Reviews


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Let the Americans keep their sodomy, bestiality, stupid and foolish ways to themselves, out of Zimbabwe.
—Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon denies in no uncertain terms the existence of homosexuality among men in the Antilles:

I had no opportunity to establish the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique. This must be viewed as the result of the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles. The schema of homosexuality is well enough known. We should not overlook, however, the existence of what are called there “men dressed like women” or “godmothers.” Generally, they wear shirts and skirts. But I am convinced that they lead normal sex lives. They can take a punch like any “he-man” and they are not impervious to the allures of women—fish and vegetable merchants. In Europe, on the other hand, I have known several Martinicans who became homosexuals, always passive. But this was by no means a neurotic homosexuality: For them it was a means to a livelihood, as pimping is for others. (180)

Fanon’s theory leaves the queer postcolonial body with no ground on which to position itself with regard to its desire for those of its own sex. In this view, homosexuality is a racialized phenomenon, gayness is culturally coded white, and homosexuality is analogous to homophobia, with the black man serving as “phobogenic object” (151). At the same time, however, as Diana Fuss so elegantly argues in “Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification,” the primitivism and sexual debauchery so closely associated with the native in much of the regnant Orientalist discourse could only be countered by Fanon through
a disavowal of what the *West* seemed to view as sexual perversion. The questions that Fuss raises ("Is it really possible to speak of ‘homosexuality,’ or for that matter ‘heterosexuality’ or ‘bisexuality,’ as universal, global formations? Can one generalize from the particular forms sexuality takes under Western Capitalism to sexuality as such?") are the ones that usefully scaffold attempts to queer the colored body in a globalist frame (33). These questions do not provide the explicitly acknowledged framework of the volume under consideration here, but they would seem to be useful ones as we proceed with the queering of sexuality globally through a displacement of “colonial, heteronormative, or otherwise hegemonic stratifications.”

The sense that there is a fundamental and mutual irreconcilability between what we might somewhat too glibly conflate into the term “postcoloniality” and somewhat too reductively as “homosexuality” is a longstanding one. *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Instructions* attempts to address the rift between queer critics who “find themselves resistant to the seemingly deeply ingrained homophobia of much postcolonial culture and discourse” and those in postcolonial studies who “decry gay/lesbian studies as ‘white’ and ‘elitist.’” The volume’s stated charge is hardly easy, given that the terms “postcolonial” and “queer” both remain contentious and ill-defined, that neither of these fields is without its deeply entrenched controversies, and that both are also fields in transition. All the more reason, then, that this difficult mission be undertaken and that some of the contradictions be encountered. *Postcolonial, Queer* makes a bold foray into this troubled terrain, with expected difficulties and valuable moments of insight.

Comprised of a substantial introduction by John Hawley, an evaluative and useful afterword by Samir Dayal, five reprinted essays, and six original ones, the volume covers a great deal of ground, geographically as well as conceptually. It traverses disciplinary borders between cultural studies, literary studies, gender studies, and postcolonial studies, allowing a prismatic perspective to emerge on sexuality and its evolving sociology. The volume’s stated aims are “to question the relation between hegemonic (U.S.) cultural transmissions as they intersect with indigenous or colonized formations of sexual identity; to connect cultural arrangements like sexual, racial, and class identities to the political economy of late capitalism; and to engage some of the theoretical debates around how to know these issues.” Given the mix of reprinted and original articles, the volume is surprisingly consistent in its focus on the dubiety of old certainties about race and sexual identities. Also uniform is the
persistent call for comparative studies of sexual identities and the need “to look beyond the borders of North America and Europe and more seriously address how queer identities and queer cultural formations have taken shape and operate elsewhere.” The project of “broadening postcolonial studies” (the title of Spurlin’s contribution) thus seems possible only in tandem with a concomitant impulse to reimagine Western queer studies, a tension that many of the essays strive to maintain.

The opening essay by Dennis Altman provides a useful note of caution against the temptation to examine sex/gender relations globally without concomitant attention to sociopolitical issues. It also sounds a note echoed through several other pieces in the volume: a commitment to investigating rather than assuming boundaries between the West and its other and between heterosexuality and homosexuality. A notable example of a geographically situated and archivally ambitious project, Joseph Boone’s classic essay on the homoerotics of orientalism, reprinted from PMLA, furnishes a survey of issues integral to a global analysis of sexuality: “the practice and economics of empire, perceptions of race, the collusion of phallocratic and colonial interests, constructions of sexual ‘deviance,’ questions of narrative authority, crises of representation.” Whether the essays that follow further discussion on “the homoerotics of an orientalizing discourse whose phallocentric collusions and resistant excitations this chapter has just begun to uncover” is not an easy question to respond to, given the many directions in which subsequent chapters take their explorations.

