



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Introduction: The Global Careers of Queerness

Tellis, A.; Bala, S.

DOI

[10.1163/9789004217942_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004217942_002)

Publication date

2015

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

The Global Trajectories of Queerness

License

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Tellis, A., & Bala, S. (2015). Introduction: The Global Careers of Queerness. In A. Tellis, & S. Bala (Eds.), *The Global Trajectories of Queerness : Re-thinking Same-Sex Politics in the Global South* (pp. 13-27). (Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race; Vol. 30). Brill Rodopi. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004217942_002

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Introduction: The Global Careers of Queerness

Ashley Tellis and Sruti Bala

ABSTRACT

The introductory essay lays the ground for this book, which is on the term “queer” and its circulation in the Global South. The term “queer” has a global reach and purchase today and we seek to map some of this in contexts of the Global South at two levels. The first is through offering genealogies of the term and its employments since its introduction in the public sphere in the US in 1990/91 and its travel in the US and outside in the subsequent one and a half decades at a conceptual level. This is also the time that many countries in the Global South opened themselves to the free market under a variety of signatures: liberalization, globalization, privatization and “queer” came along with this free market. We track the implications of this for academic engagement, politics and same-sex organizing, both conceptually and through introductions to various ethnographic sites that offer concrete manifestations of that engagement, politics and organizing.

From the early 1990s onward, there was afoot a figure in the world called the “global gay”. Dennis Altman coined the term (“Global Gaze/Global Gays”). In an essay from 1996 “Rupture or Continuity: The Internationalization of Gay Identities” (and latterly a book called *Global Sex*), Altman configured globalization as the process that brings together what he calls “tradition” – by which he means pre-modern, pre-colonial same-sex practices – and “modernity”, i.e. Western style identity politics (77, 79, 88). In doing so, he repeated a classic racialized and imperialist move of classifying the native as incapable of identity, only of practices, while the modern Western subject has identity, even as he cautions against ideas of Western superiority. Altman then

characterized globalization as the benign process that brings these two together to form a complete, dynamic whole, even as he critiques late capitalism (79). Both inform each other and grow together, he argued. The erasures in this move of different levels, despite his recognition of the uneven nature of globalization and late capitalism on the one hand, and sociological particularity on the other (his own essay and book ran though cultures as if they were objects on aisles in a global supermarket), are staggering in their implications.

In 2002, Joseph Massad wrote an essay called “Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International” (and latterly a book called *Desiring Arabs*) in which he criticized precisely the Western imperialist flattening of the Arab world in accordance with categories with a Western provenance and the yoking of them into a Western-style understanding of sexuality and sexual identity. He accuses “queer” of, in fact, heterosexualising the planet and flattening the more variegated landscape of sexual desire in the Arab world (“Re-Orienting Desire” 382).

Between these two moments, the term “queer” had moved from its origins on the streets of New York in 1991 to a plethora of locations across the world. That it continues to have a powerful hold across the world with a variety of forces unwilling to relinquish it, is evident in the lack of critiques of Altman and the ferocious critiques of Massad. The latter have come as much from Queer Studies theorists as from academics from the Global South in the US global academy doubling up as native informants and supported by Queer Studies and other progressive academics. While there is much to critique in Massad, these critiques have been inattentive to the structure of Massad’s argument (Shad Naved in this volume begins a more careful account of Massad’s argument even as he differs from him in significant ways).

The emergence of “queer”

The word “queer” emerges in the context of US gay politics in the 1990s. It emerged as an activist term by groups like *Queer Nation*, a group of radical AIDS activists in New York. *Queer Nation* was a militant group with confrontational, Situationist-style modes of intervention. The group members were activists from ACT UP and were tired of the continuing discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS by the neoliberal, Reaganite dispensation and sickened by the continuing heteronormativity of mainstream culture in the US. This term quickly became popular and was appropriated not just by the popular media but also by academia, spawning the subfield of Queer Studies in US academia. At the time in the US, this was a liberating term for LGBT folk of color and many disenfranchised along varying axes not acknowledged by the predominantly white and by now mainstream gay movement.¹

How did this term travel from this specific context and reach the world over? In what ways is it appropriated, what are the skepticisms towards the concept and its valences, what are the contexts that complicate its routes? Isn’t this use of “queer”, as Neville

Hoad points out, “innocent of its own colonizing fantasies?” (Hoad “Queer Theory Addiction” 135).² Michael Warner, whom Hoad was critiquing in the quote above (for the title of the book Warner edited, *Fear of a Queer Planet*) had himself written “In the New World Order, we should be more than usually cautious about global utopianisms that require American slang” (Warner cited in Hoad “Queer Theory Addiction” 135).

