

BORDER/LINE SEX

Queer Postcolonialities, or How Race Matters Outside the United States¹

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race

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1 The first incarnation of this piece was given as a talk at the inaugural conference of the Center for Sexual Cultures at the University of

This article foregrounds the current critical emphasis on the language of intersectionality and analogy between race and sexuality, especially with respect to the discourse of rights and discrimination. Such language uses ‘racism’ and ‘race’ as stable registers of oppression, whereby a range of discriminatory practices based on sexual orientation gather representational and judicial validity through their linkage and similarity to such registers. Buried in such ‘linkages’ is the very mathematical paradox of parallelism that forecloses any true intersection, even as it invites lines of common origin and travel. Hence, we are often left with a language of analogy and repetition where race as sex and sex as race become parallel political formations only through a constant reminder of their irreconcilable separation. Instead, I theorize the productive possibility of a Spivakian ‘transactional reading’ whereby the linking of sex and race becomes a dynamic dilation of difference, even as it speaks the language of similarity and kinship. Some of the questions I raise are: Are such analogical invocations of sexuality also about new forms of racisms and imperialisms? Given the rise of queer transnational work, how do we translate the analytical paradigm of ‘race’ outside of its formations in the United States? In order to answer these questions and more, I turn to contemporary mobilizations of the race/sex nexus, especially



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post the events of 9/11. I focus, in particular, on the successful emergence of queer 'Arab' and 'Muslim' groups such as Al-Fatiha post 9/11, and situate their success within a critique of American mobilizations of religion, race and sexuality.

2 Quoted here is a transmuted citation. Geeta Patel rewrites Dipesh Chakraborty, 'The difference-differal of a colonial modernity: Public debates on domesticity in British India', *Subaltern Studies VIII* (1994): 50–88. Chakraborty, himself, is rewriting Roland Barthes.

The compulsion to translate, to think the world in the categories of the Euro imperial modern is real and deeply rooted in institutional practices. One cannot simply opt out of this problem, or [one cannot simply] not suffer by a sheer act of will, the epistemic violence that is necessary to nation and empire making drives. . . . I think of it as Barthes once said with reference to Shaharazad of the Arabian Nights, more as a merchandise, a narrative traded for one more day of life. . . . It is to say to every perpetrator of epistemic violence and in the voice of the woman subject Shaharazad: don't fuck me yet, for I still have another story to tell. (Patel 1998)²

Necessarily, we must dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions. (Foucault 1977)

Preamble: 'Interested but not involved'

In an interview recorded just a few months before the November 2004 presidential elections, Arundhati Roy was asked what she thought of John Kerry as presidential candidate. More precisely, the interviewer, David Barsaimian, was keen to hear if Roy agreed with the writer Tariq Ali who, though critical of Kerry, had declared: 'If the American population were to vote Bush out of office, it would have a tremendous impact on world opinion. Our option at the moment is limited. Do we defeat a warmonger government or not?' Pressed into response, Roy exasperatedly comments: 'I feel sometimes when I'm asked this question like I imagine that a gay person must feel when they're watching straight sex: I'm sort of interested but not involved.' Being gay is comparable here to a location of strategized disavowal, where the imaginary 'gay person' bears witness, but not presence. For Roy, the recourse to the metaphoric space of homosexuality translates her refusal of the terms of the political debate into a language of misplaced affect, desire and agency. Given that this is the only reference to sexuality and/or 'gayness' in an interview that examines the emergence of a 'New Racism' perpetuated by the 'New Imperialism' of the United States, Roy's curious choice of analogy certainly bears further scrutiny (Roy 2004: 9). In other words, what are the elisions that must be carried out in order to so metaphorize homosexuality?

