual assortment to market economy and capitalism. The juxtaposition of various sexual diversity into market economy with a motive to obtain greater profits from the conventionally subjugated sections of the society. As these oppressed communities such as gays and lesbians start to come out of the closets, the demand for the independent products impeded along with the equal consumption. One of the reason for this audaciousness was the growth of Homo-nationalism among the people, initially gays and lesbians and even the cis class stood up for the inequality. As these discriminated class assimilated a hefty purchasing power over time, it was possible to construct a new and specific market solely for the gay community. These include gay bars and clubs, LGBTQ tourism and other specific gay oriented products.

The Pink Money which is associated with the purchasing power of gay and lesbian community created an ebullition of gay bars and nightclubs. The market power of pink money is a positive ramification for LGBTQ communities, as it give them a sense of complete identity after years of persecution and inequality. James Baldwin in his novel *Giovanni's Room* vividly delineates the image of nightclub. " He was in a good mood and I, of course, was in a good mood too, and this meant we would end up drinking in Jaques' favorite bar, a noisy, crowded, ill-lit sort of tunnel, of dubious - or perhaps not dubious at all, or rather too emphatic reputation. Every once in a while it was raided by the police." (23)

Pink Capitalism has evolved in a parallel path along side modern capitalism.

Pink Capitalism can be said as the fragment or an outcome of the modern
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capitalism as there was an ebullition of various sexual diversities. In the novel Giovanni's Room, the protagonist David is bisexual and romances with his girlfriend Hella whom he met in a bar in Saint Germain des Pres and later with Giovanni whom he the first countenance with in a gay bar of Guillaume in Paris. David also has a brief sexual encounter with Sue, a girl from Philadelphia. The sexual orientation of David in Giovanni's Room, which is a convoluted sexuality opens up a new and colossal picture of the diversities in sexualities. The acquaintance with these diversities expanded the market as new and different sexual diversities unfolded.

The Pink Money and Pink Capitalism spread in an intermittent way going through several phases. These phases marked the evolution of Pink Capitalism as a major factor in economy as well as homo-nationalism. Before opening the intricate knots about homo-nationalism and how it affected Pink Capitalism, it is significant to know the phases.

The primary phase of pink capitalism is called the underground phase. In this phase, amidst the persecution of homosexual people, gay bars and clandestine which sprang up in Europe and UK during the last decades of nineteenth century. It was the first wave of LGBT rights movement and was triggered with the printing of gay magazines but the movement was tranquilized due to the World War I and World War II with the rise in fascism. The second phase was the community building phase. During this phase, a counter attack towards homophobia due to fascism appeared. Although the consumption and the pink money remained minimal, certain association of these sidelined communities were formed which advocated the meetings of communities and opposed the promiscuous and erotic behavior of

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homosexual people. It was during this second phase homosexuality was stripped from the mental disease. James Baldwin novel Giovanni's Room was published during this phase which talked about homosexuality so audaciously but was one of the product of consumption. Giovanni's Room that was constraint within the four walls of a room where the complexities of sexuality and the intricacies surrounding it took place.

The room is vividly described by James Baldwin and is seemed to hold the heavy air where two different sexualities merged. The room also symbolize the secret and is often shown as ransacked with dark curtains and dingy walls. One of instances from the novel is: " I scarcely know how to describe that room. It became, in a way, every room I had ever been in and every room I find myself in hereafter will remind me of Giovanni's Room. We, or rather Giovanni, kept the windows closed most of the time." (76)

The third phase was called the integration in media culture phase. During 1970, when the gay and lesbian liberation movement took place which decriminalize homosexuality, a fresh wave of LGBT liberation along with the feeling of homo-nationalism initiated. With the commemoration of homo-nationalism, homosexual acts were no longer a stigma in the urban hub such as cities of Europe and UK which reveled the unique sexual diversity of the people.

Considering the homosexual acts, identity and their relationship compatible with the norms of the society, homo-nationalism augmented not just physically but also psychologically. The third phase was the phase of transition when homophobia was opposed by social and political institutions.

One of the concrete reason for the liberation was the limitless potential of the writers and musicians to convey the precarious plight of LGBT communities. One of the hitching factor and a humongous hindrance was the religion that remained stagnant to the new liberation and incessantly opposed it deeming homosexuality as sin.

The incorporation of homo-normative into the puritanical hetero-normative not just opened a new dimension but also completely changed the outlook of market economy and capitalism. From an archaic point of view, the process of sexual freedom and capitalism runs in a parallel direction, as it is based on consumption, but the non reproductive practices such as homosexuality and sodomy which do not produce any offspring. This distorted the economy as the wave of liberation helped people to celebrate their diverse sexuality, it also affected the market as the market economy went down. To counter such distortion, a new market was setup, specifically for the gay and lesbian communities, for the greater profit from the traditionally subjugated sections of the society.

With the successful ramifications in the market economy due to the brawny fragment of the capitalism: Pink Capitalism, different and innovative strategies were advocated by different associations to produce gay friendly products which further facilitated the overall economy of the market. One such strategy is Pinkwashing, a portmanteau word which in context of LGBT which delineated strategies to promote a queer friendly product specifically by the activists to raise awareness with an internal hidden motive to help the economy.

Giovanni's Room focuses on two different entities. Firstly, it emphasizes the intricacies surrounding the room where David and Giovanni explored their sexuality and secondly Guillaume gay bar was the pivotal point in the novel. The encounter of Giovanni, who was an Italian bartender meets David who came to Paris to find a job. The gay bar is not just a place in Paris but it possess a historical significance as the bar symbolizes the unflinching and valiant entity standing in the heart of Paris during the age when homosexuality was criminalized. It signifies the evolution of homosexuality and how it was not just confined to small dark rooms with closed curtains and dingy walls and was not just a desire of isolation but a full fledged complete identity where people can be who they actually are instead of draping them in the fabric of common masses. James Baldwin, time and again brings out the vivid imagery of the Guillaume bar in the novel. " I remember that the bar, that night, was more than ordinarily crowded and noisy. All of the habitués were there and many strangers, some looking and some just staring." (23) Another reference of the bar is: This bar was practically in my quartier and I had many times breakfast in the nearby working man's cafe to which all the nightbirds of the neighborhood retired when the bars closed. (24)

The novel brilliantly captures the panoramic view of the pre-liberation events, where people were compatible to remain inside the fragile closets yet wanted to break the constraints. Giovanni's Room incredulously captures this dilemma along with the feeling of homo-national in the urban centers of big countries. The juxtaposition of capitalism and LGBT

movement, for the general greater profit in the market economy through bars and nightclubs, LGBT tourism and other queer-friendly products.

Giovanni's Room by James Baldwin unfolds multiple themes and issues of homosexuality and homo-nationalism but on a wider scale, the novel itself is a product of consumption if not colossal sense, but it acquires a diminutive position, no wonder its publication even after sixty years. While the novel talks about the second wave and one of the significant waves as is studded with hefty sexual references and of the momentous fragment of pink capitalism: bars and nightclubs. The Guillaume bar which stands as a powerful symbol of unflinching and valiant efforts in opposition to the homophobia after the fascist movement. The novel also captures the panoramic view of the pre-liberation events, where people were compatible to remain inside the fragile closets yet wanted to break the constraints. Giovanni's Room incredulously captures this dilemma along with the feeling of homo-national in the urban centers of big countries. The juxtaposition of capitalism and LGBT movement, for the general greater profit in the market economy through bars and nightclubs, LGBT tourism and other queer-friendly products.