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JON BINNIE

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Sexuality and Social Theory

The Challenge of Queer Globalization

This book critically examines the relationship between sexuality, the nation and globalization. The mass of literature on the subject of globalization attests to its centrality within social theory and to the growth of critical interest in the politics of space. However, despite the volume of work produced on globalization, relatively little attention has been paid to theorizing the links between globalization, nationalism and sexuality in any sustained manner. Where sexuality does appear it often does so in a homophobic sense, for example within discourses on sex tourism that pathologize western gay men as predatory paedophiles. It is my aim in this book to critique the heteronormativity of writing on globalization and to provide a queer perspective on the subject. Why should globalization matter to students of sexuality? It should matter because of the impasse within work on sexuality. As Michael Warner argues, the transnational has often been neglected in discussions about sexual politics:

> In the middle ground between the localism of discourse and the generality of 'the subject' is the problem of international – or otherwise translocal – sexual politics. As gay activists from non-western contexts become more and more involved in setting political agendas, and as the rights discourse of internationalism is extended to more and more cultural contexts, Anglo-American queer theorists will have to be more alert to the globalizing – and localizing – tendencies of our theoretical languages. (1993: xii)

Specifically, globalization is deeply implicated within three major tendencies within current scholarship on sexuality. The first is the turn towards acknowledging the social and material components of sexualities; one problem identified with theorizing on sexuality in the early 1990s (when queer theory took off) was the lack of a wider social and economic perspective. This criticism is not unique to queer theory and has been made of

the 'cultural turn' more generally within social theory. The second is the increasing focus on the intersections of race and nation and impacts on sexual politics and vice versa. See for instance the racialized nature of debates on assimilation and transgression within claims for sexual citizenship and Philip Brian Harper's (1997) critique of Andrew Sullivan's writing on AIDS. Questions and concepts associated with postcolonial scholarship such as the transnational politics of movement, migration and diaspora have come to the fore within scholarship on sexualities. The third tendency has been a growth of interest in the state, which has crystallized around questions of sexual citizenship. The state has until recently not been terribly well-theorized in writing on queer theory and lesbian and gay studies (though see Duggan, 1995a; Smith, 1994). However, the burgeoning literature on sexual citizenship (e.g. Bell and Binnie, 2000; Brown, 1997; Evans, 1993; Phelan, 2001; Rahman, 2000; Richardson, 1998, 2000; Weeks, 1999) has been significant in re-focusing critical attention on the state. This redresses the imbalance from the earlier hegemony within queer theory in which questions of redistribution, the market and the state were at best overlooked in an emphasis on textual analysis.

Globalizing Discourses on Sexuality

The attempt here is not to produce a definitive, or authoritative last word on globalization, nationalism and sexuality – what I would term a globalized discursive truth about sexuality – but rather to examine what links can be teased out and articulated between globalization, the nation-state and sexuality. What commonalities and points of difference can be ascertained by comparing and contrasting different formations of nation and sexualities and local experiences of global processes? In *Outside Belongings*, Elspeth Probyn (1996) argues against the adding on of sexuality to a pre-given or pre-determined political subject. Accordingly my aim here is not to 'add on' sexuality to studies of the national and globalization, but rather to examine how these are produced through sexuality. However, there are real dangers in theorizing the relationships between sexuality, nationalism and globalization. For example, there is the accusation of ethnocentricity and metropolitanism. In attempting to theorize these relations across and between national borders there are concerns about the desirability of disembedding concepts and material situated in specific historical and geographical contexts. By making the nation visible there is the danger of reifying it: one risks being accused of affirming and celebrating it. Then there is the question of whose nation – whose sense and construction of nationhood? Is it possible to generalize about what we mean by the nation and nationalism?