Such a singular reference to homosexuality seems particularly jarring in an interview that is otherwise careful to warn against the language of a seductive ‘New Racism’ reliant on structures of similitude and displacement. The ‘New Racism’ no longer needs antiquated formal policies of apartheid or segregation, but instead relies on complex global systems of shared representation and trade that institutionalize inequity much more efficaciously. For example, Roy stresses the political perils of facilely equating the electoral defeat of the Hindu right in India, with the possible defeat of George W. Bush. While both governments share the rise of an ‘outright fascism’ and an embrace of ‘corporate globalization’, they differ critically in their racialization of Muslims. In India, Roy reminds us, the racialization of Muslims is linked to a covert communalism that is at the heart of the political process, while in the United States, ‘terrorist’ Muslims function specifically as the best allegory for Bush-style democratic reform. To succumb to an easy comparison between the two geopolitical sites is to collapse the differentiated racial logics at work, and to give in to a simple ‘them versus us’ narrative of progress.

3 It is important to note here that Roy’s casual reference to being a ‘gay person’ also comes on the heels of a well-publicized High Court decision in Delhi to uphold Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Section 377 deems all ‘unnatural sexual conduct’ punishable by law. Roy’s ‘gay person watching straight sex’ analogy thus seems even more politically problematic.

Throughout the interview, Roy returns repeatedly to the importance of her particular location as a scholar-activist, based in India. Within such careful formulations, Roy’s ‘gay’ analogy thus appears even more out of place, and opens up several urgent and unanswered questions through the structure of its utterance: What does it mean to *imagine* oneself gay? Does the invocation of a ‘gay person’ mark a similarity that renders irrelevant the specificities of the local? Is the identity of a ‘gay person’ rhetorically interchangeable with any and all locations? In what way, one could ask, are such invocations of homosexuality also about new forms of racisms and transnationality?³ Let me turn now to those questions.

Transacting sex

At the 2001 United Nations Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, Pravin Rashtupal, a prominent Gujurat Congress Member of Parliament, and renowned Dalit activist from India made the following comment: ‘Racism is rape without a condom and casteism is rape with a condom.’ Needless to say, this remark sparked off much controversy. Dalit activists, both from India and elsewhere, distanced themselves from what they saw as a crass and inappropriate analogy, adding fuel to the already heated discussions around the location of the category of ‘casteism’ within the hierarchies of discrimination and intolerance outlined by the conference organizers. Yet, for many Dalit activists, the difficulty still lay in convincing the attendees at the conference of the brutalities of the ‘disease of casteism’, which they



argued produced human rights violations and degradations akin to the horrors of ‘racial lynching’ in the United States. Defending his words, Rashtrapal also argued that the analogy with rape and sexual violation was necessary to drive home the connections between casteism and racism, while still maintaining the differences between the two spheres of human violence. ‘Race as rape without a condom’ was clearly the greater of the two evils, but casteism too contained the same violations, albeit to a lesser degree, where the safety valve of the condom only partially mediated the brutality of rape (Kaur 2001).

4 This discursive gesture is repeated in the formulations of nation and terrorism in the crisis in Afghanistan. One Pakistani diplomat registered some skepticism at the United States’ new alignment with Pakistan and noted that ‘Pakistan was simply the condom that the US is using to penetrate Afghanistan. Once they are done, they will toss us aside, as they have done in the past’ (‘Quotables’, *Frontline*, 25 September 2001).

Embedded in these struggles for the advocacy and articulation of ‘casteism’ are two critical yet fraught analogies: casteism is both like and not like racism; and casteism and racism are both like and not like rape. Here, the terrains of gender and sexuality disturbingly provide the lexicon through which gradations of human violation can be measured and evaluated, with the threat of sexually transmitted diseases (‘without a condom’) providing contemporary reminders of a different order of death and destruction.⁴ I belabor the particular example of the Dalits at the United Nations Conference to foreground the current critical emphasis on the language of intersectionality and analogy, especially with respect to the discourse of rights and discrimination (for a more detailed discussion of the term ‘intersectionality’, see Crenshaw 1993). Such language uses ‘racism’ and ‘race’ as stable registers of oppression, whereby a range of discriminatory practices gather representational and judicial validity through their linkage and similarity to such registers. Hence, casteism makes sense as a human rights violation *only* when weighed alongside an established understanding of racism.