US academia’s conceptualizations of “queer”

Following Kath Weston’s early call for more theory in her classic essay “Lesbian/Gay Studies in the House of Anthropology” (an essay asking similar questions and offering very different answers than Altman), Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan in their 2001 essay “Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality” open with the statement: “In modernity, identities inevitably become global” (663).

They are quick to recognize, of course, that saying that does not at all “get at the complex terrain of sexual politics that is at once national, regional, local, even ‘cross-cultural’ and hybrid” (ibid.). Globalization they assert is neither simply a homogenizing movement nor simply neocolonialism. They prefer the word “transnational” (Grewal and Kaplan 664) and proceed to enlist five defining characteristics of the discourse of the transnational in the context of the US academy: (1) a discourse of migration, without an analysis of labor; (2) a discourse of the irrelevance of the nation state, which erases an analysis of political economy and new forms of governmentality; (3) one of diaspora, which mystifies and romanticizes displacement as subcultural and always resistant to the nation-state; (4) that of neocolonialism, which mystifies forms of exploitation before globalized capitalism, and (5) the NGO-ization of social movements, a “transnationalism from below” (Grewal and Kaplan 666), that relies on a universal subject and is tied to colonial processes and imperialism.

These five co-ordinates usefully lay out the main components of the field in the Global South (and not just in the academies of the Global South), albeit in modified form, given the different scales and spaces. In these spaces, the field of same-sex politics can be said to be marked by migrations, both internal and external, and of different kinds, but all without an analysis of labor; there is a rhetoric of rights that exceeds the nation state and engages the nation with extra-national tools pretending the nation-state is irrelevant when it is, in fact, more relevant than ever; diasporic narratives of identity riding the globalization jet are the materials used to form subcultures in urban spaces; the rhetorics of neocolonialism, from the Left in many parts of the Global South, for example, are still predicated upon the complete erasure of same-sex politics and an insufficient critique of Third World capitalism; the NGO-ization of the women’s movements and the same-sex “movements” has taken place with little reflexive critique of the repercussions.

In calling for a new interdisciplinarity to deal with globalization in the US academy, Kaplan and Grewal, however, proceed to undertake undertake a series of problematic moves. They dismiss psychoanalysis as universalist, Eurocentric and a form of

biomedicine (667), accuse gay and lesbian and queer studies of focusing on the white middle-class as the only nationalist subjects (669), argue that a tradition/modernity divide persists in the US academy where tradition is the less developed Third World and modernity is the liberated West, and position sexual minority subjects as purely oppositional. In a corrective to a practice attributed to an unnamed “many”, they say: “queer subjects are not always already avant-garde for all time and in all places” (670), clinching their argument with the pitting of gay men against lesbians, when they say: “Lesbian sexuality and practices in many sites have to struggle against patriarchal formations, while gay male sexualities may not” (ibid.).

Grewal and Kaplan conclude with a call for a new mode of study that “adopts a more complicated model of transnational relations in which power structures, asymmetries, and inequalities become the conditions of possibility of new subjects” (671). They acknowledge this as a writing of present history, point to the limitations of identity politics and indicate that it is links between various institutions that produce subjects, not just the politics of identity as we know it. Salutory stuff, to be sure, but just how are these “new subjects” going to be theorized? Grewal and Kaplan end with broad brushstrokes that suggest more where these “new subjects” can be located or zones that will furnish materials of use to constitute them rather than the materials of their subject formation themselves. The zones for Grewal and Kaplan are: the discourses of modernity and cultural production, tourism, and immigration.

Another engagement with the question of globalization came in 2002 in the collection edited by Martin Manalansan and Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé titled *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*. The opening statement in the book’s introduction claims: “Queerness is now global” (Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé 1). When was queerness not global, if by queerness they mean non-heteronormativity? Or do they implicitly mean that queerness as a concept emerged in the US and has now reached across the globe? Queerness as a word and category still does not mean anything in many places in the world and in yet others, it means something different from its US academic definition, which in turn is different from its ACT UP definition. The next assertion is that queerness has become an object of consumption (ibid.). Yet isn’t the historical formation of gayness, which moves into queerness, as John D’Emilio has shown us, intertwined from the start with capitalism?

Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé proceed to employ a series of binaries. First, between commodification and politics. As if politics is completely outside the realm of commodification. As if queer intervention is not capable of being commodified and with deleterious effects as is clear in many parts of the Global South. Second, between dispossession and empowerment. As if empowerment cannot dispossess. It sure can, and queer politics in many sites has shown that eloquently. What apparently empowers might actually dispossess. Third, between home (the nationalist sphere) and diasporas (Euro-American queer politics). As if the two were so neatly separable. As if queer

North American and Western European politics were also not tied up with nationalist projects and as if the diaspora's "queernesses" were not always already contaminated by Euro-US queer politics.

These three binaries make them invoke the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) and the language of human rights without any interrogation of their discourses and their imperialisms. Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé want to unfix the word "gay" and open it to its global signifying capacities and situated contextualities. Fine rhetorical moves again, but what constitutes "situated knowledge" in the global context? How does it exactly break with hegemonic notions of "gay"?

They then outline five basic processes within globalization: a) heterogeneity obscures power relations in it, b) queerness is often appropriated to legitimize hegemonic discourses like nationalism and US imperialism, c) the non-West is teleologically interpolated into an evolutionary narrative moving toward the fully-formed West, d) all non-Western queer identities are translated into Euro-US categories and e) there is a complicity between home (nationalisms) and global values. A fourth binary creeps in. How are nationalisms separable, even schematically, from the global economy? How, allowing for the binary, can queerness become a third term, outside of the terms of the binary ("local, global, mobile") to dissolve it? What liminal "free" space does or can queerness occupy even as it partakes of both? From which space does it operate? They offer the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) in the US as the way out and this is questionable, not least because it is based on an invocation of notional activist links between SALGA in New York and CALERI in Delhi, but also because of the theoretically and politically unsubstantiated privileging of the "diasporic positionality" (Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé 7).

The final and fifth binary they introduce is between globalization and subjectivity, building on Elizabeth Povinelli's and George Chauncey's complaint that globalization studies does not speak of the embodiment and the desires of the queer subject (Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé 8). Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé's answer is the necessarily counter-hegemonic queer subject whose "agency might become legible in mapping the circuits and flows of globalization" (ibid.). Queer subjectivity is not a narrative that can be so beautifully disinterred from the debris of globalization and offered as a pure counter-hegemonic narrative. Nor is it only in the mapping of the "counter-hegemonic rhetorical strategies" (ibid.) as they put it, that queer subjectivities become legible. That conflates queer subjectivity with queer critique. Queer subjectivities in the sites explored in this book, are anything but purely counter-hegemonic. They are often dovetailed quite comfortably and disturbingly with the hegemonic. The ways out of these crippling binaries is to see the implicatedness of all these diametrically counterposed narratives in each other and see what form of subject emerges from that melange.

More recent studies continue with this globalizing imperialism and almost all use the word “queer” without interrogation. Two recent anthologies are: *Understanding Global Sexualities: New Frontiers* (2012) and *The Sexual History of the Global South: Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (2013), whose titles are indicative of the continuing problems. While calling for empirical study combined with critical reflection, Henrietta Moore, one of the editors of *Understanding Global Sexualities* nevertheless buys into the gender/sexuality separation and queer theory’s own narrative of its radicalism, not to mention the idea that one is able “to observe from research around the globe” that “the nature of the sexual” cannot be subsumed within a single model or teleology and yet on the same page refers to “a need to re-think the nature of the sexual subject” and “resituate that subject” in the singular (Moore 15).

The editors of *The Sexual History of the Global South* on the one hand insist that locations in the Global South not be seen “merely as places where metropolitan sexual politics have been applied, and sexual subjects have been colonized but as contexts where the sexual realm has been invented and reinvented with different meanings” (Wieringa and Sivori 15) and yet follow that with a section entitled “Sexual Citizenship and Emerging Identities”, where both sexual citizenship and sexual identity are seen as new phenomena in the Global South.