As Parker et al. (1992: 3) argue in their introduction to *Nationalisms and Sexualities*: 'there is no privileged narrative of the nation, no "nationalism in general" such that any single model could prove adequate to its myriad and contradictory historical forms'. Moreover, there are dangers in not attempting to create a more substantial and sustained understanding of the relationships between nationalism, globalization and sexuality. In *Legislators and Interpreters*, Zygmunt Bauman (1987) argues that the job of the intellectual in postmodern society is to act as interpreter. Any claims for knowledge advanced by this book are therefore only partial and tentative.

Work on sexuality, like any other is commonly produced within specialist knowledge communities (e.g. Hispanic/Latin American Studies, Asian-Pacific Studies, European Studies) and is not always debated elsewhere. Research on sexuality clearly is far from immune to disciplinary mechanisms that regulate and control the production of knowledge. I hope this book will have something meaningful to say that will address readers across the humanities and social sciences. There is a real need to bring together the insights of political geography and international relations – work from a political economic perspective has tended to marginalize sexual politics, cultures and communities – with other approaches rooted in cultural studies, the humanities and cultural geography.

In the invitation I received to submit the proposal for this book, the two major concerns of Robert Rojek, my commissioning editor at Sage, were that it 'must be written for an interdisciplinary market', and that it must appeal to an English-speaking global audience – that is, the book 'must mean something to people in Milwaukee, Manchester, Melbourne and all points in between'. Obviously the English language is itself a key factor in globalization, and this book reproduces this linguistic hegemony. The book does not set out to be a definitive statement about the transnational basis of sexual cultures, communities and politics. While seeking to articulate the sexualized nature of global/local links, I cannot claim to be authoritative about sexual cultures globally. I am not claiming to be an expert or authority on Melanesia, nor Macedonia, Cuba, Vancouver or Moscow. In this sense, this book is trying to resist a globalizing discourse of sexuality and the claims to truth and knowledge advanced on the basis of a class-based cosmopolitan (moral) authority – a problem that taints much of the current literature on sexuality and globalization. In the preface to their edited volume on sexualities in the Asia-Pacific, Manderson and Jolly argue:

> As researchers and theorists of sexuality, we often not only occupy the site of the West but take it as our point of view as the normative measure of sameness and difference. We thereby presume our global centrality and deny our global connections. (1997: 22)

This statement should be considered alongside Aihwa Ong's (1999) discussion of the cultural politics and economics of transnational communities. In *Flexible Citizenship*, Ong states that it is dangerous to over-state or over-simplify the nature of transnational connections. Specifically she asks: where are the centres and the margins in contemporary global society? She is critical of the hegemonic status of postcolonial writing on transnational flows, which obscures the complexity of the power relationships in transnational communities more generally. Questions of authority and reflexivity routinely come into play in discussions of sexuality and globalization. Skeggs (2002) points towards the class basis of the concept of self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity is important in the project of deconstructing the anthropological self and creating a space for work informed by queer perspectives. Some writers, however, argue that a lack of reflexivity characterizes much gay anthropology. For instance in his essay 'Arrested Development or the Queerness of Savages', Neville Hoad (2000: 149) takes to task some gay anthropologists, arguing that: 'a wealth of gay studies anthropology fails to consider what may be at stake in its related figuration of certain acts as homosexual'. In *Global Sex*, Dennis Altman (2001) demonstrates a certain modesty about his limitations in not knowing everything about sexual cultures all over the globe – but then proceeds to reel off a long list of places he has been privileged enough to visit. In the introduction to the book, he notes that:

> One of the striking aspects of the burgeoning literature on globalization [...] is the extent to which authors draw upon serendipity as much as scholarship for their examples. The very nature of writing of the 'global' means we must appear at home everywhere, yet at the same time none of us can know more than a small fragment of the world. (2001: xi)

This ability to feel (or at least appear to be) at home everywhere is a pretty good definition of the cosmopolitan critic taken to task in Timothy Brennan's *At Home in the World*. We cannot all be cosmopolitan, as being cosmopolitan means that others are excluded from that identity. Those excluded from a cosmopolitan identity lack the requisite cultural (and other) capital to be a cosmopolite. According to Slavoj Žižek (1997) the other of the cosmopolitan is nationalist and fascist. The Others created by Altman are the passive gay men who are represented in his work as cultural dupes – victims of their own false consciousness and enslaved to the hedonistic desires promoted by global gay consumer culture. These are not the only set of Others created by cosmopolitan discourses, of course. Certain axes of difference are easier to commodify than others.