5 The Intersection of Race and Sexuality: A Background Paper with Amendments and Proposals for the Draft Declaration and Programme of Action for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, IGLHRC, 27 August 2001. Available on their website at: www.ighlhrc.org.

A second example of such thinking finds articulation in the manifold organizing work done by LGBT and/or queer groups in the United States. In 2001, the International Gay Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) issued a statement to be distributed at the United Nations Conference proposing such intersectional thinking as being foundational to their mission and advocacy of queer rights in the global arena. In the statement entitled ‘The Intersection of Race and Sexuality: A Background Paper’, the authors argue that ‘the struggle to win legal protection for people who are discriminated against or stigmatized due to their sexual identity or behavior is integrally linked with the struggle to win rights and legal protections for groups who experience racial discrimination’.⁵ The remainder of the statement then addresses itself to transforming the ‘linkage’ between sexual and racial discrimination to an equation whereby discrimination based on sexual orientation and discrimination based on race become parallel structures of oppression, and thus privy to the same judicial processes and advocacy. In

the case of organizations such as IGLHRC, such analytical shifts are particularly hazardous as these American-based ‘international’ groups emphasize the global and transnational reach of their arguments, haphazardly including postcolonial and neo-colonial locations within the same raced landscape.

In this article, I do not advocate an ‘against race’ argument, but instead outline an analytical strategy where the conjoining of the categories of queer and race within discourses of globalization needs to be rethought and rearticulated. I focus, in particular, on the institutionalization of the ‘linkages’ of queer and race studies in current geopolitical formulations, and the utilization of discourses of human rights and discrimination in such a project. Buried, in such ‘linkages’, is the very mathematical paradox of parallelism that forecloses any true intersection, even as it invites lines of common origin and travel. Hence, we are often left with a language of analogy and repetition where race as sex and sex as race become parallel political formations only through a constant reminder of their irreconcilable separation. Instead, I wish to theorize the productive possibility of a Spivakian ‘transactional reading’ that articulates the analogical imperative as a ‘site of the displacement of function between sign systems’. Within such transactional readings, the linking of sex and race becomes a dynamic dilation of difference, even as it speaks the language of similarity and kinship. Such a reading elaborates the very act of analogy as an active transaction between oppositions, even as it puts these oppositions into question, in ‘the breaking and relinking of the [signifying] chain’ (Spivak 1985: 333–37).

What I want to do here, with the help of the murky genealogies of sex and race that my opening examples have already outlined for us, is ask the following questions: Given the rise of queer transnational work, of which I am a hesitant producer, how do we translate the analytical paradigm of ‘race’ outside of its formations in the United States? Do queer transnational projects fall easily under the umbrella of the queer/race project, or do their theoretical formulations require a different rendering of the project? If ‘race’, for instance, as understood in the context of a geography like India is a model of analysis that works only in relation to either colonial or neo-colonial structures of knowledge (i.e., Indians are ‘raced’ in relation to their construction in colonial or neo-colonial epistemes), how do we read ‘race’ through a grid of similarities instead of differences as in the case of postcolonial India? In order to answer these questions and more, I examine some contemporary mobilizations of the race/sex nexus, especially after the events of 9/11 (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 Front page of the *Frontier Post*, 29 March 2002, showing a demonstration in Karachi by the Awami Himayat Tehreek (People's Solidarity Movement) to register Muslims' condemnation of the recent terrorist attack against a church in Pakistan, and to express solidarity with Christians

Fags not flags: Thank God for the West

One problematic effect of the 'international' project of global queering, or what Joseph Massad has called the emergence of 'Gay International', has been the growing public presence of Al-Fatiha, a non-profit organization for gay Muslims based in the United States. Founded in 1997 by Faisal Alam, a Pakistani-American Muslim, Al-Fatiha's mission statement reads as follows:

Al-Fatiha is an international organization dedicated to Muslims who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, those questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and aims to support LGBTQ Muslims in reconciling their sexual orientation or gender identity with Islam. Al-Fatiha promotes the Islamic notions of social justice, peace, and tolerance through its work, to bring all closer to a world that is free from injustice, prejudice, and discrimination.⁶

⁶ *Al-Fatiha Home Page*. www.al-fatiha.net/ (accessed 30 October 2001).

