

Transcript of Podcast 059: Do You Have Pride In Your Country?

{Intro -

{Extract from an interview from Deutsche Welle with Angel Maxine}

{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a fortnightly series looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Brit with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'whys' behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

As I type the framework for this podcast, I'm aware that Southern England is having a bit of a heatwave, with temperatures in the low 30s Celsius. Be aware that not all of the UK is suffering the same issues. Last Friday was a particularly good one as half of my Twitter and Instagram timeline melted on the hottest day of the year by far, while I woke up to a whole morning of heavy rain and temperatures that weren't even the hottest day of the week. 13 degrees in mid-June is not entirely summery, but I'd rather have that than 31. Just, you know, with less rain.

The weekend was drier, a bit warmer too. I did Parkrun for the first time in a while on the Saturday, and while it felt pretty quick (and I always know it's going to be a good run when I don't get lapped), it turns out the fastest finisher was a minute and a half slower than usual so my time ended up being only slightly quicker than my average. That said, I'd be interested to know what I'd be like on a Parkrun circuit that's, you know, flat. There's a new one started this month in Govan, about 3 miles away, and I walked around the circuit on Sunday. It's not suitable for bare feet, being a bit too knobbly, but it'll be fine for the minimalist sandals and I can easily get to Govan. There's a direct bus from where I live, although curiously it takes such a circuitous route that I'd actually be quicker to run there. But probably not a good idea before a Parkrun.

I've been doing something really boring of late, plotting the local railway stations and seeing how many I've walked past, because there's just so many - like, there's 10 within a mile of where I live, never mind the rest of the Glasgow metro area. While I'm quite fond of local transport, I'd say having 10 railway stations within a mile is maybe just a tad excessive - at the other extreme though, Sheffield, a similar sized city, has less than 10 railway stations in total, although certainly the hills there don't help. At the moment though there's industrial action on Scotrail so the number of services currently operating is lower than usual. And I usually walk everywhere I need to anyway.

What else have I been doing? Oh, a couple of weeks ago I had an online interview with Asma Younus for the online Travel.Radio radio station. She's doing a weekly segment where she interviews travel bloggers, and I was one of the first she reached out to, so I feel quite honoured about that to be honest. It was only supposed to be a 10 minute thing in the final broadcast (I said good luck to her editor who had to distil almost an hour's chat. I did warn her in advance that I talked a lot), but in the event they kept nearly half an hour's worth of chat in. She did say I had a nice, soothing, voice too, so that's, I mean I know many people have said that but radio is her job (she does things on BBC Radio Manchester) so coming from her that's pretty high praise. There's a link to the site in the show notes - it'll be Asma Younus's show (Global Gossip) on 27 June.

My last podcast also got a rave review from one of my friends, who said: "This episode is hilarious. I've been laughing out loud a lot walking down the street, looking ridiculous". She then sent me four things I either got wrong or misremembered, including that Bissap is made from the flowers of the hibiscus, rather than the leaves; and Switzerland, despite not being in the EU, is in EFTA, and has bilateral trade agreements with the EU in addition, so there are no customs checks. Also, apparently I have been to Pere Lachaise one other time, in May 2018, with said friend, who shall remain nameless but if you think it's obviously Laura then I can't tell you you're wrong, which I have no recollection of and I honestly don't know why.

This podcast will not be as hilarious. I mean, I can do my best but it's going to be a bit serious, slightly morbid, and ... yep, I think Laura's switched off now to save for later.

It was Pride Month last month, that annual event where corporations brand everything with rainbows and pretend they have always committed themselves to the cause of queer liberation, when really it's just an excuse to profit from the Pink Pound. Even Disney seem to having a spat about it with the Florida State Governor; it's one of those situations where I hope they both lose.

Anyway. I'm discovering Glasgow actually *has* an LGBTQIA+ scene, or at least, there's a Queer bookshop (primarily Trans, of all the acronym, but covers all bases) not very far from me in the Strathbungo area of Southside Glasgow and I popped in there a couple of weeks ago - so many books, but also badges! Proper and old-school badges, some of which are modern recreations of the kind of badges I'd've seen at University. They even have a Demisexual badge (helpfully described as 'an asexual badge that looks like an arrow', but still, at least it's there). The person running the shop gave me a list of several other places in Glasgow I might want to make contact with, including a Queer cafe in the city centre and an organisation that runs things both online and in person, like Queer hiking, a non-binary get-together, and all manner of zooms. This, coupled with a couple of kinky boardgame groups (the overlap between kink and LGBTQIA+ is not a given, but there's certainly an overlap, and despite being a travel blogger, the most popular page on my website by far is the one talking about asexuality and kink. Make of that what you will) means if I could get my social anxiety in order, I might, might, just be able to break a few chunks in my occasional loneliness up here. I'd have that problem wherever I lived, to be honest, though, well, I mean, I do have that problem, like, I lived in Nottinghamshire for 15 years and know about four people, one of whom is only there because of me (and I met her online first anyway), and one of the other two is someone I know from online first.