Jarrod Hayes suggests the possibility that “it is in fact the homo that resists the hetero globalizing moves of late (and not-so-late capitalism).” Hayes challenges the assumption of “the globalization of the hetero-homo binarism,” proposing instead that we might be better served by a salutary examination of “the tropes of queer resistance to colonialism, neocolonialism, and postindependence nationalized oppression in Algeria” offered in his study. These might well serve as inspiration for “a renewed antiimperialist queer politics.” Hayes succeeds in identifying, if obliquely, what queer politics might be against, but it is not his project, regrettably, to suggest what it might be for. It would seem that the strongest point of convergence between postcolonial and queer theory inheres in this particular dilemma: how to imagine a globally conceived, culturally sensitive, yet practically charged project for a meaningful politics that can keep all the variables of identity and evolving socio-economics in full play—how to transact, in other words, between the
global and the particular and the known and the elusive in a manner that will allow a thoughtful politics to emerge.

The tensions between global and local inform many of the essays that follow Hayes’ in the volume. What might otherwise seem like a unidirectional cultural imperialism, however, emerges as a transactional process with a culturally particular, unique, and situated rhetoric of unconventional desire and its emergent language. Jillana Enteen’s transportation of feminist, sex, and race theories into the less-known terrain of non-Western locations resists what Dennis Altman refers to as the formation of an aggregate “global gay” as she examines “the shifting positions of women in Bangkok over the past decade as a result of increasing opportunities for education and financial stability.” Enteen examines the crucial role of language in articulating identity, a significant factor in light of the spread of global English in general and the use of English argot in expressing the same-sex love in particular. Yingrakying, Thai women who love women, gathering under the banner of the only Thai organization specifically serving this community, find themselves negotiating a variety of different cultural discourses, not least their own, in their effort to group without losing an individual sense of self. Language and terminology become reinfused with unique experience instead of redefining and leveling differences. Chong Kee Tan’s essay on sexual politics in 1990s Taiwan also displays the transactional nature of evolving gay identity—one that need be neither uniformly derivative nor completely xenophobic. Premised on the understanding that what we sometimes think of as “Western homosexual colonization” (sometimes conflated with “American homosexuality”) is itself characterized by no singular identity, Tan’s argument underscores the reality of conflicted constructions of sexual identity that coexist.

Gaurav Desai’s essay, cleverly titled “Out in Africa,” also performs a comparable analysis of “sexual practices in all their fluid forms,” but this time with regard to African sexual identities. Desai’s particular interest is in examining “the ways in which literary works interpellate issues of sexual normativity and transgression.” One of the collection’s best essays on literary sources as indices of the complexities of sexual identity, Hema Chari’s “Colonial Fantasies and Postcolonial Identities” squarely broaches the problem of “deferred and displaced homoeroticism” and its disproportionate significance for the politics of postcoloniality. Focused on Salman Rushdie’s novel, The Moor’s Last Sigh, the essay suggests quite persuasively that “disjunctive norms of alternative sexuality are caught within the dichotomy of East/West,
This less hopeful articulation of emergent postcolonial sexual identity is not likely to cheer, but it does represent a sober encounter with all the forces of fundamentalist, nationalist, and gender politics that continue to bedevil postcolonial societies. Chari is not alone in sounding a more cautionary than celebratory note. Donald Morton's essay on "Global (Sexual) Politics, Class Struggle, and the Queer Left" underscores the importance of social justice, productively meshing sexual and class politics, and insisting that sexuality alone cannot be the foundation of a meaningful sodality.

Class issues have posed a persistent challenge both to postcolonial and queer studies. In the initial stages of the development of both, certain isolated factors assumed implicit and perhaps warranted importance. As each field continues to evolve, however, the season for a full-blown emergence of class analysis may be said to be upon us with some urgency. If class cannot be isolated as the only factor of importance, nor can it always be invited into our discussion post festum. J.K. Gibson-Graham's querying of the scripts of capitalist globalization (in the well-known essay reprinted in this collection) complicates the customary understanding of its workings very effectively, but without sufficiently explaining how diverse economic identities are understood through a traditional or even refurbished class analysis. The dauntingly diverse range of human sexual experiences, the dynamic interplay of the global and local, and the fractal appearance of the intertwined issues of race, sex, and class resonate throughout the collection, with variant emphases and the distinct challenges that remain. I find myself in the curious position of agreeing wholeheartedly with Samir Dayal's statement in the concluding "By Way of an Afterword" that "the psychic or psychol analytic dimensions of desire" remain undertheorized even in this venturesome collection, but with a sense that desire can scarcely be understood without a full reckoning of the material circumstances from which it springs and within which it must struggle to find expression. This marriage of critical emphases continues to elude both postcolonial and queer studies.

Works Cited