Al-Fatiha follows in the footsteps of GLAS (Gay and Lesbian Arabic [sic] Society), founded in 1989, to help gay Muslims be 'part of the global gay and lesbian movement' (quoted in Massad 2002). Both organizations clearly articulate their links to some avatar of global queer solidarity, albeit based on what they outline is their corrective view of Islamic ideology and heritage. The critical impulse, especially behind the mission statement of Al-Fatiha, is that the organization merely seeks to explicate, make 'right' what is misread, 'wrong' in fundamentalist and Western readings of Islam. Joseph Massad, in his work on the linkages between the Gay International and the Arab World,

argues that Al-Fatiha's gestures of ideological reform *vis à vis* Islam merely echo the missionary zeal embedded in the rhetoric of organizations such as ILGHRC and ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Association). For Massad, just as Muslims within pre-modern Western articulations were attacked for their sexual licentiousness, the modern West now reorders that attack on the grounds of Islam's alleged repression of sexual freedoms. Organizations such as Al-Fatiha thus merely continue the hegemony of the sexual epistemology of identity over practice, so necessary to the establishment of an identity-based global queer movement emanating from the West.

Since its inception in November 1997, Al-Fatiha has also received extensive publicity in major queer-friendly and queer-focused newspapers and magazines in North America and Europe, ranging from *The Advocate*, *Trikone* magazine, *The Gay Times* (UK) and *The New York Times*, to name a select few. The Al-Fatiha website also proudly (and indiscriminately) proclaims its coverage in a range of non-Western media sites in Bangladesh, Turkey and India, underlining through such claims that its membership is growing and spreading globally. The website does not describe the particular discursive locations of this much-touted coverage in Bangladesh and/or India, for instance, disavowing, as it were, any sites of local challenge. In fact, Al-Fatiha has been heavily criticized by the main grassroots lesbian rights group, Stree Sangam, in Mumbai, India, for producing 'dangerously communal rhetoric' around essential religious identities (Shah 2001). In a metropolitan space like Mumbai, India, which has still not entirely recovered from the Hindu-right's hysterical denouncements of a lesbian relationship depicted in Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, Al-Fatiha's mission, however tolerantly imagined, still comes up short. By claiming to speak for all Muslims, and in the name of a corrective Islam, Al-Fatiha produces merely another equally flattening order of things, delinking geopolitical landscapes from the racialization and sexualization of bodies. Arab Muslims stand in for South Asian Muslims and so on, producing the symbolic corpus of gay Muslim identity that continuously overlooks its own geographical and historical fractures.

A dangerous effect of such elisions of differences within and between what is articulated as 'Muslim', 'gay', 'queer', 'Arab', 'South Asian' can be most markedly seen in the responses of public cultures after the events of 9/11. In the weeks following the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, media and activist groups recorded the increasing proliferation of hate-crimes against Arab-Americans, Sikhs and various 'others' who come under the purview of difference ('mistaken identity') as broadly conceived and stretched within gender and racial terms. In the aftermath of 9/11, the consolation of a racially motivated crime replaces the specter of gay bashing in a proudly liberal urban space such as San Francisco. Hence, in San Francisco, for example, a Latino gay man was reportedly beaten up for

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appearing Middle Eastern by a gang of Latino youngsters in early October, while the media quietly ignored the presence of his gay white lover who accompanied him and was also similarly brutalized by the same group of individuals. Such misrecognitions of civil rights have been accompanied by a concurrent and visible remasculinization of American culture as strong, turban-less, aggressively heterosexual, and refueled with a newer, more bellicose version of the colonial *mission civilisatrice*. On a visit to New York, two weeks after the attacks, a friend who lives and works in midtown Manhattan, passed on a poster of a caricatured Bin Laden being anally penetrated by the Empire State Building. The scribbled text accompanying the poster read: 'So you like them big, bitch?' A few days later, the poster reappeared as a sardonic, anonymous Internet image on my computer screen from my local queer watch group, courtesy of a subject title that read: 'The Empire Strikes Back.' Here the nexus of race and sex had reappeared in a more vicious version of racialized homophobia where American reprisals render homosexuality into the ultimate form of punishment. Fags not flags were to be the answer to the attacks against the United States. Clearly, such representations of the enemy as the demonized faggot figure are not unusual. During the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein suffered similar treatment at the hands of Internet cartoonists and other resident public commentators (see Puar and Rai 2004).