But, that's not the purpose of this podcast. Rather, because it was Pride month, I wanted to talk about things related to the LGBTQIA community, but while I've previously talked about my personal experiences of queerity, this time I wanted to talk a bit about how things are in the rest of the world. It was prompted because I follow a couple of people heavily involved in the community in Ghana, and I figured the situation of the Ghana Rainbow Scene wasn't something my audience would know a lot about. And then I wondered, well, what other countries would be interesting to match with it, for balance.

Some of this pod is positive. Much of this pod is negative. But things are getting better, I promise. Unless you're a TERF, in which case you can suck my ... toes.

{Ghana National Anthem}

I'm going to start this pod in West Africa, and specifically in Ghana. Now, I know many countries in Africa aren't great for the LGBTQIA+ community, mostly because of colonial religious viewpoints being imposed during the Victorian era and, unlike in much of the UK, staying put at that level rather than being softened over time. One of the worst is Uganda, where they often flirt with the death penalty for overt homosexuality. On the one hand, Ghana (and nearby Nigeria) isn't quite that bad, but that's as far as the good news goes.

In fact the punishment is three years in jail. Homosexuality has been effectively banned in Ghana since 1861, and this was reaffirmed within a couple of years after independence. [The rule specifically bans 'unnatural carnal knowledge', but many of the things this might also cover are effectively ignored. Tellingly, the same article in question specifically also bans bestiality, telling you exactly what they thought of gay sex]. This is a reflection of society in general, which has a very negative view on, well, pretty much the whole of Queer culture. A survey 2021 by ACILA, the African Centre for International Law and Accountability, revealed that not only were over 80% of Ghanaians as a whole opposed to homosexuality (the word used was 'normalisation', but we can take that to mean 'equality'), but 87% were opposed to public meetings to even discuss Queer issues. In addition, while pretty much everyone believes the police have a responsibility to crack down on what you might call 'mob justice', 20% of those surveyed said this responsibility does not apply to the Queer community. That is to say, 1 in 5 people in Ghana believe Queer people should be the victim of, shall we say, vigilantism, without any fear of punishment.

Other stunning stats the survey revealed include that three-quarters of Ghanaians support politicians who spout anti-Queer rhetoric, and just over a third actively support not just discrimination, but actual doxxing, including sacking from jobs or expelled from education establishments, purely on account of their sexuality or gender orientation.

One such politician on an anti-Queer crusade is Sam George, MP for Ningo-Prampram, in the outskirts of Accra. He has a history of anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment, having been accused of using false statistics from organisations like the Ghana AIDS commission to create hatred for LGBT people, and lying about

government funds going into healthcare for gay people (as highlighted by twitter user @JustDerby in June 2022). But in late 2021 he proposed a law called the "Family Values Bill". According to him, the existing legislation doesn't go nearly far enough to protect 'family values', because, you know, hardline religious conservatives are a bit paranoid and obsessed about these things. His proposal includes up to 10 years imprisonment for even promoting or distributing Queer resources, including just being involved in any Queer association, making this podcast illegal in Ghana, you might want to think about that; a year in jail for public displays of affection between not just people of the same sex/gender, but also with someone who cross-dresses, never mind has undergone actual transition; and potential forced gender surgery on people who are defined as Intersex. Amongst other provisions; it's 36 pages long.

Internally, the bill has a lot of support. Not just cross-party support within the political system (the only party to express opposition is the Liberal Party, which has no seats in parliament anyway), but also amongst both the traditional Kingdoms (which still hold a lot of influence in the country's vibe; one chief said he'd storm parliament with 10,000 people to ensure the bill was passed), and not just the established Anglican church but also many of the other religions in the country. The majority of external commentary, from international organisations to external religious bodies, have been uniformly negative, but I guess they don't get a vote.

