

Editorial: Racism in the Closet - Interrogating Postcolonial Sexuality

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In September 2007, the liberal German daily newspaper *Süddeutsche* published an article entitled 'Migrant kids against Gays'.¹ The article referred to the results of a study initiated by the German Lesbian and Gay Federation (LSVD), investigating attitudes among German students towards homosexuality, comparing those of German, Russian and Turkish backgrounds.² According to *Süddeutsche*, the study showed that 'migrant kids in particular strongly rejected homosexuality',³ and that German kids were more likely to be *weltoffen*, that is, open minded or cosmopolitan. While on the one hand all migrant subjects are hereby constituted as a single category – that is, not German and hence not *weltoffen* – there is at the same time a hierarchy constructed within the migrant community through the problematization of religion. As the article in *Süddeutsche* continues, 'the rejection of homosexuals is increased amongst adolescents of Turkish origin with increasing religiousness. The study shows that the rejection of homosexuality also depends on levels of social integration: those with hardly any connection to [German] society are particularly homophobic'.⁴

Thus the status of migrancy is read back through Turkishness, which in turn functions as a religious category. The more religious (meaning Muslim) the less tolerant (meaning 'gay friendly') and the less *weltoffen* you are. The question of open-mindedness (*Weltoffenheit*) is directly linked to the question of 'integration': those marked out by a religious identity are considered unable or unwilling to integrate. German values (symbolized, of course, by 'cosmopolitan' Berlin, the nation's moral as well as political capital) are accordingly placed under threat by Islamic migrants. By commissioning this survey, the LSVD – as Germany's largest gay and lesbian organization – played a part in consolidating a 'progressive' conception of German values through the rejection of the Muslim subject. Homophobia is thus simultaneously nationalized and racialized. In an act of audacious historical revisionism, Germany becomes equated with gay rights (as an expression of its general regard for 'human rights'), while Islam is constituted as homophobic (and thus outside a discourse of 'human rights'). Gay rights are thus mobilized in anti-immigration discourse as a key signifier of European cultural superiority, as (white) gay Germans assert their membership of the national community through the construction of the figure of the homophobic Muslim.

The example of the LSVD survey, which assembles categories of race, sexuality and religion, demonstrates the willingness of the German gay leadership to align themselves with the politics of the mainstream right. The construction of German nationalism as the progressive and tolerant champion of homosexuality is a project also shared, for example, by the Christian Democrat-led government of Baden-Württemberg, which introduced into the nationalist 'integration debate' a new questionnaire commonly known as the 'Muslim Test'. This questionnaire is primarily aimed against the state's Turkish community and applies exclusively to applicants for German citizenship from so-called Muslim countries. The majority of the 30 questions are related either to gender and sexuality (e.g., 'How do you view the statement that a woman should obey her husband, and that he can beat her if she doesn't?' or 'Imagine that your son comes to you and declares that he's a homosexual and would like to live with another man. How do you react?') or are linked to the issue of terrorism (e.g., 'you learn that people from your neighbourhood or from among friends or acquaintances have carried out or are planning a terrorist attack – what do you do?').⁵

As this edition of darkmatter will show, the LSVD survey and 'Muslim-Test' are not isolated examples, and they represent tendencies that are becoming increasingly entrenched across contemporary Western states and societies. As gay rights become articulated to the nation and used as markers of European, Western or 'civilizational' superiority, they are simultaneously becoming detached from their historical relation to a left-wing politics. Borders and battle lines that were once thought set and certain in our wars

of position are suddenly revealed to be in flux, as political antagonisms are more than ever before 'being formulated in terms of moral categories'⁶, and the seductive lexicon of liberation struggles is mined by a variety of dubious social actors intent on providing for themselves a veneer of ethical legitimacy.⁷ As sexuality has come to play a major role in shaping dominant Western attitudes towards cultural difference, scholars and activists the world over are becoming starkly aware of the normative racial bias in hegemonic forms of sexual politics.

In an attempt to make some sense of this problematic, we are drawn, along with several contributors to this edition, to consider the importance of the social, cultural, political and economic exigencies of the War on Terror.⁸ Race and sexuality have been central to the moral economy of the War on Terror, from representations of Afghanistan and Iraq to the abuses at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib.

Jasbir Puar has been a key theorist of postcolonial sexuality in the context of the War on Terror, and has powerfully demonstrated how discourses of sexuality and race have been readily combined with and against markers of identity and citizenship. Puar argues that counterterrorist discourses are not only 'intrinsically gendered, raced, sexualized, and nationalized' but also that they actively produce normative patriot bodies 'that cohere against and through queer terrorist corporealities'. The terrorist subject thus becomes a trope for the production and reproduction of US/Western exceptionalism 'through the insistent and frantic manufacturing of "homosexuality" and "Muslim" as mutually exclusive discrete categories'.⁹

Puar's work has shown that the sexual politics of the War on Terror not only provide a tool for underwriting the moral superiority of its antagonists, but have served a wider function in organizing and shaping a diverse range of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, as the terrorist subject is directly linked to the figuration of 'non-integrated' citizens, migrants and their families. In this process, Islam has come to be constituted as one of the main obstacles to successful 'integration' within the West and for the implementation of democracy outside of it (see, for example, the current debate on the EU accession of Turkey). Through this discursive formation, 'the Muslim' is constituted as an 'impossible subject' within contemporary nationalist discourses, as Catherine Raissiguier points out in this edition.