Interestingly, within such times of representational peril, Al-Fatiha has taken on the role of producing itself as the ideal secular body in response to what it sees as senseless hate-crimes against those perceived as Muslims. Al-Fatiha members have routinely adopted the voice of the new, secularized Islamic body, espousing what they see as a much-needed liberal and Western-friendly reading of Islam and Muslim identity. Faisal Alam, the young founder of the group which now has six chapters in the United States, two in Canada, and one in the United Kingdom, defends his organization's efforts by emphasizing the linkages between his efforts to democratize and domesticate Islam (by accepting homosexuality) and the crackdown in the United States on Islamic militants: 'We're trying to make this our home. We like the freedom here. And we don't want to seem like a foreign entity.'⁷ Alam's efforts have gained much press primarily after a '*fatwa*' was issued by Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed, head of the British Islamic group Al-Muharjiroun, after Al-Fatiha publicized an open conference for gay Muslims in 2001. The decree in the much publicized '*fatwa*' rejected the very existence of Al-Fatiha as illegitimate, condemning its members to the death sentence, anticipating as it were the very language that Al-Quaeda, Bin-Laden's network would use to denounce the United States and its allies.

An article in the 18 October 2001 issue of *The Guardian* extends this American logic of incorporation to its British allies. The article boldly titled 'An Islamic Revolutionary' is a feature on Adnan Ali, founder of the British

7 See www.thegully.com/essays/gaymundo/011027_gay_muslims.html (accessed 27 October 2001).

branch of Al-Fatiha, and portrays him as the selfless new hero of secular Muslims, and by extension of the secular West. Adnan Ali, in response to a question on the relationship of gay Muslims to the larger (read: white) community, answers: ‘There’s a lot of Islamophobia, to them [gay Muslims], everyone is like the Taliban.’ Here, the confusions of communalism, bigotry and terrorism collude to produce the gay Muslim as the modern revolutionary, fighting against the absolutism of competing systems of intolerant whiteness and Islamic fundamentalism. And in case the reader becomes too disturbed by this image, the author, Tania Branigan, coyly adds that Ali is ‘clean-shaven’ and gentle as he thoughtfully strokes his hairless chin in response to her questions. In this case, fags, Al-Fatiha’s gay Muslim subjects become the new purveyors of Western democracy, the Bin-Ladenesque Islamic revolutionaries domesticated to clean-shaven, secular subjects of the Union Jack (Branigan 2001).

Even as faith-based queer organizations like Al-Fatiha placate American liberal sentiment, there are others who continue to join the fray, in louder and more visible form. The heavily orchestrated publication of Irshad Manji’s *The Trouble with Islam: A Muslim’s Call for Reform in her Faith* (Manji 2003) in the United States and Canada is one such striking example. Manji, a self-designated ‘Muslim refusnik’ is a prominent lesbian talk-show host in Canada who claims she wrote the book because ‘Islam is on very thin ice with me’ (Manji 2003: 1). Manji argues for an Islamic reformation, substituting *jihad*, or religious war, with *ijtihad*, independent critical thinking for Muslims. And of course, it is no small coincidence that such reform can only take place in countries such as the United States where Muslims are wildly free from the suffocating totalitarianism of the Islamic world (Manji 2003: 2–24). Under Manji’s ‘Western eyes’, to slightly misquote Chandra Talpade-Mohanty here, globalization is the new freedom. As she glibly writes: ‘Maybe in your steely-eyed revolt against globalization . . . you’ve concluded that the universality of freedom is a slick euphemism for the uniformity of culture. Get real. Under globalization’s “uniformity,” nobody forces me on pain of execution to patronize the golden arches. I can choose *not* to read a McDonald’s menu’ (Manji 2003: 202).

