
Book Review: Sandeep Bakshi, Suhraiya Jivraj and Silvia Posocco (eds.), *Decolonizing Sexualities: Transnational Perspectives: Critical Interventions* (Counterpress, Oxford 2016) ISBN: 978-1-910761-02-1

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Decolonizing Sexualities is a thoughtful collection of essays that is presented in multiple forms and narratives challenging deeply embedded hierarchies of form and location of “academic work”. Many of the contributions in this volume are part of a broader conversation taking in place in Western academia and among activists, writers and academics of colour. This specific location frames the central theme of the book – the emphasis of a decolonial perspective that embraces not just knowledge, but ways of thinking, methods, language, and articulation of sexuality.

One of the central themes in the book is the changing nature of sexuality politics globally, and the ways in which those engaged in this field are responding to these changes. This book flags the ways in which transnational politics negotiate local, regional and global spaces. For instance, in the essay by AlQaisiya, Hilal and Maikay, who are activists from alQaws, a civil society organization working on sexuality issues in Palestine, the ethical and political debates that are flagged, are not only about international alliances and responses to boycotting official LGBTQI events funded by the government of Israel, but also the complex relationship between Palestinian queer groups within different parts of Palestine – the West Bank, Ramallah and the Gaza Strip.¹

Central to this book, and its vision of transnational politics is interrogating intersectionality as a mode of political engagement. The authors in this book flag intersectionality, not just of movements but of ideas and discourses. Many of the contributors in the volume, drawing upon their own activist engagement, urge the reader to think about the politics of intersectionality itself. Sirma Bilge’s essay asks the question of whether there is a disproportionate burden on more marginalized groups in political coalitions. For Bilge, an intersectional analysis is not just a ‘category of power’ analysis but also a ‘domain of power’ analysis, i.e. addressing the domains through which power is organized, managed, legitimized, reactivated, internalized, contested, subverted etc.²

In the European context intersectionality is crucial to queer groups of colour, especially those identifying as Queer and Trans People of Colour (QTPOC), as for

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¹ Wala AlQaisiya et al., “Dismantling the Image of the Palestinian Homosexual: Exploring the Role of alQaws”, pp. 125-140.

² Sirma Bilge, “Theoretical Coalitions and Multi-Issue Activism: ‘Our Struggles Will be Intersectional or They Will Be Bullshit!’”, pp. 102-117.

many of these groups, the normative LGBTQI movement does not adequately take into account concerns of queer people of colour and immigrants. From the account in the book (organizing a queer rally in London), there is an emerging political scenario, where LGBTQI issues are pinkwashed within Europe, used as a pretext to bludgeon and further stereotype existing racial and religious minorities. Rather than question this creeping insidious politics that obfuscates wider issues of race, religion, sexuality and gender, the interests of the relatively well off and gentrified white gay male are posed as being intrinsically opposed to the violent immigrant or Muslim male. Here is where this collection of essays intervenes, drawing upon a wide range of disciplines such as urban studies, aesthetics, and architecture. The essay by Shannahan and Tauqir deals with accessibility of mosques in Britain, moving beyond the more familiar question of what does an intersectional politics look like in terms of religious content, to what it would look like in terms of accessibility to a wide range of believers, including differently-abled persons.³

Another aspect of sexuality politics that I found provocative in this collection is the focus on issues of poverty, class and political economy, which I read as call to moving beyond identity politics to the structural issues that often hang as invisible frames to the painting of sexuality politics. A number of essays in this collection focus on questions such as the politics of funding, the prison industrial complex, and critiques of the commercialization of gay culture. From a trans perspective, João Gabriell's essay points to the intimate connections between transphobia and the material conditions of transpersons.⁴ For Gabriell the queer struggle is not just about educating the public about queer issues but about addressing structural inequalities including the unequal distribution of privilege and economic resources.

Many of the contributions in the book address the question of the constitutive potential of the law, recognizing that the law not only intervenes to protect or injure, but (re) constitutes identity. Arturo Sánchez Garcia's essay, in the context of the legal recognition of same sex marriage in Mexico City, asks if marriage becoming an object of desire postpones the impulse for justice.⁵ Garcia argues that the focus on identity politics and a wider public education is at the cost of structural issues such as poverty, extreme inequality and the disproportionate burden of risk that different segments of queer populations face. For Garcia, drawing on Foucault's formulation, desire gives way to ethics and the potential of desire to reorder relations of power as relations of affection, friendship, loyalty, and reciprocity.⁶ The question for Garcia is whether this transition from desire to ethics is necessarily disrupted by legal recognition and reform?

³ Dervla Zaynab Shannahan and Tamsila Tauqir, "Building an Inclusive Mosque: A Case Study", pp. 197-214.

⁴ João Gabriell, "In Defence of a Radical Trans Perspective in the FRnech Context", pp. 60-70.

⁵ Arturo Sánchez Garcia, "Reasons for Optimism: Same Sex Marriage in Mexico City", pp. 231-248.

⁶ Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life" in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, translated by Robert Hurley et al. (New York, The New Press, 1994) 136-138.

The writing and contemporary debates around legal reform on LGBTQI rights in India reflect Garcia's concerns subject to the specific contexts and strategies of queer activist groups in India. The debates around the legal challenge to section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, the anti-sodomy law, have focused on the process that led to the legal challenge,⁷ and the constitutive potential of the law.⁸ Here is where one confronts tensions between the means and between the immediate race against time and the appeal to the sensibilities of judges, characterized as legal strategy, with a more long term vision of movements.

Aniruddha Dutta's epilogue to this book echoes many of my own concerns. Dutta points to the disjuncture between the colonial/decolonial frame in some Global South contexts, where there are multiple and complicated reconfigurations of these terms. For instance, Dutta refers to the ways in which countries like India, long considered part of the Global South, are viewed in reference to their global military ambitions, as well as Indian multinationals and industries expanding rapidly to other parts of the world including the Global North.⁹ Where would we situate a transnational queer perspective within this more complicated terrain that does not fall neatly into a colonial/decolonial framework?

Decolonizing Sexualities prompted me to think about how ideas travel, gain currency and take root in different contexts and locations. This collection is an excellent introduction to the various actors and contexts in which these discourses circulate. What is missing though is a focus on technology, given the significant ways in which transnational queer debates are mediated by technology, especially social media platforms.

⁷ Naisargi Dave, *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics* (New Delhi, Zubaan, 2016); Jyoti Puri, *Sexual States: Governance and the Struggle to Decriminalize Homosexuality in India* (Hyderabad, OrientBlackswan, 2016).

⁸ Akshay Khanna, *Sexualness* (New Delhi, New Text, 2016).

⁹ Aniruddha Dutta, "Afterword: Interrogating QTPOC Critique, Imagining North-South Solidarities", pp. 275-280.