Even in country or site-specific studies like Naisargi Dave’s *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics*, this assumption of being able to locate “queerness” as a radical alternative persists. While an account of subjectivity as contaminated must historicize its own terms, Dave posits queer activism in India as always already ethical even as she acknowledges that “the history of queer activism in India is in other words, inseparable from the history of neoliberalism” (10). This ethicality presumably comes for Dave from queerness (in her case specifically lesbian queerness) “being a field of possibility in India, a space where cultural norms are newly imagined, deployed and inhabited in and through the politics of sexuality” (17). Queerness becomes (via Halperin, Muñoz and Badiou) a term of horizon (Dave 20). Consequently, her reading of the Delhi High Court judgment is inflationary and sentimental. She claims it as a moment in which “law and justice seemed reconcilable” (Dave 24), a moment of fleeting belonging allowed to activists in search of the ever-receding queer horizon. Such utopic formulations are not historically or politically tenable and also reach for the very pure they abjure.

Evidently, while work on globalizing queerness coming out of the US and Western Europe show awareness of the complicated politics of the multiple contexts of its articulation, this often seems tokenist, as is clear from the body of work examined above. Queer work coming out of places other than the US and Western Europe, in the Global South, for example, are not necessarily any better and indeed often worse. While the early type of work that produces the non-Western world only as an endlessly

proliferating ethnographic theater of difference continues to get produced, newer work aligns this with queer politics in deeply problematic ways. Natalie Oswin's article out of the National University in Singapore, "The End of Queer (as we knew it): Globalization and the making of a gay-friendly South Africa" is an example. Her take on globalization makes the South African state fantastically "queer", a reading by which we are far from convinced and which is symptomatic of the inflated and exorbitant readings of the term "queer" that we are confronted with. What we are trying to achieve in this book is a more historicized, political and critical delineation of "queerness" and globalization, without romanticizing the Non-West or blindly accepting the discourses of the West.

What this book tries to do

This book seeks to offer both a conceptual critique of the frames in which same-sex cultures in the Global South are constructed as well as ethnographies that are embodied. We attempt to do these things simultaneously, therefore including voices of scholars, activists and artists, and seeking productive discussions across the Social Sciences, Arts and the Humanities.

The Global Trajectories of Queerness: Rethinking Same-Sex Politics in the Global South attempts to interrogate the global and inflationary use of "queer" with its political economy underpinnings and its cultural politics, by closely mapping what space the theorizing of same-sex sexualities and sexual politics in the Global South inhabits. From theoretical discussions around the frameworks and epistemologies of such conceptualizations of space in the Global South to specific illustrative ethnographies of various sites of same-sex culture that address those conceptual questions, this collection hopes to forge a way of tracking the histories of race, class, caste, gender, sexual orientation that form what we today call the moment of globalization and the "global queer movement".

The idea for the volume emerged from the need to develop an understanding of same-sex politics in the Global South, to see whether Southern countries simply borrow and graft an internationalist (read Euro-US) language of LGBT/queer rights and identity politics in their contexts, whether it is imposed on them, or whether there is a productive negotiation of that language in the thinking and on the ground.

Through an exploration of local contexts and sociologically particular expressions of same-sex desire and subjectivity, avoiding the attendant traps of nativism and cultural relativism in their interactions with transnational languages of identity politics and rights, as well as a simultaneous conceptual investigation of the logics behind these new languages, we hope to develop a more grounded sense of sexual configurations that go under the banner of "queer" and re-think the politics of same-sex imaginings for a different set of futures.

“Could there have been a queer theory of, from and for the Global South?”

The book charts the uneven, ambivalent and contradictory trajectories of the concept “queer” in different sites of the Global South. In some contexts, the term “queer” is put to use to a concrete end, whether in offering a critique of nationalism, expanding the vocabulary of self-articulation, or productively engaging with policy and law. In other contexts, the concept is shown as dovetailing with the demands and conditions of neoliberal global governance, invested in the hegemonic and in institutional structures that exacerbate existing disparities and power asymmetries. We open the volume with an essay by NEVILLE HOAD, which examines key strands and impulses of Western queer theory through analyzing the implications of their “transnational” trajectories and legacies. By way of an answer to the question of what a queer theory of, from and for the Global South would look like, Hoad proposes to understand the relation between “queer” and “neoliberal” as a “shifting kind of *pharmakon* – medicine and poison, condition and effect, symptom and critique”. By historicizing the emergence of queer theory as a kind of “invented tradition”, Hoad works out how on the one side, queer theory’s influence on transnational policy and human rights discourses induces specific effects in different places, sometimes proliferating new sexual identities that require new regulatory and legal frameworks, and at other times labeling sexual practices rather than identities, which are then ironically turned into identities, in order to be assimilable into those very same discourses they were meant to be understood as being outside of. On the other side, he shows how the desire for recuperating indigenous forms of queerness can both lead to their commodification as well as make them unrecognizable and thus unable to participate in the imaginary domains promised by queerness. Hoad thus calls for a theorization of queer that is capable of understanding the interlockings of sexuality, sovereignty and imperialism, which makes it possible to empirically and conceptually trace plural universes of queer without forcing upon it a universalization of queerness.