We are pleased to include in this edition a very interesting contribution from Puar, as she answers some of our questions about her critical practice. Puar summarizes some of the arguments in her recent book, *Terrorist Assemblages*, and sets out her position in regard to a number of key debates in feminist and queer theory. In particular, Puar considers the positionality of her own work, queer's claim to oppositionality, the politics of intersectionality and the theory of assemblage, and the relationship of her work to that of Judith Butler.

Puar's lead is taken up by Jin Haritaworn, who considers how the assimilation of certain forms of (white) gay subject into social citizenship has not only occurred against the backdrop of the War on Terror, but has moreover served as a mode of its legitimation, reinscribing gay (and queer) identity within the imperial parameters of race and nation. Relating such phenomena to the longstanding orientalist genealogies critiqued so powerfully from postcolonial feminist positions, Haritaworn discusses the problematic incorporation of gay men into the British army, and the role played in Britain by Peter Tatchell's *Outrage* in 'the post-9/11 gender regime'.¹⁰

The War on Terror also occupies an important conceptual status in Catherine Raissiguier's article, which attempts to account for the sudden political and media visibility of the black feminist group *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* in France since 2003. Raissiguier argues that the profile of NPNS is linked directly to the scapegoating of Muslim men – and by extension Islam in general. In Raissiguier's analysis, discourses of gender and sexuality circulate around the figure of the 'arab-Muslim-maghrebi', constructing Muslim women as 'either victims of tradition and religion or vectors of integration'. Raissiguier demonstrates how the putatively universal principle of *laïcité* is hereby overdetermined by a form of racial normativity, concealing the profound inequality that inheres in the Republican myth.

Suzanne Lenon also explores the raciological structuring of national identity in her analysis of debates around the introduction of same-sex marriage legislation in Canada. Lenon argues that both pro- and anti-positions function metonymically as discourses representing 'what "Canada" as a nation stands for and what it means to be "Canadian"'. Thus viewing same-sex marriage as a project of civility, Lenon demonstrates how an idea of the nation (and particularly the national past) comes to be articulated in an idiom of liberal tolerance which perversely reinscribes the whiteness of Canadian homosexuality. Such

discourses are used to reinforce Canada's international standing in a civilizational hierarchy, where gay rights have come to figure for the nation's political class 'as the newest manifestation of Western civility'.

Lenon's stress on same-sex marriage as a form of neoliberal governmentality relates to the latest work of Elizabeth Povinelli, whose book *The Empire of Love* attends to the specificities of liberal governance in relation to gender, race and sexuality in two very different communities in Australia and the US. The *Empire of Love* is reviewed here by Silvia Posocco.

Damien Riggs's article explores how the normative power of whiteness operates in Australia in the 'complex interrelationships between Indigenous communities, white queer people, and the children they seek to adopt'. Riggs considers some of the thorny epistemological issues generated out of this nexus, in particular the conflicts between white academic and Indigenous knowledge claims. Like Haritaworn, Riggs argues that we need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the positionality of the (white) queer subject if we are to properly account for the continuing privileges of whiteness.

Adi Kuntsman follows Puar in questioning the transgressiveness of queer, and explores the complicity of queer sexuality with dominant racial and nationalist formations in Israel/Palestine. Kuntsman shows how the Israeli queer scene 'is saturated with the notion of European superiority', and demonstrates how queer immigrants to Israel from the former Soviet Union negotiate their sexual and national identity through the rejection or demonization of the *Mizrachim* (Asian/North African Jews) and Palestinians, in order to identify with the *Ashkenazi* elite.

The way in which the racial logic of the Israeli queer scene constructs Israel as a European state serves as a reminder that the complexities of what we are calling postcolonial sexuality are not confined to the West, and neither can they solely be understood in relation to the imperial logics of the War on Terror. Though much scholarly attention has been generated by and is focussing on the West in the current conjuncture, important work has been done for quite some time on racism and sexuality, and in particular the racialization of sexuality studies.¹¹ One reason why this work has not been properly acknowledged within mainstream academic circles is, ironically, that much of it derives from non-Western scholars, or explores subjects outside the West. Such work has proven well-equipped to challenge the normative racial bias of Western and Eurocentric identity paradigms, and the associated tendency to force recognition of non-heteronormative sexualities into the frame of a Western gay and lesbian politics.¹² The tendency to impose Western concepts as signifiers of modernity continues to be an important area of investigation, and it is mirrored in the conceptual failure to acknowledge and incorporate postcolonial and transnational sexualities into queer theory and practice. It also underlines the extent to which the sex/gender organization of many postcolonial states are still constituted, in cultural and political terms, along colonial lines, and goes some way to explaining the continuity of white gay supremacy within metropolitan sexual cultures, as well as the rise of the discourse of homosexuality as a Western practice.¹³

The populist and rightwing notion of homosexuality as un-African (an idea of cultural exemption that is not limited to the African context)¹⁴ is challenged by the photographic work of Zanele Muholi, in her images of black lesbian sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa. Muholi's work resists the idea that the decolonized subject is necessarily heterosexual. In this issue, Muholi presents a collection of images from a work in progress called *Is'khathi* (period), an exploration of the 'cultural politics of blood'.