While there is much to be said about the problematic and dangerous success of Manji’s book in the United States and Canada, I want to restrict my comments here to the strategic mobilization of her ‘Muslim queer’ identity. Manji’s website (www.irshadmanji.com) carefully documents the transnational reach of her book – the book has been published in over ten countries – and contains links to free downloadable Urdu and Arabic translations of the text. We are told that bookstores in Pakistan, for example, are afraid to sell the book, and Manji’s American-based website, with its free Arabic and Urdu translations, is designed to make such material

hurdles disappear. The website also provides multiple testimonies, letters and links that attest to Manji's impact on Muslim communities, from young straight girls thanking her for her bravery, to angry Mullahs berating her for her vilification of Islam. What is fascinating about the website, and Manji's book in particular, is her management of her lesbianism. In a book that takes on the most sensationalized aspects of Islam (*hijab*, *fatwas*, adultery, fanaticism), Manji's own publicized identity as a lesbian remains curiously uninterrogated, emerging only as an occasional marker of interest. It is as if being a queer Muslim is paradoxically a topic of least and most interest. That is to say, Manji's call for reform in Islam is most successful because she is understood as a lesbian, a context that somehow needs the least explanation. Islam's 'troubles' can thus only be articulated through the voice of a lesbian, as Manji herself says, 'in appreciation of what the West has done for me. I owe the West my willingness to help reform Islam. In all honesty, my fellow Muslims, you do too' (Manji 2003: 203).

Critical queer/race studies: Some interventions

Thus far, I have outlined some symptomatic debates through which the facile (and sometimes not so facile) confluences of race and sex produce gross misrepresentations of historical and geopolitical subjects and issues. What I want to do now is to provide some examples of critical work where the epistemic violence of such analogical gestures is being interrogated and negotiated. One such intellectual space of intervention is the burgeoning arena of critical queer/race studies in the United States. Critical queer/race studies, broadly defined, explores the interrelated, epistemological frameworks of critical race studies and queer studies. Through the study of a range of philosophical, scientific, literary and cinematic texts, to name a select few, it rigorously historicizes and theorizes nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first-century efforts to simultaneously link and separate theories of race and sexuality. Overall, this is an interdisciplinary field, where the interstices between 'factual' and 'fictional' materials on sexuality and race are constantly exploded and expanded upon. Building on the work of critical race studies scholars like Kimberle Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Kendall Thomas and Patricia Williams, critical queer/race studies extends interrogations of intersectionality and legal interpretation to questions of sexuality and race, as they emerge both in equal rights discourse, as well as the intellectual space of the academy. Recent collections such as *Q and A: Queer in Asian America* (1998), *Queer Diasporas* (Patton & Sánchez-Eppler 2000), the special issue of *Callaloo* on black queer studies (Vol. 23, No. 1) and *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (2002) elaborate on the relationship of racial difference to the constitution of

sexuality, and could, to some extent, be excellent examples of critical queer/race scholarship within the academic arena.

The past decade in queer scholarship has also witnessed a perceptible shift in queer studies to include questions of transnationalism, and its effects on the impact of queer movements globally. Such shifts have been in response to the growing sense that the proliferation of transnational sexual diasporas is challenging the ways in which we understand and disseminate categories of the sexual, the nation, and the subject. Thus, *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* produced a special issue entitled ‘Thinking Sexuality Transnationally’ (Povinelli and Chauncey 1999) with the explicit goal of placing critical studies of sex alongside discourses of globalization and transnationalism, and by extension, urging the literatures of globalization to also incorporate theorizations of mediated cultural forms such as sexuality in their analysis of social phenomena. Much of these efforts to critically ‘transnationalize’ queer studies in the United States have also emerged in response to severe criticism from international scholars about the provinciality of American-based queer criticism.