The queer cosmopolitan is routinely located within the major urban centres of gay consumer culture (Binnie, 2000). The other to this cosmopolitan is

therefore rural and provincial, pointing towards the neglect of the provincial and rural within work on queer globalization. Commentaries on queer consumer culture commonly imagine that the world ends at the boundaries of the metropolis. This point is astutely made by Vincent Quinn (2000) in his essay on sexual politics in Northern Ireland in which he rails against the metropolitanism of writers such as Mark Simpson, who generalize about gay life based on their own metropolitan London experience. As Phillips and Watt (2000: 15–16), introducing Quinn's essay, state 'consumerism and globalization are not equally pervasive in all Western countries and regions – even within the United Kingdom very different patterns emerge'.

Globalizing processes operate unevenly and have differential impacts upon individual nation-states (as well as within them). It is imperative that any geographical or other analysis of queer globalization respects both national differences and differences within national boundaries. In prefaces and introductions to books and papers on globalization it is customary to state one's relationship to the subject – to come clean about how one is personally situated or located (as in a feminist politics of location). For instance take Robert Holton's *Globalization and the Nation-State*. In the introduction to his book, Holton (1998: 20) puts down much of his interest in the subject to his own experience of migration from Britain to Australia: 'migration has done something to unsettle a Eurocentric Northern Hemispheric vision of global order'.

When it comes to sexuality it is even clearer that questions of authority and autobiography come into play. Gilbert Herdt also constitutes himself as cosmopolitan critic. On the dust jacket for his *Same Sex, Different Cultures*, we learn that Gilbert Herdt 'resides in Chicago and Amsterdam', as if to add weight to his authority as scholar of global gay culture. In terms of my own engagement with globalization and nationalism, my interest in the subject and need to write about stems from my simultaneous decision to 'come out' and to study abroad in Denmark as an exchange student, where I found the distance and space to 'come out' as a gay man and explore my sexuality in the leather bars of Copenhagen and Hamburg. Being an exchange student I was able to take advantage of programmes to promote student mobility within the European Community. I learnt many of the slang terms for homosex in Danish before I learned them in English. My estrangement from Englishness and Britishness and my Europhilia, then, marked my first degree. Simultaneously the experience of being constituted as 'Thatcher's child' by Danish students marked my Otherness, as did being patronized by Danish gays for coming from such a backward and under-developed society in terms of its sexual politics. Living in Copenhagen in the year that saw Section 28 of the Local Government Act (Smith, 1991, 1994) come into law at the same time as the Danish law on registered partnerships (Bech, 1992)

made me realize how wide a gulf there appeared to be between Britain and Denmark in terms of sexual politics, culture and everyday life. It also sparked my continuing interest in theorizing the spatial politics of sexuality. In particular it helped to shape my concern with the transnational basis of sexual cultures and communities within Europe.

National Formations of Lesbian and Gay Studies

While there is a growing awareness of national differences in sexual cultures, it is important that we also recognize national differences in the way sexual cultures have been studied. In *Global Sex*, Dennis Altman's argument reproduces the view that globalization has led to an accelerated Americanization and homogenization of (gay) culture. The implication from reading Altman's work is that the globalized gay culture he critiques represents a false consciousness on the part of those who passively consume it. However, Altman's reductionism fails to scratch the surface of the reasons why this consumer culture is so appealing to so many. As Christopher Lane writes in his reply to Altman's earlier online essay:

> We cannot summarily dismiss the issue of queer globalization as simply a phenomenon North America has foisted egregiously on other cultures. Altman's points about 'exporting the American dream', though well taken, leave unanswered more difficult and pressing questions. What, for instance, is so compelling about the queer model of desire that numerous lesbians and gay men in different countries have received it with a kind of avidity Altman finds galling. (1996: 1)