The contexts of postcolonial theory, U.S. civil rights discourses and identity politics and post-Cold-War Third World politics, which inform the understanding of the transnational in Hoad’s argument, are also pivotal to RODERICK FERGUSON’s genealogy of a queer of color critique. By linking his queer of color critique to the question of the Global South, Ferguson builds on the pioneering work in his book *Aberrations in Black* (2004) where he tracked the signifier “queer” across the spaces of African-American sociology, black nationalism and literature. In this account, he ponders on how key insights in his queer of color critique were educed from postcolonial theorizations, and thus in fact shed light on its trajectories and implications, as “queer” travelled from the United States and continues to circulate in the contexts of global governance and an international political-sexual economy. The essay reflects on four areas signified by the critical figure of the Global South, which proved crucial to the elaboration of a queer of color critique. The first is concerned with the adoption of a critical

historiographical perspective, mobilized from the work of Subaltern Studies, which questions and brings to productive crisis established narratives of sexualities, race and political economy. The second area is the interrogation of “the West” as a marker of geopolitical knowledge formation and the recognition of the overlaps between racial discourses in the U.S. and colonial discourses in Asia. The theorization of ambivalence as a constitutive element within racial discourse forms a third genealogical link between queer of color critique and the Global South, whereby African American cultural production could be read as “failed mimics” in the sense of Homi Bhabha’s theorization of colonial slippage. This is closely related to the fourth insight Ferguson draws from the figure of the Global South, namely the critique of logocentrism as a component of racial hegemony and the need to be wary of rendering minoritized subjects transparent.

Following the trajectories of queerness across the unevenly accessible terrains of the Global South is thus not simply a task of finding a pro or contra position, as if the critique of “Western” conceptions of queer were only a matter of adding to it or replacing it with some adequately indigenous “non-Western” queer ingredients. A central question for the essays in this volume is thus how to account for the incommensurabilities of same-sex politics and experiences at specific junctures, such as the intersection of “queer” with the “postcolonial”. ASHLEY TELLIS argues for what he calls a “psychic-material account of same-sex subjects”, offering a critique of the Indian “queer movement” through portraits of three middle class, self-identified, effeminate or feminized gay men in India. Tellis reads hysteria as the common figuration of a certain gay selfhood, arguing that a closer understanding of these hysterical self-conceptions reveals not only the contradictions in homosexual formation but also in heterosexual patriarchy. Where queerness in the identity-speak of contemporary Indian NGO-ized movements marks an illusory point of arrival, the tracing of hysterical selfhood in Tellis’ account marks what he claims to be a point of departure for a same-sex politics in India.

SHAD NAVED’s essay is concerned with the historical asymmetries between “queer” and the “postcolonial”, a trajectory he follows and reconceives by way of a two-fold discussion: of the controversies and impasses generated by Joseph Massad’s 2007 critique of the “gay international” on the one hand and of the Saudi Arabian “lesbian” novel *Al-Akharun*, by the pseudonymous writer Siba Al-Hirz, on the other. Rather than attempt to trace the existence of an authentic lesbian subject in Saudi Arabia, – and Naved, in agreement with Massad, critiques this desire itself as a problematic identification of sexuality with visibility – the essay searches instead for the literary, stylistic moves in the novel that mark a host of subject positions as sexually deviant. Naved interprets the novel’s elaboration of different kinds of minorityism – religious, sexual, gender, genre-based – as queer, to the extent that the notion is not read as “a set of methodological principles or theoretical dogma but diagnostic of

the nature of social observation, which ... enacts both itself and the world in that performance.”

