



EDITED BY **SASKIA WIERINGA**
AND **HORACIO SÍVORI**

THE
SEXUAL
HISTORY
OF THE
GLOBAL
SOUTH

SEXUAL POLITICS IN AFRICA,
ASIA, AND LATIN AMERICA



The sexual history of the global South

sexual politics in Africa, Asia, and Latin America

EDITED BY SASKIA WIERINGA AND HORACIO SÍVORI



Zed Books

LONDON | NEW YORK

The sexual history of the global South: sexual politics in Africa, Asia, and Latin America was first published in 2013 by Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, UK and Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

www.zedbooks.co.uk

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Set in OurType Arnhem and Monotype Futura by
Ewan Smith, London

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Cover design: www.alice-marwick.co.uk

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon,
CRO 4YY

Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of
St Martin's Press, LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library
Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data available

ISBN 978 1 78032 403 6 hb

ISBN 978 1 78032 402 9 pb

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Foreword

This book is the outcome of a long-term program focused on a historically grounded and comparative analysis of sexualities in the South. It was carried out by the Sephis program, the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development, a research initiative aimed at stimulating the critical study of development in the global South within a comparative framework.

The Sephis program was established in 1994 and financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its main objective is to reinsert a historically grounded perspective into the thinking about the development of the 'global South' (to employ the term developed by recent critiques of colonial geopolitics to depict countries struggling in different ways with problems of colonialism and underdevelopment). It aims at fostering dialog and collaboration between researchers with diverse visions of development and history, to encourage comparative research, and to strengthen research capacity in the South.

In 2007, Sephis received a grant from the Ford Foundation to support a research program on the History of the Sexualities in the South that could take advantage of the experiences of the Sephis program in South-South academic exchange. In addition, it allowed for the training of a new generation of researchers in comparative and historically grounded approaches to practices and ideologies surrounding sexuality in different parts of the global South. The objective of this program was to allow young scholars in the humanities and social sciences to engage in new field research and link it with national and international debates and advocacy for sexual rights.

The ultimate aim was to gain a deeper historical understanding of the complex interplay between cultural genealogies and the politics of gender relations and sexual behavior. Related themes of interest to the program were the legal regulation of and public policies on sexuality, sex- and gender-based claims of identities, sexual expression, and sexual knowledge. These

claims are located within wider processes of state formation and global transformations and are often connected to a strengthening of patriarchal relations, heteronormativity, and conservative control in many parts of the world. The program also aimed to stimulate linkages between social science research and advocacy on sexual rights, working from a human and sexual rights perspective.

The program was designed to train a relatively small group of sexuality researchers from different countries of the global South, stimulating them to compare their different experiences and conceptual frameworks. Most of them were pursuing graduate studies and conducted their field research in specific countries within the global South. A related goal was to build an international community of researchers around these issues with the objective of fostering the exchange of information on research and advocacy and of encouraging high-quality research through enhancing the research capacities of all involved.

These cross-cultural and trans-disciplinary conversations took place in the individual projects of the participants and in the virtual contact that is part and parcel of today's academic work. They were especially intensive during a number of academic encounters organized in different parts of the world. An expert meeting was organized at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, in February 2008. The first training workshop for the selected grantees took place in September 2008 at the Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights (CLAM) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The second workshop, for a second batch of grantees, was organized at the Institute of Women's Studies of the University of Dhaka, in Bangladesh, in March 2009. A peer review workshop took place in Cairo and was organized in collaboration with the Institute for Gender and Women's Studies of the American University in Cairo in May 2009. The program ended with an international policy dialog at the Gajah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, co-organized with the Kartini Asia Network for Women's/Gender Studies in August 2010.