To be honest, incidents over the last couple of years suggest society is not just ready for this bill, but that the bill will codify and legalise situations that already occur. For instance, in January 2021, Ghana's first LGBT community centre opened, run by a Trans Woman. It lasted less than two months before being closed by police, following a series of violent protests against and attacks on it. More recently (late June 2022), 30 Rainbow People were arrested by police after a house party in Accra; the party was attacked by robbers but when the police arrived, the robbers explained the house was being used for an LGBT get-together and the police arrested them rather than the original robbers, on the grounds of 'unlawful assembly'. There are suggestions the arrests were, shall we say, 'not peaceful'. In addition, some of the partygoers seem to have been there secretly, but the police informed their families not just of their arrest but also the reason for their arrest, thereby effectively 'outing' them; their families responded by disowning them. Arrested and exiled from home, just because of who you are.

This incident prompted a twitter joke from Ghanaian musician and film director Wanlov the Kubolor ('vagabond', in the Ghanaian language Ga), who is one of the few people within Ghana to fight for LGBTQIA rights. He asked "what be the difference between police & armed robbers?", to which twitter user @echo_scorpion replied "Police wear uniform".

Also in June 2022, to celebrate Pride Month, billboards were erected in Accra and Tamale with the phrase 'Love, Tolerance, and Acceptance'. They did not last very long, being torn down by an angry mob. In both cities, the mob was encouraged by politicians; the one in Accra being the target of the same Sam George, who tweeted 'So long as they mount those billboards, we would bring them down', while the one in Tamale was targeted by local MP Ibrahim Murtala Muhammed, who said pretty much the same thing: "any material that is pasted on any billboard within my jurisdiction, and it's from those people, we'll pull it down and burn it". Note that both say 'we'; this isn't just rabble-rousing, this is actual direct action by the MPs themselves.

Physical attacks are also common, and those committing them tend to assume the police will turn a blind eye; as we've already heard they're not afraid to commit to the cause themselves. The media site Pinknews reported in January 2022 of an attack in the coastal city of Tema, just east of Accra, by a group of people who attacked and stabbed a man walking home because they thought he was gay, without any proof or confirmation. He ended up in hospital with wounds that took over a month to heal.

There are some beacons of light. For example, apart from Wanlov mentioned earlier, there are occasional individuals who try their best to stand against the tide. Pinknews in 2021 reported the intentions of the singer Angel Maxine, a trans woman, and her mother, Araba Forson. Angel has said the situation is so bad in Ghana she's attempted suicide several times, and if the Family Values Bill passes she will do so again. Her mother has stated she's regularly attacked with tomatoes when she visits her daughter, and said she'll walk naked to parliament in protest if the bill is passed. In a country that values traditional family values, it's rare to find a parent who stands by their child this much. There's also the artist and photographer in Kumasi, Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi, who was interviewed by Reuters. She is another trans woman, who, as much as she can, exhibits her work in galleries and safe spaces across the country. Her art focuses mainly on her own transition journey, and she's vowed to continue living and working in Ghana regardless of whether the bill is passed or not, out of solidarity with those in similar situations who are unable to flee the country, even though both her art and her very existence are under threat from the bill.

There are a couple of LGBT+ organisations in Ghana, including Rightify Ghana, an LGBTQIA+ rights group, and Silent Majority, who define themselves as 'a community of Ghanaians standing in solidarity with queer and transgender Ghanaians everywhere', but with the best will in the world, it feels like less of a silent majority and much more of a 'last stand'. There's no word on when the bill will be passed, but it feels, well, somewhat inevitable and even seen as something most Ghanaians will be looking forward to.

I found Ghana to be a great country to visit, but you might want to think if you should go right now.

Let's move on to somewhere with a few brighter rainbows, shall we?

{India National Anthem}

India's proving to have been a bit of a mixed bag of issues in the LGBTQIA+ community, as far as I can tell anyway. There seems to be a political drive to implement more rights for the Queer community, which isn't always matched by the will of public opinion - kind of the exact opposite of the situation in the UK.

What certainly doesn't help is India is a much more regional country than most - the average citizen of Mizoram is more different to the average citizen of Uttar Pradesh, in terms of culture, background, lifestyle, and even language, than you'd expect from two places 1,600km apart (the approximate distance between Moscow and Ekaterinberg, in the Sverdlovsk Oblast sub-entity of Russia).