An example of the kinds of international criticism the new work in queer studies in the United States is attempting to address can be best understood through the terms of the continued debate on the issue of ‘global queering’. This debate attempts to formulate, albeit awkwardly and generally, the uneven relationship between the United States’ neo-colonialist, capital presence and the onslaught of a proliferating ‘queer subjects’, produced and encouraged, partially, through the dissemination of vehicles such as ‘queer theory’. The debate was most aggressively rehearsed in the August 1996 issue of the *Australian Humanities Review* where Dennis Altman argued for a renewed skepticism toward the liberating claims of ‘queer theory’, pointing to the pervasiveness of the North American (read: American) model of gayness and its appropriation in the post-industrial, and more interestingly, the industrialising world (Altman 1996a). Altman’s piece raised much ire and discussion, and was accompanied by a host of responses from queer scholars such as David Halperin, Christopher Lane and so on. Altman has since then followed this piece with a similar one in an issue of *Social Text* where he takes us on a dizzyingly haphazard tour of the ‘homosexual world’ in countries such as Thailand, the Philippines and Japan, suggesting, rather banally, I would argue, for closer attention to the political economy of sexuality in each of the specific locations. For Altman, there are ‘indigenous’ movements and subcultures that need to be read in their ‘original’ state before the arresting contamination of global queering ‘Westernizes’ them beyond reprieve (Altman 1996b).

In Altman’s view, ‘Westernization’ in this new queer version is continuing the process of capitalist exploitation that these ‘Third World’ countries have always experienced at the hands of First World economies. And queer

theory, despite its assumed radicalness and political underpinnings, Altman argues, has done little to address these concerns – a fact not helped by the old bugbear of all theory: its arcane language – as he says ‘one might compliment Eve Sedgwick for her intelligence, but hardly for her style . . . this theory is totally ignored by the vast majority of people whose life it purports to describe’ (Altman 1996a). Altman’s most recent addition to the debate is his new book, *Global Sex*, which once again continues (in more taxingly detailed form) the theoretical questions he outlined in his earlier pieces (Altman 2001).

I elaborate the terms of Altman’s critique because, first, it does signal important lacunae in queer studies which (despite the texts I have cited earlier) is still prominently American-based and ostensibly disinterested in geopolitical formations and in any possible intersectionalities with the kinds of historicist and materialist questions that postcolonial critics such as, for example, the Subaltern Studies group continue to pose. Second, what is equally interesting are the flaws in Altman’s attempt to expose and remedy what he sees at fault in current queer work. While championing the cause of the ‘indigenous’ or the ‘native’ (categories whose demarcations have always eluded me), Altman assumes that there is no indigenous greed, or alternative market space, or consumer culture – that it is only Westernization and its American-created queer cultures that create such economic formations. The limits of such observations are evident in the work of transnational studies scholars such as Aihwa Ong who have repeatedly emphasized the need to decenter the hegemony of the American impact model, and to instead articulate the simultaneity of multiple local and global spatialities. Thus, Ong’s work in China, specifically Shanghai, foregrounds the upheavals brought on by the entry of Japanese and Korean entrepreneurs into local economies that far outweigh any damage American multinationals are doing (Ong 1999). Ong’s focus on a differentiated locale could thus reorient American-based prescriptions about sexuality and geopolitics.

Altman’s (1997) construction of the United States’ crippling ‘global gaze/gays’ phenomenon can be challenged further through an examination of the specific work of queer scholars whose work originates, as it were, in his eulogized and privileged space of authentic nativist production. In this example, so-called ‘indigenous theorization’ suffers from an equally constraining homogenization and/or essentialization. I am referring here to Giti Thadani’s *Sakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India* (Thadani 1996). Postcolonial queer critics such as Ruth Vanita have pointed out that American-based theory is often dismissed within Indian intellectuals circles as politically suspect and unworthy of serious intellectual labor and recovery, a scepticism that extends beyond just the provenance of queer theory (Vanita 1996). Within such a framework, what does it then mean for Giti Thadani, the Indian founder of an openly lesbian collective, SAKHI, to