Many people participated in this project at one stage or another. First of all we wish to thank the Ford Foundation, and especially Barbara Klugman, for its unwavering support for this adventurous project. We hope this book fulfills their expectations, albeit perhaps inevitably in a partial and incomplete way. Shamil Jeppie, co-chair of Sephis in the period 2006–11,

and Ulbe Bosma, Sephis coordinator from 1994 to 2007, laid the foundations for this program by writing the grant proposal. Saskia Wieringa and Sanjay Srivastava were involved as lecturers and Horacio Sívori as host at the first training workshop in Rio de Janeiro and continued their involvement in the program in different ways. Imtiaz Saikh was coordinator of the program from April 2008 till April 2010, working closely with the Sephis Secretariat in Amsterdam. Jacqueline Rutte, office manager of Sephis, was involved in every aspect of the organization of the grants, the workshops, and the publication. We are very grateful to each one of them for their contribution to making this program successful.

In the different locations where activities were organized we could count on the support and enthusiasm of many people working in or with the institutions mentioned. We cannot acknowledge them all, but they can rest assured that their support has been duly and gratefully noted and recognized by all participants. Without them, the project's success would not have been possible. Last but not least we would like to thank the editors of this volume, Saskia Wieringa and Horacio Sívori, who both, in their own ways, have contributed tremendously to the success of this program. Without their commitment and dedication to training young scholars from the global South in the study of sexuality, the program would never have been the same, and this book would never have seen the light of day.

Michiel Baud, co-chair, Sephis

Shamil Jeppie, co-chair, Sephis

Marina de Regt, coordinator, Sephis

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1 | Sexual politics in the global South: framing the discourse

SASKIA WIERINGA AND HORACIO SÍVORI

Introduction

What does a global South perspective mean to historical studies of sexuality and sexual politics? If, as Weeks (1981), Foucault (1978, 1985, 1988), Halperin (2002), and others have argued, sexuality – as a separate domain of human experience and an object of regulation – is a recent Western invention produced by discourses of modernity about identity, subjectivity, bodies, and population control, what space is there to investigate non-Western historical discourses on sexuality and sexual politics? How to investigate not only the genealogies and figurations of the sexual in different sociocultural contexts, but also the constitution of the gaze that sees ‘non-Western’ sexuality as fundamentally distinct from the modern? How has sexuality historically been articulated in contexts that cannot be designated as either colonial or post-colonial, such as China and the Arab world? How to do justice to the manifold local contexts that feed into the production of global discourses on sexuality? How to document the often overlooked agency and desires of individuals and collectives whose location at the margins of a Eurocentric, (post-)colonial discourse sets them apart as pre-rational or ‘traditional’?

Addressing these questions means investigating a diversity of beliefs, practices, and cultural traditions that shape and challenge sexual meanings and classifications in the context of pre-colonial realities and peripheral modernities (see Andaya 2006; Blackwood 2005; Peletz 2009; and Wieringa 2010). It also means examining the role of the sexual – e.g. of reproduction and the family, of sexual morality, of sexual health, of sexual classifications, and sexual selves – in contemporary societies, in development programs (Pigg and Adams 2005), and in processes of nation-building (Ndjio, Biswas, Kumaramkandath, and Sierra Madero, this volume).

Globalization and transnational flows have had tangible effects on sexual relations, identities, and subjectivities. In the wake of an increasingly globalized world order under waning Western dominance,

within ideologies of modernity, civilization, and programs for social improvement, discourses on population control, 'safe sex,' and 'sexual rights' (Petchesky 2000) coexist with moral tales of purity and decay. From a Eurocentric perspective, in a manner analogous to the colonial map of the world, sexuality was conceived in the form of center-periphery relations: the 'normal,' the 'modern' at the centre, the 'deviate' and 'traditional' on the periphery (Bleys 1995; Epprecht 2004). But, as Appadurai (1996) rightly asks, does modernity come only from the places that geopolitical conventions have designated as the West? Does modern thinking exclusively arise in colonial or neo-colonial metropolitan centers and then spread to global peripheries? Are eroticism, morality, and the social organization of bodies, pleasure, reproduction, well-being, and disease merely the result of exogenous geopolitical arrangements and struggles?