That said, while many commentators might point to a rural/urban divide (and a divide between contemporary and traditional lifestyles; a survey conducted internally at the Indian Institute of Technology's New Delhi site, 72% of respondents believed homosexuality and heterosexuality were as normal as each other, for instance), it's a lot more nuanced than that. There aren't too many surveys that assess the wider Indian public's opinion of issues like the Queer community, but outside of specific technological and government circles, tacit approval appears to be relatively low.

Pew Research did some surveys across the 2010s in various countries around homosexuality in particular, and on the question 'should homosexuality be accepted by society', 37% of Indians said 'yes', as compared with 14% in 2014.

A report conducted in 2019 by Azim Premji University, a small private university in Bangalore that seems to specialise in Economics and Public Policy, had a small section on the subject of same-sex relations, and concluded that overall, a little more than 50% rejected the notion that such relationships should be accepted, and only just under 20% had a small or strong belief that they should. They drilled deeper into this though and found it was both highly regional - Uttar Pradesh registered a 36% agreement whilst in Mizoram this was less than 10% - but also related in part to media exposure to queer culture. Or, more specifically, individuals with greater media exposure (as in, are exposed to things in a wider world view rather than being centred on their own community and their attitudes) have a greater likelihood to accept same-sex relationships in society; 33% amongst those with high exposure as opposed to 10% in those with no exposure. What is interesting though is that it also works the other way - the survey has four levels of 'exposure' and only at 'high exposure' does the proportion of those opposed to same sex relationships go down. The vibe here very much seems to be - greater exposure to queer lifestyles leads to greater acceptance of it, but just because you're exposed to it doesn't mean you're destined to like it. There's also another strong inverse correlation between media exposure and opinion; those with very low media exposure are far more likely not to really care about the subject in the first place (for those who perceive they have 'no exposure' to media, almost 50% have 'no opinion'; it's just over 10% in the segment who claim to have 'high exposure'.) Make of that what you will.

Ipsos did a Global Pride Survey in 2021, and came up with more positive figures, although it might be their survey respondents were more likely to be amongst those well-informed about global LGBTQIA+ trends and information, due to the nature of their respondents, especially as it seems to have been, in India at least, an almost online survey. Anyway, they report that 17% of respondents were attracted to the same sex (the survey worded it as sex), either equally or exclusively, which was the highest of all countries surveyed - Australia was 16%, UK was 15%, and Russia was at the bottom with 4%. As an aside, I did contemplate looking at Russia for this podcast but I valued my mental health too much. In addition, 2% reported as being Asexual, the second highest in the world after Sweden (3%). This probably needs a deeper survey to get to the bottom of.

Other positive notes from this survey are that 21% of Indians surveyed have attended a Pride march (the same proportion as Australia, Mexico, and South Africa, and of the countries surveyed, only behind Spain), 21% (again) of respondents have a relative, friend or work colleague who is Bisexual (middling compared with the

countries surveyed but interestingly the only country in the survey where Bisexuality is more commonly known than homosexuality - the corresponding figures for the UK are 57% v 28% and the USA is very similar), and the 12% who know someone who is non-binary, gender non-conforming, or genderfluid is amongst the highest in the world, behind only Canada, Australia, Peru, the USA, Chile, and Sweden, and equal with the UK and Argentina. Uruguay was not surveyed. 18% have attended a same-sex wedding, on a par with Netherlands (NETHERLANDS) and South Africa, and only behind Mexico, Argentina, and Belgium. However even this survey has limits; while 44% of those surveyed in India believe in same-sex marriages (which is high compared with other surveys of the Indian population), it's one of the lowest countries in this particular survey (while far ahead of the likes of Poland and Russia, it's below the 'global average' of 54%, and the Netherlands has an active approval rate of 84%), although 56% of people say their opinions have changed over the last five years. Relating to other surveys, this has mostly been a positive change, but still there feels like a long way to go. Finally, India ranks above average in many metrics relating to LGBT visibility, including having more LGBT representation in sports teams, films, and advertising, and are the only country in the entire survey to have a majority in favour of Transgender athletes competing under the gender they are rather than the gender they were born as (52% support; Spain has 50%, the only other countries in the 40s% are all in South America - Argentina, Chile, and Brazil).

But, regardless, the proportions liking it are much lower than you might expect, given central government's push for LGBTQIA+ equality.

Same-sex marriage is not currently legal in India as a whole, although one member of parliament, Supriya Sule, introduced a Private Members Bill in April to change this. This is but the latest in a series of attempts to change the law; there have been several previous attempts in the last ten years. While parliament itself lags behind, the legal profession plots its own course.