The essay by HANEEN MAIKEY and MIKKI STELDER continues the discussion of Massad’s notion of the “gay international” in the context of Palestinian activism and addresses the inseparability of the concept of queerness from the struggle for de-colonization. “Queer” here can stand for an opposition to the hegemony of Western LGBT organizing, to Palestinian patriarchal culture with its sexual norms and taboos as well as to the complicity of the Israeli LGBT movement with Zionist settler-colonialism. At the same time, it is deployed pragmatically and tactically, not with affective attachment or investment, but relevant as long as it serves as a frame of analysis encompassing feminism, sexual and gender diversity and anti-colonial struggles. Maikey and Stelder also reflect on the problem of the hierarchization of struggles, where the question of sexuality is framed as secondary to and not part of the larger battle against Israeli occupation. Here the concept of queer is used to both counter the pinkwashing project as well as to forge a multi-pronged ethics of international solidarity, which goes beyond making Palestine more appealing to queer people.

Another mode of following the trajectories of “queer” is through translation. IMAN GANJI’s essay on the silent movements of the Iranian queer conceives of translation as the effort to grasp “the resonance between forms of struggle and activism with their own syntax and grammar”. Elaborating on the nuances of various attempts to translate and adapt “queer” into Farsi, and their attendant implications for who uses the term and to what ends, Ganji critiques the binaries drawn between West and East or between modernity and tradition as obstructing any deep understanding of the situation and lives of non-heterosexual subjectivities in Iran. The essay, written with inputs from anonymous contributors in Iran, argues that it is necessary to understand “queer” in terms of the political economy of its circulation and networks of signification. It thus critiques the rights-based discourses around protecting or saving queer subjects in Iran and yet proposes expanding our thinking of rights from the purely juridical and identitarian to a plurality of struggles, from the focus on reactions to oppression to the formation of multiple movements and alliances.

The legislation and regulation of desires

The essays in the book dialogue with perspectives from both the Social Sciences and the Humanities, in their tracing of the trajectories of “queer” under the conditions of global governance. The role of (international) non-governmental organizations or (I)NGOs and their related juridical apparatus in the processes of claiming rights and concessions and negotiating with the state form a crucial concern for several contributions in this volume. JOSEPHINE Ho points out that the NGO-ization of sexuality-related work leads to their adopting a state-centered thinking or an NGO-state coalition which oddly strengthens state-oriented thinking, even while neoliberal ideologies seek

to weaken the state. This implies a mainstreaming or normalizing tendency in the activities and aims of the NGOs, wherein Ho identifies several problems, such as “the concentrated investment in the same-sex, and more recently transgender, marriage rights issue for individual subjects”, as well as the project of regulating sexuality through framing it in the law mainly in sex-negative terms, i.e. in the realm of crime and punishability.

WEI TINGTING speaks from the perspective of a project manager at a national gender and public health organization and as a young self-identified queer feminist activist in China. While visibility and recognition are marked as important aims in queer organization in the mainland Chinese contexts, the terminology of “queer” in Chinese itself ironically derives from the name of a Coca-Cola beverage, *Qoo*, introduced in the early 2000s in the Chinese market. The term, phonetically written as *ku er*, literally translated as “cool kid”, was appropriated as lending (sub)cultural status to “queer” without the original negative associations it had in the West. Thus the mainstream visibility of “queer” goes hand in hand or ensues from its proximity to the commodity, a relationship made invisible in the heavily rights-based discourses of NGOs.

WITCHAYANEE OCHA discusses the relationship between the sex and medical tourism industry in Thailand and outlines the emergence of a diversity of gender identities catering to the market, thus introducing the question of labor into the tracking of “queer” in the Global South. Based on an ethnographic study of adult male-to-female transgender people in Thailand’s sex tourism industry, Ocha reflects on how gender biopolitics is deeply entrenched in the political economy of demand and supply, even while it deploys and refers to indigenous conceptions and vocabularies of sexuality to anchor the practices in daily life. The essay also highlights the stark contrast between the difficult realities of transgender lives in terms of making a living with the labor of their bodies and the inflated rhetoric of queer emancipation as it circulates in the realm of global governance.