Dislocating sexuality studies from an exclusively metropolitan perspective means not just looking at those issues from different locations, but primarily asking different questions, addressing the asymmetries of power involved in processes of globalization. Historians and anthropologists have documented the extent to which the racist social order of colonial regimes also produced gendered and sexualized relations between colonizers and colonized peoples (Hyam 1991; Stoler 1995). Third World feminists and feminists of color in North America have interrogated the persistence of gender and racial asymmetries in both neocolonial and metropolitan cultural politics, intellectual traditions, and liberation movements (Mohanty et al. 1991; Basu et al. 2001). Scholars in the humanities and the social sciences, mostly based in Europe and North America, have begun addressing sexuality transnationally by establishing links between feminist, lesbian/gay/queer, and post-colonial theories (Ahmed 2005; Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé 2002; Manalansan 2003; see also Loomba 2005). A number of such authors have produced general studies of sexuality and globalization, mainly from a Northern-centred perspective (Altman 2001; Binnie 2004). Accounts based in the South, by scholars from the South, are still rare.

The global circulation of knowledge has, until recently, drawn a deep divide between the West and the rest, and within first- and second-class citizens both at metropolitan centers and at the global periphery. This is evident in the uneven distribution of access to higher education, the academy, and academic publishing. As a consequence, direct exchange of scientific knowledge and literature between Africa, Asia, and Latin America has not been consistent. Scholarly exchange – when it hap-

pens – takes place almost exclusively between those regions and North America and western Europe, rarely among Southern nations. In spite of that, each region of the global South has a burgeoning production (most of it in languages other than English), which is often ignored overseas. Voices from the global South have begun to be heard in the North only as the boundaries between North and South begin to dissolve and the influence of the BRIC countries begins to be felt globally.

For sexuality studies to become truly transnational, a careful trajectory of sexual politics all over the globe is required. From these micro-geographies a global perspective can be built that is neither reflective of hegemonic Western concerns nor dispersed into unconnected fragments. This book is meant as a contribution to the growing body of transnational sexuality studies by scholars from the global South trained in their own countries, reflecting on theoretical, political, and empirical interests emerging at the crossroads of local, regional, and global circuits of intellectual exchange. They look at sexual morality (Vasudevan, Biswas, Sierra Madero); sexual identities (Kumaramkandath, Teutle López, Al-Ghafari); state policy (Ndjio, Sadock); media representations of sexuality (Biswas); culture, sexuality, and subjectivity (Masvawure, Cordeiro); sexuality and social movements (Sempol); and the scientific study of sexuality (Huang). The focus of these studies is often on the agency of individuals and collectives: female dance performers in India (Vasudevan); university students in Zimbabwe (Masvawure); prison inmates in Brazil (Cordeiro); homosexual men in urban Mexico (Teutle López) and southern India (Kumaramkandath); and lesbian and gay activists in Argentina (Sempol). A related concern is the sexual politics in processes of nation-building and social transformation. Authors in this volume address that link in colonial (Biswas, Sadock) and post-colonial (Sierra Madero, Vasudevan, Ndjio, Masvawure) situations; in societies emerging from dictatorship (Sempol); in processes of national refoundation (Huang); in large-scale population policies (Cordeiro); in the policing of national morality (Sierra Madero, Teutle López); and the control of the public visibility and the speakability of female bodies and passions (Al-Ghafari).

Indeed, this list of subjects and issues is somewhat arbitrary too. This volume is the result of an academic research training venture, which largely reflects the current conditions of a field. Although neither this introduction nor the book's chapter composition intends to be representative of 'the state of the art' in sexual politics research, some relevant missing topics should be acknowledged. Those include new perspectives on heterosexuality and reproductive (but also non-

reproductive) health and rights. And particularly the radical political and theoretical innovations brought by actors who have more recently emerged into the global sexual rights arena, such as transgender communities and sex workers' movements. Each of those issues and subjects – all rising to public visibility particularly at global South locations – challenge received notions of sexual morality, normativity, the materiality of bodies, language, and sexual relations, and would have been relevant here.