For instance, in 2018, the Supreme Court effectively decriminalised homosexual sex by ruling that consensual homosexual sex was not covered by the Indian Penal Code. Then, in 2021, a ruling by Justice N Anand Venkatesh prohibited sexual conversion therapy, making India the first recognised Asian country, the second entity behind Taiwan, to do so. What made this ruling particularly interesting is Justice Venkatesh himself underwent related counselling with a Queer counsellor in order to fully understand and appreciate the concept of homosexuality.

In 2020, the high court of the state of Uttarakhand noted that, despite same-sex marriages being technically 'not legally binding nor legally recognisable', they would fall under the same banner as co-habitation and what we in the UK might refer to as 'commonlaw' relationships, giving them some legal protection under Indian law.

Even as early as 2011, a court in the northern state of Haryana ruled that a same-sex marriage between two women was legally protected, despite the wishes of their families and local communities.

One of the issues in India is, because there's a strong community spirit and family structure, and because there's a tendency for communities and families to uphold more traditional lifestyle values - as we heard earlier, the majority of people, especially in more rural areas, are minded to disfavour LGBTQIA+ culture, lifestyle, and beliefs. And while not as notorious as in neighbouring Pakistan, so-called 'honour killings' are used at least as a threat by communities unable to accept a Queer relationship in the family. This doesn't even just happen in rural areas; the Times Of India reports a gay couple in 2019 being forced to flee death threats from their homes in Barasat, a northern suburb of that not-very-small-village of Kolkata. They were subject to firstly social pressure, then torture, then a kangaroo-court in lieu of counselling and told a contract had been taken out on their lives.

A study published in 2019 by the Journal of Interpersonal Violence, a twice-monthly report studying the treatment of victims and perpetrators in cases of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, and other related matters, noted that respondents believed strongly that being Queer was a damage to honour (an average of 4.2/7) and that anti-gay 'honour abuse' was approved of (3.545/7) - second only to Pakistan in both cases, although only a select group of countries and demographics were surveyed, Two other groups surveyed - British Asians and British Whites - gave lower average scores but interestingly the British Asian group scored just below India in both, far above British Whites and even above Iran, suggesting that it's very much a cultural rather than a geographic tendency, and that while more muted, anything that India itself feels is replicated in the Indian diaspora, regardless of other cultural influences.

In general, in India, it seems if you're gay, you're better off in the cities, and in more middle-class circles. [It was ever thus ...] Also, it seems that culture is a very strong driver for anti-Rainbow sentiment. Let's now fly to the

other side of the world from India to a place where, like Ghana, even the government provides little help for people like me.

{El Salvador National Anthem}

Have you ever heard the name William Hernandez? It's not an uncommon name, to be fair, and a websearch brings up an actor & TikTok star, a Cuban chess player, and an artist from Portland. This *particular* William Hernandez, however, is the director of an organisation in El Salvador called 'Asociacion Entre Amigos' ('Between Friends'). This organisation is the leading group in El Salvador that stands up for LGBTQIA+ rights, provides sex education information, and highlights discriminations and human rights violations against Queer People.

The trouble is, this position makes him a regular target for death threats and intimidation. So much, in fact, that he's listed on Amnesty International as being someone the rest of the world needs to be aware of and help out however we can.

El Salvador is not a good place to be anything but a cishet male. This is a country, remember, that jails women for miscarriages. It's predominantly a modern cultural thing, stemming mainly from religion, specifically the long-term Catholicism and upcoming Evangelicalism, neither of which are particularly open to new cultural ideas, including equality and freedoms of lifestyle - especially in the LGBT scene which they hypocritically view as 'displaying signs of immorality'. It being a country with a long recent history of both civil war and right-wing dictatorship hasn't helped, especially when funded by Republican USA Presidents (Nicaragua, so 'beloved' of Ronald Reagan, for instance, is 'just over there', and evidence of CIA activity in El Salvador is pretty clear). And of course Reagan loved the gays. Loved them so much he laughed. Often when they died. But this is not an American Politics podcast; go to NPR if you want those.

Oddly, same-sex sexual activity has been legal since 1822. However this is something enshrined in law as opposed to everyday practice - it's not illegal per se, but it's best not to tell anyone you're doing it. Same-sex relationships are not protected by domestic violence laws nor adopt children, and while there have been recent attempts to legalise same-sex marriage, these feel like they've been more to make a point than to actually change the country, and generally fail in parliament due to bureaucratic intransigence and malicious compliance on behalf of the authorities finding petty faults in the drafted legislations.