Paying close attention to divergent vocabularies and grammars of self-articulation is another mode of discerning how, if at all, the fluidity and non-identitarianess associated with “queer” is embodied. In an ethnographic study of 35 women in Trinidad who engage in homosexual activity without necessarily being self-identified as lesbians, KRYSTAL GHISYAWAN explores the valences in their vocabularies of self-perception, where Euro-American discourses and media influences, local ethnic stereotypes and social and racial stigmas stemming from the history of indentured labor and migration to the Caribbean blend together. Diaspora and transnational links complicate the dialogues on sexuality in the Caribbean, creating frictions between the identification of queerness with colonization and white privilege on the one hand, and liberation from social dogmas on the other. In a gesture of reverse ethnography, Ghisyawan turns the question of the absence of “queer” as a common political

self-descriptor in the Caribbean around, asking in what ways the term “queer” is accommodative of or responsive to the Creole, a concept in fact given by the Caribbean to the world?

The politics of visibility, legibility and recognizability haunt the trajectories of queerness, especially in those parts of the world where neither the mechanisms and apparatuses of human rights, nor the promises of commercially viable sexual diversity have managed to mediate the formation of recognizable non-normative sexual subjectivities. STELLA NYANZI’S essay on the silence of homosexuals in the West African state of The Gambia in response to the loud and rabid homophobic statements of the current Gambian President touches on the difficulty of accessing any kind of politicized presence in terms of self-articulation. While Nyanzi cannot provide substantial evidence for the presence of a silent queer movement, she argues that the presence of deviant sexual subjects and practices can be traced through oblique routes, ranging from local nomenclature and terminology for effeminate men, ceremonial dances and enactments of homosociality, traditional spiritual healing practices addressed at “curing” homosexual desires, sex tourism and sex work and criminal records to the President’s public homophobic statements. Nyanzi paradoxically both rejects and embraces the notion of queer, a double move that demonstrates the ambivalent trajectories of the term.

SOLEDAD CUTULI AND VICTORIA KELLER’S essay on Argentinean LGBT activism argues for a careful deployment of the term “queer”, for while it has scarce circulation in local academia and in social movements and would not be an accurate descriptor of the cases discussed, it may be a convenient label in order to refer to all non-heterosexual practices and desires. Cutuli and Keller’s investigation of two instances of LGBT political organization in Argentina in the legal realm, namely the Same-Sex Marriage Act and the Gender Identity Law, reveals what they call the productive frictions between local and global configurations (Tsing), and between different technologies of time-telling (Alexander). By mobilizing debates from the anthropology of globalization, Cutuli and Keller argue that local appropriations of seemingly global forms of legal-political activism take on unpredictable forms and need to be understood from the vantage point of the specific frictions and unequal encounters they generate. Extremely progressive laws such as the Gender Identity Bill that cuts across the sex-gender linkage in legislation may thus co-exist side by side with conservative laws such as the criminalization of abortion.

The Imagined Romance of Queer Community

The notion of a “global queer community” is paradoxical for it conjoins the fluidity and anti-identitarianism of “queer” with the stability, coherence and identifiability of “community” and conflates the scales of global and communal in order to sustain some kind of non-exclusive inclusion. Readers of this book will find that some contributions are

deeply attached to or invested in some idea of community, whereas others are equally distrustful of invocations of community. An example of the latter is the essay by GUILLERMO NÚÑEZ NORIEGA, where he takes to task the myths and misconceptions around the apparent innocence of the notion of interculturalism, critiquing it for ignoring or covering up asymmetries and systemically different kinds of vulnerabilities. Based on his experiences as a scholar-activist in programs for the prevention of HIV-AIDS in rural Mexico, NÚÑEZ NORIEGA argues that it is more useful to dig into the contradictions of the relationships between indigenous groups or grasp the relation between sexual or gender dissident subjects and national or supranational interests rather than issue well-intentioned calls for dialogue, where the terms for the dialogue are not set by those whom the dialogue is meant to benefit. He elaborates how interculturalism may well go hand in hand with sexual and capitalist exploitation, and cautions against confusing culture with worldview or searching for a true culture and community that corresponds to every territory.

In many ways, JULIETA PAREDES' statements on the "neocolonial queer" stand in stark contrast to NÚÑEZ NORIEGA's insistence against the romance of community when it comes to addressing the needs and questions of sexual non-conforming subjects. In her manifesto, Paredes speaks in the first person plural, invoking the community of indigenous lesbians, all tied by eco-homosocial bonds to their ancestral grandmothers and to a common feminine time-space conception of the *warmipacha*, resisting lesbophobia and the colonization of their bodies with a feminist practice explicitly termed as communitarian. Paredes is fiercely critical of the NGO-ization of the gay movement in Bolivia and Latin America with its middle class and homonormative agendas. Yet despite her insistence on the historicity of bodies, she clings to an essentialism in her defense of lesbian subjectivities that are seemingly stable over centuries. The contradictions in this position become most apparent in her categorical and anxiety-ridden rejection of any alliances with transgenders, arguing that it is impossible for trans people to deny what she perceives as their originally – thus essentially – female or male bodies. It is left to the critical reader to work out how these vastly different frameworks of same-sex subjectivity are reconcilable with the "global queer community".