Authors in this volume draw on post-colonial theories, deconstructing the colonial past and the way its tentacles stretch into the present, and address globalization issues, focusing on present-day theories of the influence of Western discourses on the rest of the world. Though approaching sexual politics from different theoretical backgrounds, from the humanities and the social sciences respectively, they converge in critical ways, as Krishnaswamy and Hawley (2008) stress, sharing the geopolitical focus that is relevant for this project. A common theme is the creation of normativities as a biopolitical project, situated in time and space (Ahmed 2005).

In this introductory chapter we address two themes that cut across the empirical contributions in the various chapters: the interrogation of the colonialist gaze that has constituted sexuality and sexual subjects as an object of scientific inquiry, state repression, and bio-political intervention in the global South; and the conception of sexualities as an inherently localized phenomenon.

Whose sexuality, whose gaze?

If the meanings of sexuality and the production of sexual knowledge are part of a social process, it becomes important to interrogate its cultural and historic conditions, and locate the actors involved in that process. Colonialism, modernization, the Cold War, the surge of neoliberal policies over the past few decades, and the rise of new economic centers of power have a large impact on gender orders, bodily practices, and sexual subjectivities. National political and economic elites, religious leaders, international organizations such as WHO, UNAIDS, UN Women (formerly UNIFEM), and the World Bank, as well as Western and non-Western intellectuals and experts, have played a substantial role not only in shaping sexual subjectivities and regulating sexuality, but also in the classification of 'sexual subcultures' globally. The historical trajectory of studies of sexuality in the global South is also the history of a gaze constituted at the confluence of modern medical science and Western colonial expansion, which catalogued

Southern perspectives on gender and the erotic as exotic innocent curiosities, at best, or degenerations at worst.

Until roughly the 1970s, sexuality in former colonies and 'Third World' nations was an object of interest in the writings of missionaries, travelers, colonial administrators, historians, anthropologists, archeologists, and national intellectuals, under a master narrative in which indigenous beliefs, cultural practices, economy, and social organization were situated at the bottom of a hierarchy headed by modern science and forms of government.¹ 'Non-Western' sexualities acquired meaning strictly within the bounds of indigenous cultures, reinforcing their exterior and inferior status vis-à-vis the uncontested authority of modern Western knowledge. As described and codified by colonial administrators, researchers, and social reformers, sexualities were frozen in the culture, social organization, magic, and religious beliefs of peoples of lesser worth.

Since then, researchers and intellectuals in the global South, along with critical scholars in the North, have started questioning hegemonic narratives, challenging the commonplace assumption of their marginal, subordinate, or 'developing' status (Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1999; Loomba 2005). Critical studies of colonial relations, development rationalities, and the role of class, race, and gender hierarchies within those frameworks have merged with theoretical perspectives on the history of sexuality to analyze the shifting meanings of eroticism, gender orders, and bodily practices in the context of unequal power relations (Brah and Coombes 2000; Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé 2002; Stoler 1995). Instead of an exotic 'other,' Southern researchers have become agents of a double engagement, at once involved in local political and also theoretical debates drawing upon, and challenging, assumptions widely established in global social science research.

This is by no means an easy task. On the one hand, inherited theoretical frameworks may predetermine the way they frame research questions, the concepts and the analytical tools available to them, as well as their findings (Cook and Jackson 1999). On the other hand, in the Northern literature that has set trends in the social sciences and the humanities, the meaning and value of contributions by scholars and activists based in the global South are often recognized merely as 'cases,' or 'native knowledge,' rather than theoretical and political perspectives worth engaging in as part of an intellectual debate. Thus, in a global division of knowledge, countries in the South are considered the realm of 'culture,' whereas analysis, interpretation, and debate take place in a separate public sphere, to which Southern

intellectuals can claim access only by means of a Northern education, and where they will remain marked as representatives of that foreign culture. Likewise, in studies of changing sexual discourses in Northern countries, the 'West' often goes unmarked, such as in Richardson's important study on sexuality since the 1960s (Richardson 2000). Perhaps as a result of the unchallenged hegemony of the English language in international academic practices, networks of sexuality scholars have rarely altered the self-referencing conventions of the Anglo-Saxon academic world, or treated the work of Southern activists and researchers as relevant to their understanding of global theoretical concerns.² Southern intellectuals find themselves back in footnotes, providing the empirical material upon which Northern academics build their theories.