Bear in mind, by the way, in surveys conducted by the AmericasBarometer organisation, support for same-sex marriage in El Salvador was 10% in 2010, and by 2017 it had improved to ... 19%. In addition, and something visitors to the country may want to be aware of, a survey by SciELO Brazil in 2013 reported that over half of the population (62%) didn't accept the concept of LGBT in the first place, while a whopping 85% believed that, specifically relating to Transgender, it should not only be illegal but in fact be legal and acceptable to assault someone Transgender purely because of their Transgenderism.

It's unsurprising to learn then that hate crimes are not only common (many hundreds over the last couple of decades, and they're only the ones that are reported), but even the act of reporting them is ... relatively pointless. A law in 2018 allowed people to at least file complaints when discriminated against, but what good's a complaint if all it does it reveal to people with power and guns who and what you are?

As an aside, one of the aspects of Salvadorian culture is the dominance of macho culture - it's a country with a chaotic level of toxic masculinity. Obviously Trans Women bear the brunt of this, but society and culture is not amenable to gay men, lesbians, or even Trans Men; the feeling is that men are men, women are women, both have their place and that place is as God intended. For instance, Aldo Peña is a Trans Man from San Salvador and he's not just had a lack of support in his transgender journey (having to source testosterone from the black market and inject it himself without supervision, which even he identifies as irresponsible, but notes it's the only way), but also having been abused and beaten by the police for no reason other than his transgenderism.

It manifests in two ways. Firstly, the man is very much 'on top'. Gay men get a better deal if they're the dominant partner, as it's a sign of virility, of 'we are men, we are in charge, we fuck', while effeminate 'bottoms' are seen as no more than 'scum'. I guess it's a 'power' thing - Salvadoran society looks better on men who 'top', as that's what men are supposed to do, all assuming of course that they do the same to the woman in their life and that anything they do with other men isn't a precursor to a relationship with them. One assumes their women are supposed to be happy with this, too.

The other issue is that families and neighbours are very unlikely to accept non-cisgender relationships. Aldo Peña lost the trust of his family when he transitioned into a man, and he was going *into* the dominant culture. 'Coming Out' as LGBT is seen as 'bringing shame' onto the family, the community, and people who do are quickly ostracised. It doesn't just affect the individuals involved either - even having friends who are LGBTQIA leads to 'guilt by association', even at times making people assume 'oh your friend is gay so you must be too', making it very hard for anyone LGBTQIA to have a support network outside of other people in the Queer community. And in a country like El Salvador, it's hard to escape from such cultural roadblocks as even if you move away, you can't live as you want because the new town, even if it's a large metropolis, will be populated by people with the same cultural values. One Trans Woman, Zashy Zuley del Cid Velásquez, fled her coastal village after coming out in 2014 and moved around to towns of different sizes to try to escape cultural hatred, but still ended up getting assassinated in 2021 in San Miguel, the third most populous city in the country. Obviously it's not discussed in schools either, which means people go through most of their early life not able to be comfortable with who they are, which leads to LGBTQIA people underperforming at school and in worklife. Indeed, a study of LGBTQIA+ people by D Hernandez & M Hernandez at the University of El Salvador in 1998 reported that 90% of respondents earned less than the minimum wage, 54% worked in the informal sector, and 9% were unemployed.

But back to William Hernandez and the Asociación Entre Amigos. It was established after the Civil War (which ended in 1992) originally to discuss the HIV epidemic that at the time was sweeping the country with absolutely no information or backstory, and kind of naturally morphed into the leading (only?) LGBT rights organisation in the country. They were even responsible for organising and creating the first Gay Pride march in El Salvador, in 1997, and it's been conducted ever since, although you can imagine the reception it gets.

To give you an idea on how bad LGBTQIA+ people are treated, the Human Rights Watch point out that in September 2020, a non-binary Salvadorean was granted asylum because, and I quote, "their gender expression exposed them to police violence and daily abuse and degradation.". The country which granted their asylum? That bastion of human rights and home to the safe right of gender expression ... the UK. Good God! If the UK can be seen as a 'safe-haven' for enbies, can you imagine what El Salvador is like for people like me?