The book consciously attempts to work against the tiresome separation of scholars, activists and practitioners. The perspectives of analysis thus range from the literary to the historiographical to the anthropological and the objects of analysis range from ethnographic interviews to visual, literary and theatrical productions. The closing contribution of the book features an interview with LAIA AMÉRICA RIBERA CAÑÉNGUEZ, member of the Guatemalan lesbian feminist theater collective *Teatro Siluetas*. This work is an instance of artistic activism, affiliated but not attached to the autonomous – as opposed to the institutionalized – lesbian feminist movement in Latin America following the neoliberal policy shifts in the post-war period of the 1990s.

The interview explores the theater-based work of a young independent artistic collective in Guatemala, which foregrounds lesbian lives and problems in and through art. It talks about the challenges of putting on stage this reality of lesbophobia, violence against women and religious conservatism, and at the same time reflects on the situated knowledge and necessity posed by the medium of the theater to materially embody ideas and thoughts.

What we offer in *The Global Trajectories of Queerness* then is a series of interrogations and illustrations that constitute a genealogy of the term “queer” in the Global South. Our only hopes are that this genealogy offers roadmaps to build and strengthen the struggles of same-sex politics in different sites in the Global South, forge critical dialogues and conversations between these countries and contexts (something which we hope will be intensified through this book) and contest hegemonomies both external and internal to us and our lives.

Notes

1. This is not to suggest that an ACT UP-style politics is what the “queer movements” in the Global South might more usefully replicate. The contexts are so different that that would be impossible. However, the political impulse, passion and anger behind that moment in the US would be good to emulate and is missing from the “queer movement” in most parts of the Global South altogether. How that might be

articulated in the contexts of the Global South is heterogeneous and difficult but is the focus of this book, which brings together various such sites and also searches for theoretical blueprints.

2. Hoad is citing his own pioneering essay on the racist and colonial genealogies of queer theory, see also Hoad “Arrested Development”.

Works Cited

Aggleton, Peter, Paul Boyce, Henrietta Moore and Richard Parker, eds. *Understanding Global Sexualities: New Frontiers*. London: Routledge, 2012.

Altman, Dennis. “Rupture or Continuity: The Internationalization of Gay Identities” *Social Text* 48 (Fall 1996): 77–94.

———. “Global Gaze/Global Gays.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3.4 (May 1997): 417–436.

———. *Global Sex*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002.

Dave, Naisargi. *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

D’Emilio, John. “Capitalism and Gay Identity.” *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. Eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharan Thompson. New York: Monthly Review Press. New Feminist Library Series. 1983. 100–13.

Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan. “Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality.” *GLQ* 7.4 (2001): 663–79.

Hoad, Neville. “Arrested Development or the Queerness of Savages: The Imperial and Neo-Imperial Uses of Male Homosexuality.” *Postcolonial Studies* 3.2 (2000): 133–58.

———. “Queer Theory Addiction.” *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*. Eds. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 130–141.

Manalansan, Martin and Arnaldo Cruz-Malave, eds. *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*. New York: New York University Press, 2002.

Massad, Joseph. “Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World.” *Public Culture* 14.2 (2002): 361–85. Reprinted in idem, *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. 160–9.

Oswin, Natalie. “The end of queer as we knew it: globalization and the making of a gay-friendly South Africa.” *Gender, Place and Culture* 14.1 (2007): 93–110.

Warner, Michael. “Something Queer about the Nation-State.” *After Political Correctness. The Humanities and Society in the 1990s*. Eds. Christopher Newfield and Ronald Strickland. Boulder: Westview Press, 1995. 361–71.

Weston, Kath. “Lesbian/Gay Studies in the House of Anthropology.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993): 339–67.

Wieringa, Saskia and Horacio Sivori, eds. *The Sexual History of the Global South: Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America*. London: Zed Books, 2013.