The field of sexuality studies is itself part of a power/knowledge regime where conventions are generated and contested, ethical standpoints elaborated, and esthetic sensibilities developed. An example is the global use of categories such as 'lesbian,' 'gay,' and 'queer.' As the basic vocabulary of global 'lesbian and gay studies,' they carry social connotations from the white middle-class Western milieu where they were first adopted. In a globalizing world, they constitute an ethnocentric toolkit that scholars and activists from the South have to grapple with.³ As Povinelli and Chauncey have pointed out, the significance of transnational processes in the production of localized sexual subjectivities is reflected in the 'tension between increasingly powerful global discourses and institutions of homosexuality and heterosexuality, and between local sexual ideologies and subjectivities' (1999: 446). If theory is seen as the sediment of empirical knowledge, one might expect that analyses of localized, Southern experiences would influence the development of global theories as well. Yet global discourses of 'gay/lesbian' and 'queer' remain largely based on Western middle-class values.

Some scholars argue that local terms are preferable to concepts developed in the global North (Wieringa et al. 2007). Indeed, some chapters on same-sex practices, identities, and communities in this volume (Kumaramkandath, Sierra Madero, Teutle López, Cordeiro) analyze the use of specific terms that point to particular, localized subjectivities and behaviors. Yet there is no consensus. Vasudevan and Kumaramkandath argue in this volume that the univocal identification of such concepts with a specific cultural ecology might contribute to exoticizing people with same-sex desires in global South locations. Would it not be better to broaden definitions of same-sex practices and desires, so that they point not only to Western sensibilities, but to

non-Western ones as well? Al-Ghafari (this volume) insists on the use of 'lesbian' as a transhistorical category, applicable to the investigation of women's same-sex relations in Arab cultures across centuries.

Sexual science and political control

Sexuality emerged as a field of knowledge from the end of the nineteenth century onwards in Europe, as a response to the Industrial Revolution, in the wake of eugenics and the belief that the destiny of nations could be controlled by means of manipulating the somatic makeup of its population. It was the context of debates over female suffrage, and of increasing state intervention in the domestic sphere (Weeks 1981). The new science of sexology set itself the task of uncovering the 'laws of nature' to make sexual instincts intelligible. Sexual classifications became a medicalized concern, the object of a naturalistic approach imbricated with the construction of racial and ethnic traits. Medical and psychological theories became immensely influential. The works of Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfeld, and other pioneers attracted wide attention and became popular in many corners of the globe (Bland and Doan 1998; Robinson 1976).

For over one hundred years, criminological and then psychiatric theories presided over the study of and state policy on sexual 'weakness,' 'degeneration,' and 'vices.' Freud's invention of psychoanalysis as a 'science of desire' in late nineteenth-century Vienna was a main contribution to the popularization of the assumption that humans were born with a sexual nature, and that there was a 'normal' course in the development of sexual subjectivity, in which male dominance and women's receptivity – naturalized as biologically determined – were eroticized (Jeffreys 1985; Wieringa 2002). Ideas about sexual orientation at the time were inextricably embedded in biomedical theories of gender inversion, such as those of Krafft-Ebing (see Weeks 1981). Expanding the influence of the clinical method, modern science set itself the task of making the sexual intelligible in an individualizing regime (Gagnon and Parker 1995; Weeks 1981). The study of the diversity of sexual customs and of the domestication of sexual instincts among 'natives' as a marker of civilization was a fundamental focus of attention for early twentieth-century anthropology (Vance 2007 [1991]).

This essentialist perspective on sexuality also spread to countries beyond Western centres, as policy-makers and intellectuals in New World nations, as well as in African and Asian colonies and empires, were well versed in the latest scientific theories and were as concerned about the design of a healthy, productive population as their metropolitan