It's a shame really, because with my travel blogger hat on, it is exactly the place for someone like me. But I've talked about this sort of dichotomy before, in my pods on travel influencers.

I suppose I ought to vibe more positively now, so let's go to another continent, and a country I think many of you will know quite well.

{Australia National Anthem}

Ah Australia. Land of the free-r. Terms and Conditions Apply.

Firstly, some positive news. There was recently an election (I feel there is always 'recently an election' and until the Brexit Referendum, I had a vibe of 'who's the Australian PM this week?', but then Things Changed and the UK government felt like it changed personnel more often than The Fall, and made about as much sense), but this election was kinda a big deal because the Labor (no 'u', surprisingly) Party formed their first government since 2013 (four Prime Ministers ago), perhaps ushering in a more, ironically given the main opposition party's name, liberal social policy. The foreign minister, Penelope Wong-Yin Yen, is the first female, openly-Queer-oriented, federal parliamentarian, and having a lesbian in such a high position in government will definitely send a message of intent to the wider public.

This compares with the previous regime, The previous PM, Scott Morrison (also known as 'Scotty from Marketing', a derisory epithet given due to his pre-political career as MD of Tourism Australia - basically he's otherwise a travel blogger's wet dream), is noted for certain anti-Rainbow beliefs, including being an opponent of gay marriage, and, in the recent election campaign, reacting negatively to the concept of Trans athletes. There's a hope that his removal from office is a reflection of a vibe of 'dude, it's 2022, can we not think it's 1922'.

The most widely known issue in recent years in Australia was that referendum on Gay Marriage (the 'Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey) in 2017, or, you know, marriage; the gender and sexual identity of the people involved really doesn't matter, doubly not to my aromantic self. All my engagements have been to cis-women though not all of them have been to het-women. Parce-que l'amour est universelle. But that's by the by. (Nel, what's the point in subtweeting someone who doesn't even know if you're still alive?)

Obviously the whole debate and referendum itself is beyond the scope of this pod, but by all accounts it felt very divisive in society. Although pretty much every poll beforehand gave the 'Yes' campaign not just the lead but in fact a literal majority (the final result of 61.6% voting 'Yes' merely reflected an average of those polls), there was always a loud 'no' campaign, mainly from the Christian Right, as you might expect, and there was a clamour for religious exemptions from people as high up in political life as former Prime Minister John Howard, while on the streets there was an increase in anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment during the election campaign.

That said, Australia is one country where homophobia appears to be a minority rather than a default. The Pew Research Centre's 2019 survey referred to earlier reported the % of people who believed homosexuality should be accepted by society at 81% - while lower than Canada and much of Northern and Western Europe, it's not exactly a low figure and it's certainly one to give confidence for gay travellers to visit Australia (the USA's figure was 72%). What's also interesting is that, while worldwide there's a correlation between education level and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ activities, even though there's a 10 percentage point gap between the least and most educated, that's still 77% v 87%; 77% is also the % of people on the right of politics who agree with the statement. Even amongst segments of society traditionally homophobic, over three quarters of people surveyed believed homosexuality should be accepted by society. The lowest reported score was amongst people who felt religion was an important aspect of their lives, where the acceptability score was only 61%. This is still high compared with Israel (22%) and South Korea (13%), amongst others.

To the surprise of no-one, the IPSOS survey, as mentioned earlier, reports that 16% of people surveyed in Australia identified themselves as wholly, mostly, or equally attracted to the same sex, the second highest in the results after India. In addition, 9% stated they were *only* attracted to the same sex - the highest for that answer, just ahead of Netherlands (8%). Also, while 'only' 55% of people surveyed said they knew someone who was homosexual, which while higher than average is still only mid-ranking, 18% of people said they knew someone Transgender and 16% knew someone non-binary, both joint-highest of the countries surveyed, alongside Canada. In addition, 21% of people said they'd attended a public event like Pride, second only to Spain, 34% said they'd visited a gay bar (second highest, just behind, of all places, the UK). Is this where I raise a stereotype of the Aussies and the Brits not really caring where they go as long as there's decent booze?

The IPSOS survey also relates that 62% of people believe same-sex couples should be able to marry legally, interestingly very close to the actual referendum result a couple of years earlier, while a further 14% support some kind of legal recognition that doesn't go as far as actual marriage rights. In the UK we have 'civil partnerships' which are marriages in all but name, but to be honest I don't believe there should be a difference. But then, as stated earlier, I'm now unlikely to be the target market for marriage. Although I am open to offers. That's a subtweet. I'll leave it up to you to argue to whom that subtweet is aimed at.