While I wish to take issue with Altman's anti-Americanism and the way he rather simplistically equates globalization, homogenization and Americanization, I am acutely aware of the US dominance of lesbian and gay cultural life and of lesbian and gay studies. This dominance is recognized by some writers working within the field, such as Jarrod Hayes, who takes US queer activists to task for 'assuming the history of US lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer resistance holds a monopoly on inspiration for a global queer politics' (Hayes, 2001: 94). Some authors, moreover, have sought to examine anti-American discourses within European debates on sexual politics. In his discussion of the development of the *Pacte Civil de Solidarité* (PACS) in France, for instance, Carl Stychin (2001) argues that opponents of the PACS articulated anti-Americanism suggested that the PACS represented an imposition of an alien American identity politics into French society and the national republican political tradition:

> republicanism frequently has deployed anti-Americanism in different forms. This 'displacement' of American within republicanism is central to the way in which the wider ideological implications of the PACS are characterized by both sides. (2001: 362)

Eric Fassin moreover, has questioned the extent to which what he terms the 'rhetoric of America' was invoked in French debates on the PACS. He claims that references to the Americanization of French society and culture declined sharply at the height of public debate on the PACS. In thinking through debates on gay marriage on both sides of the Atlantic, Fassin (2001: 218) argues that while the 'rhetoric of America' has been influential in contemporary French politics, the same cannot be said of the rhetoric of France within the American polity: 'there is no symmetry between the two sides of the transatlantic mirror: the 'rhetoric of France' clearly does not carry the same weight in the United States as its counterpart does in France'. In terms of academic knowledge production, US dominance is reflected by publishers insisting on using American examples to heighten the marketability of books (though this dominance could more accurately be termed an Anglo-American one). Scholars working outside of the US and the UK are now challenging this dominance, however. For instance, in a guest editorial of the leading geographical journal *Society and Space*, Larry Berg and Robin Kearns (1998: 128) bemoan the marginalization, which they claim affects 'almost all geographers working outside of Britain and America'. One solution towards rectifying the situation is more collaborative work between writers working in the centre and periphery. However it is also dangerous to make assumptions about what constitutes the centre and the margins, considering for instance the strength of feminist cultural geography 'down under' (Binnie, Longhurst and Peace, 2001). Conversely it is important to reflect upon whether anti-American sentiment lies behind criticism of queer theory in Britain and Europe, given the legacy of anti-Americanism within European academia and in the European Left. I also detected an anti-American tone at a conference on the direction of lesbian and gay studies in Europe in the mid-1990s. Queer theory was rubbished by some delegates and represented as something 'American' that we don't do over here in Europe. At the conference various 'authorities' representing different disciplines and European nations were asked to speak on the current state of lesbian and gay studies within their respective discipline and country. One delegate, Alibhe Smyth, presented a thoughtful paper that challenged the remit she had been given, arguing that if she was to present a paper on the state of lesbian and gay studies in Ireland, then she had to begin by examining the highly contested boundaries of the Irish state (Smyth, 1995).

I was minded at the conference of the general failure of lesbian and gay studies to adequately address questions of nationalism. The book that was produced out of the conference (Sandfort et al., 2000) ended up being organized around disciplines as opposed to nation-states. This suggests that it is perhaps easier for scholars in lesbian and gay studies to work across disciplinary boundaries then national ones. Perhaps we have less invested in

maintaining disciplinary identities. It was also unfortunate that something of the complexity and richness of the different national approaches to lesbian and gay studies was lost in the final publication, and that the book is dominated by British and Dutch academics. Thus the perspectives of German, Finnish, Italian scholars and the discussion of the state of lesbian and gay studies in their countries became marginalized. This is significant because it reinforces Berg and Kearns' argument about the American and British dominance of academic production.