author a book from a postcolonial geographical location that deploys the same theoretical gestures that Altman and the Indian academy repudiate? Thadani's book recuperates the strategies of historical genealogy, lesbian invisibility and identity and deploys them in her reading of lesbian culture in India. Her project is also remarkably guilt-free of its own complicity in these so-called 'Western' critical gestures. In fact, Thadani begins sections of her book with quotations from Edward Said's *Orientalism* and crafts the lesbian movement in India in the same stylized ways as the gay movement in the United States. The significant and useful difference is her exhaustive evidence of, and gesture to, the specificity of her context. Thadani provides specific Indian models to all the so-called 'Western critical manners' being adopted, resurrecting an eerie shadow of what Homi Bhabha has called the concept of 'colonial mimicry'. While Thadani's book is fraught with historical and scholarly inaccuracies, and gross schematizations of the archives she has uncovered, her book still opens up new terrains for investigation – a first major exploration of lesbians in South Asia, especially in the space of queer transnational work where the deemed preoccupation – by necessity, or by choice – is still the histories and anthropologies of gay men.

A second model of critical queer/race studies would be the one we see emblazoned in recent gay rights discourse such as that of IGLHRC, what Janet Halley has recently called the 'like race' advocacy language that 'joins sexual constituencies to race constituencies'. Halley (2000: 46) argues that the 'central legal achievement of litigation waged on behalf of the black civil rights movement was a historic succession of equal protection holdings'. Attempting to work with such equal rights precedents, gay and lesbian advocates frequently reiterate that sexual orientation is like race, or that gay men and lesbians are like a racial group, or that anti-gay policies are like racist policies, or that homophobia is like racism. While it is obvious that the analogical imperative is in some ways inbuilt into American case law (within the logic of legal precedent) and perhaps all public discourse, Halley cautions against the dangers of such liaisons, not just in terms of a critique of rights discourse (which scholars such as Wendy Brown have done so well) but more in terms of the damage it does to the complexity of the queer model. Thus, 'like race' arguments produce a perilous universalizing structure to understand queers, what Halley (2000: 49) categorizes as the 'integrationalist model'. Such a model clearly works against the very notion of 'queer' activism which relies on a fractured, non-cohesive identity formation. An additional problem with the 'like race' argument is an assumption that one knows what 'race' is in legal terms. And within our current milieu of anti-affirmative action policies, many activists have strategically chosen to organize their claims for equal protection rights within the new form, 'not like race'. Halley (2000: 68) cites the example of a Native Hawaiian rights claim where the special programs dedicated under federal law to federally

maintained Indian tribes and under Hawaiian state law to Native Hawaiian cultural preservation could be erased from the landscape if native groups were understood to be ‘like race’.

Stuart Hall’s formulations suggest some additional strategies through which these questions of race, cultural power and political struggle could be imagined *within*, rather than against the grain of ‘the postcolonial’ or, in our case, of ‘the queer’ (Hall 1996). Here my invocation of ‘queer’ alongside ‘the postcolonial’ works more as a rhetorical and political juxtaposition than as violent analogical conflation. In other words, just as India, Brazil, Mexico, on the one hand, and Britain, Canada and the United States are not raced in the same ways, does not mean that they are not raced in any way. To extrapolate from Hall, the very constitution of the idea of queer/race studies as in the general discourse of all theoretical and political projects is always already operating, in Derridean terms, ‘under erasure’ (Hall 1996: 255). To assume, then, for example, that the continued critique of racism, of heterosexuality and of Europe in both queer and postcolonial studies contradicts its desire to be ‘over’ precisely those preoccupations misses Hall’s point. The project of queer/race studies is no exception, and as practitioners and contributors to such a project, we are particularly aware of the dangers of analogical and telos-driven thinking. Our goal as queer scholars and teachers must then be to make sexuality co-constitutive with writing on labor, race and colonialism, and intervene in discursive formations that would disarticulate queer/race subjects. Thus, even as the repetitions of colonial epistemes rework themselves in the language of analogy, we must think of these echoes more as transactions, as necessary narratives traded for one more day of life.

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