The one place the survey highlights a less-than-equality stance is in the area of Transgender athletes, and, I guess, by inference, Transgender rights as a whole. 27% of people surveyed support the concept of Transgender people competing as their identified gender rather than their birth gender - the global average of countries surveyed is 32%.

Now. One issue with Australia is it's a highly federalised state, similar in a way to the USA, and much legislation on personal identity is created at state/territory level rather than national level. This means, for instance, that while it's legally possible to change gender everywhere in Australia, New South Wales and Queensland require you to go through gender reassignment surgery first. That said, the other states only removed this requirement in the last few years; it's an ongoing and recent process so it would be nice to think NSW and Queensland are just slightly behind the curve - especially since the largest city in NSW is Sydney and everyone knows about the Queer scene there. Queensland is ... less of a surprise. That's also a subtweet.

The other issue I've been advised about in Australia in the area of LGBTQIA+ issues is the 'Safe Schools Coalition Australia'. This was a program of eight lessons, complete with video of an LGBTQIA+ teenager talking about their experiences and journey, which then encourages discussion in the classroom afterwards. The program launched in the state of Victoria in 2010, before being rolled out nationally a few years later, that aimed to provide a methodology and framework to help LGBTQIA+ teenagers cope with their discovery of their identities, and to try to encourage a wider vibe of tolerance and acceptance.

Obviously this went down about as well with the traditional Right as you might expect, with comments from politicians, church figures, and columnists talking about 'grooming' and 'sexualisation', as well as thoughts that teenagers shouldn't be learning about this kind of thing anyway. The Prime Minister that week, Malcolm Turnbull (not the most forward-thinking of people) didn't really seem to commit one way or the other on the

program at first, leading to a bit of hesitancy amongst authorities as to what they should do with it or whether they should go forward with it, although obviously he later reverted to type and fell on the side of criticism.

What didn't help either was a co-ordinated attack on the program's co-founder Roz Ward, who ended up having to resign in 2016 from a role she had helping out the Victoria government because of a social media post where she was deemed to have criticised the Australian Flag for being 'racist', and suggesting that it be replaced with the Red Flag.

In 2016, the government launched a review of the program, the Loudon Review, but surprisingly this didn't find any of the issues the government may have been hoping for. Rather, they found the resources and concept were appropriate, and suggested criticisms of the program were overstated and mostly pushed by external lobbyists with their own agenda. Nevertheless, not long after this, government cancelled federal funding for the program, and several of the states (including NSW and Queensland, you perhaps may not be surprised by) withdrew, creating their own, less, shall we say, 'intense', programs of their own. The program is still funded at a federal level by the governments of Victoria, South Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory.

Both sides of the dispute are reported to have resorted to violence, similar to that seen later in the Marriage Referendum; indeed in the early days of campaigning in the referendum, there were people who sought to conflate the two issues - mainly on the 'no' camp, who suggested LGBTQIA+ education would be compulsory if the Marriage Referendum passed. I don't see this as a bad thing, but then I'm not a religious pastor in Queensland. For good reason. But anyway, it seems that even in Australia, feelings run high around the topic of Queer Culture.

{section separation jingle}

So what have we learned in this episode? I think the biggest takeout is that LGBTQIA+ rights are under threat everywhere, and few countries are truly welcoming to the Rainbow People. And this is important to remember; certainly for people like me, and for many of you, we concentrate so much on our own countries and our own cultures that we don't often know what's happening elsewhere in the world. It's one thing fighting for Queer rights in our own countries, but even if we manage to achieve them there, we must remember the fight isn't over until we're free everywhere. For every Peter Tatchell there's a corresponding William Hernandez, for every Miss Major there's a corresponding Angel Maxine. We are not safe until we are all safe.

And follow @wanlov on Twitter, He's also quite funny.

{end pod jingle}

Well that's about all for this episode. Join me next time for another trip Beyond The Brochure, although given I'm about to go on holiday for a week and a half, it's likely that episode will be on the delights of road-tripping around Ireland with an ex-girlfriend. I've half-written another podcast on beer but that'll wait for another fortnight, it's already a month late. Ah, I love the sound of deadlines as they whoosh by, as Douglas Adams once said. #Relatable. Until then, in the words of Ghanaian Trans photographer Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi, "We Are All The Same", and if you're feeling off-colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it}

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}