In this introduction I have cautioned against the paradoxical parochialism of current debates on the globalization of sexualities. The failure to acknowledge non-western perspectives on sexualities has been increasingly challenged by post-colonial and other writers. However, parochialism takes many forms. For instance what of the parochialism that fails to address the different configurations of the relationships between globalization, nationalism and sexualities in Eastern Europe (e.g. Essig, 1999; Long, 1999; Sieg, 1995, Stychin, 2002), Southern Europe (e.g. Nardi, 1998) and the Celtic periphery of Europe (e.g. Conrad, 2001; Flynn, 1997; Moore, 2000)? Lesbian and gay studies is an emerging field that has its own centres (literature, sociology, cultural studies) and its margins (geography, law, politics, international relations). Parochialism can also result from working within narrow disciplinary frameworks that can lead to the failure to recognize the value of work in other disciplines. This issue is particularly salient for globalization, which John Tomlinson suggests, constitutes a challenge to traditional academic boundaries: 'Globalizing phenomena are, of their essence, complex and multidimensional, putting pressure on the conceptual frameworks by which we have traditionally grasped the social world' (1999: 14). Writers in other disciplines have written about interdisciplinarity and the 'discipline question' in lesbian and gay studies. Lisa Duggan (1995b) has written about the particular marginalization of scholars working on sexuality within history and the neglect of historical perspectives within lesbian and gay studies. Given the US dominance of lesbian and gay studies, and the low status of geography within the academy in the United States, the marginalization of geographical perspectives within lesbian and gay studies is perhaps unsurprising. The growth of interest and excitement in all matters spatial that characterized social and cultural theory in the 1990s has not always been reflected in the enhanced status of the discipline. Duggan calls for greater recognition of work from disciplines other than English: 'Queer studies must recognize the importance of empirically grounded work in history, anthropology, and social and cultural theory' (1996: 188).

While rooted in human geography this book is committed to interdisciplinarity. In particular I am deeply committed to bringing the compartmentalization of phenomena into distinctive spheres of the cultural,

political, economic and social. I also seek to challenge the dichotomy that has been set up by Nancy Fraser (1995) between the politics of redistribution and the politics of recognition; and which has been critiqued by Judith Butler (1997), Iris Marion Young (1997) and Majid Yar (2001). Key features of this book are the re-instatement of class and questions of redistribution into theories of globalization and sexuality. I shall now proceed to explain how the book is organized.

Structure of the Book

In the next chapter, 'The Nation and Sexual Dissidence', I examine the relationship between nationalism and sexuality. Drawing on literature from a wide range of geographical and historical contexts I argue that sexuality plays a crucial role in the symbolic enclosure of space in nationalism. Moreover, I explore how sexuality is key to the nation's survival and to the reproduction of the nation's population.

Chapter 3, 'Locating Queer Globalization', argues against the heteronormativity of the literature on globalization. Despite the vast amount of material on the subject, very few writers on globalization discuss sexuality at all. Feminist critiques of globalization have emerged, though these are still marginalized. In this chapter I discuss how globalization may be queered within the academy and everyday life. The chapter examines the literature on globalization and finds that some of the material is useful for conceptualizing the link between globalization and sexuality. This establishes the theoretical framework of the book.

Materialist feminists such as Rosemary Hennessy (2000) maintain that lesbian and gay men occupy a very particular relationship to global capitalism and that the global economic dimension is lacking from discussions of queer politics. In Chapter 4, 'The Economics of Queer Globalization', I examine the relationship between materiality, consumption and the global economy. Anxieties about the global economy are routinely displaced onto particular bodies. For instance, discourses about globalization stressing the need for competitiveness among cities for mobile capital are deployed to purify spaces within particular cities (e.g. New York) and in the UK, government arguments for welfare reform are couched in terms of the need to increase competitiveness within the global economic system (Haylett, 2001). While some writers argue that globalization has become a fetish, or banal, I argue that there remains much to do to tease out the relationships between sexuality and globalization, without lapsing into moralizing judgments on gay hedonism.

In Chapter 5, 'Queer Postcolonialism', I critique both the universalist tendencies within lesbian and gay politics and the heteronormativity of

post-colonial criticism. The dangers of a universal gay rights discourse are discussed in the context of international campaigning groups such as the ILGA. Particularly dangerous is the ethnocentricity of the basic vocabulary of lesbian and gay studies. Is there an assertion of a global gay imaginary and queer consciousness within international lesbian and gay politics that parallels the declarations of 'global sisterhood'? How injurious is this to non-hegemonic queer sexualities?

While globalization champions the free movement of capital and goods, the free movement of persons is more problematic. In Chapter 6, 'Queer Mobility and the Politics of Migration and Tourism', I argue that for queers, free movement across global space is difficult given the biological basis of laws on acquiring citizenship. In states where same-sex relationships are recognized for the purposes of naturalization, there are restrictions – and the basis for migration is the unit of the (monogamous) couple. As the literature on gender and international migration reminds us, mobility is itself a highly gendered phenomenon. Here I examine the notion that tourism is a sexualized phenomenon. Literature on sexuality and tourist practices is dominated by discussions of sex tourism, which tends to pathologize gay men's tourism, depicting western gay men as paedophiles. This masks the fact that all tourism is sex tourism to the extent that tourist practices are sexualized and embody sexualized values (e.g. the notion of heterosexual romance). There are certain types of tourist experience, and certain tourist gazes (Urry, 1990) that are represented as 'normal' – the family (in the narrowest, straightest sense) package tour to the Mediterranean for example. Other tourist experiences such as global lesbian and gay events like the Gay Games are treated with bemusement.

In Chapter 7 'AIDS and Queer Globalization', I argue that the pandemic has been significant in accelerating awareness of a global sense of place. It has reinforced the awareness of the porosity of national boundaries, and the need for global policy responses. However I maintain that significant differences in policies reflect and reproduce national sexual and political cultures.

Chapter 8 'Queering Transnational Urbanism', examines cosmopolitanism and the nature of consumption practices within the global city, arguing that the distinction between cosmopolitanism and provincialism has been at the heart of queer narratives of self and queer consumption practices. I examine this through an analysis of strategies to promote cities and festivals as queer-friendly. I contrast the marketed visions of queer urbanism with emerging queer critiques of the commodification and gentrification of queer urban space.

In Chapter 9 I offer suggestions for future research in this area, and ponder how the sexual politics of globalization could and should be taken forward. Having outlined the structure and logic of the book, I now go on to discuss the relationship between sexuality and the nation as this is a key theoretical underpinning to the book.

2

The Nation and Sexual Dissidence

The relationship between nationalism and sexuality remains relatively under-theorized. Sam Pryke argues that 'theoretically, there is very little in the most influential accounts of nationalism or sexuality to help in discerning a relationship between them' (1998: 530). The under-theorization of the relationship between nationalism and sexuality is especially problematic as the exact nature and condition of the interrelationships between the nation-state, nationalism and globalization remains subject to considerable disagreement. The question of whether globalization threatens the nation-state, or leads to the promotion of nationalism has been at the forefront of debates on the subject. Some argue that globalization means the inevitable decline in significance and power of the nation-state; others suggest that nationalism appears to be far from finished. Robert Holton (1998) claims there is in fact a symbiotic relationship between globalization and the nation-state. His *Globalization and the Nation-State* provides a clear discussion of the extent to which the nation-state's power is being challenged by globalizing processes. In the discussion of what he terms 'some problems with globe-talk', Holton considers questions of identity alongside political economic approaches. Extreme caution when discussing some of the bolder claims of the proponents in the debate has characterized many recent accounts and studies of globalization. Holton points towards the resurgence of nationalism as one of the major counter-trends towards the globalization of everyday life. He argues that 'globe talk' stresses conflict between globalization and the nation-state, whereas he writes that: 'the "national" and the "global" are in many ways complementary rather than necessarily conflicting social forces' (1998: 7). Moreover, he argues that much global rhetoric tends to underplay the historical dimension to globalization, and to over-state the uniqueness of contemporary globalizing processes.