Contemporary South Africa is also the subject of Nolwazi Mkhwanazi's contribution to this edition, which explores the appeal to culture as a mechanism of sexual control. Mkhwanazi considers how sexual politics has been manifest in the ethnicized leadership struggle within the ANC, focusing on the recent rape trial of Jacob Zuma and considering the wider currency of hegemonic sexual discourses - as well as their contestation - in other recent cases of sexual violence.

This special issue brings together a wide range of scholarship on postcolonial sexuality. A postcolonial frame has highlighted the implicit whiteness of Western theories of sexuality, pointing to the complex ways in which the concepts and practices of sexuality are central to racisms, nationalisms and (neo) colonialisms. Although engaging with a range of theoretical perspectives, all the contributions here share an acknowledgement that it is impossible to think about apparent conflicts between sexuality and race as negotiable and soluble claims within a framework of rights and recognition, and instead take as a point of departure the knowledge that their differential positioning in any social formation will invariably overdetermine the outcome of any such settlement. As such, all contributions have stressed the

importance of situated and historically contextualized approaches to race and sexuality in order to understand their profound significance to the structuring of our contemporary social orders. If there is a more general conclusion to be drawn, the work collected here demonstrates, above all, how important it is for us to de-Westernize and confront the normative racial bias of theoretical production if discourses of gay rights and liberation are not simply to act as proxy forms of cultural imperialism.

While it remains imperative to challenge all forms of social discrimination, from whatever quarter, the articles collected here prove that it is just as necessary to remain vigilant to the tendency of a 'progressive' critique to become subsumed in and overdetermined by falsely universal ethical frameworks. For us to recognize that discourses of racial superiority can easily speak in a lexicon of sexual freedom is to acknowledge that no politics is immune from the key determining structures and systems through which power is currently manifest. The prevailing logics of the War on Terror drive home to us the urgent and forceful need to clear racism out of the closet.

Ben Pitcher and Henriette Gunkel, May 2008.

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Notes

1. 'Migrantenkinder gegen Schwule'. [↩]
2. The study, based on a thousand interviews with pupils from twelve different gymnasiums and comprehensive schools in Berlin, was undertaken by the Christian-Albrechts-University in Kiel. [↩]
3. 'Vor allem bei Migrantenkindern stieß Homosexualität auf starke Ablehnung.' [↩]
4. 'Die Ablehnung von Homosexuellen steigt laut Studie vor allem bei türkischstämmigen Jugendlichen mit zunehmender Religiosität. Sie hänge außerdem vom Grad der Integration ab, heißt es weiter. Wer kaum Anschluss an die Gesellschaft habe, sei besonders schwulenfeindlich.' [↩]
5. For more on the LSVD survey, and a discussion of how the 'Muslim Test' was welcomed in sections of the German gay community, see Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem, forthcoming. [↩]
6. Chantal Mouffe (2005) *On The Political*. London: Routledge. p. 75. [↩]
7. Gay rights are not alone here in being co-opted to shore up nationalist and imperialist projects. In particular, discourses of feminism – though a longstanding tool of Western colonialism (see, for example, Leila Ahmed (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press) – have increasingly been called upon in the context of the

War on Terror. A number of articles in this edition explore the important relationship between discourses of race, gender and sexuality. For more on this problematic, see Ben Pitcher (forthcoming) *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Race and Racism After Anti-Racism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. [↵]

8. The War on Terror is hereby understood in the most expansive sense as a description of a project predicated on, but not reducible to, US imperialism, which has also served to give structure, shape and substance to a panoply of (often longstanding) racialized practices to do with immigration and security regimes, social control and 'cohesion', as well as instituting a particular set of narratives of identity and belonging. [↵]
9. Jasbir Puar (2005) 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages', *Social Text* 84–85, Vol. 23, Nos. 3–4, Fall–Winter 2005. pp 121, 126. [↵]
10. Tatchell's position as a de facto apologist for the War on Terror is an interesting illustration of the normative racial bias in insufficiently reflexive discourses of gay rights, particularly as espoused by those otherwise socially positioned to benefit from gender, race and class privilege. For more on Tatchell and Outrage, see Leslie Feinberg (2006) '[Anti-Iran protest misdirects LGBT struggle](#)' In *Workers World*; Aken'Ova et al. (2007) 'African LGBTI Human Rights Defenders Warn Public Against Participation in Campaigns Concerning LGBTI Issues in Africa Led by Peter Tatchell and Outrage!' press release of 31 January, 2007; Jasbir Puar (2007) *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* Durham, NC: Duke; Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem (forthcoming). [↵]
11. See, for example, Kopano Ratele (2001) *The Sexualisation of Apartheid* Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of the Western Cape: Cape Town; Donald L Donham (2002) 'Freeing South Africa: The "Modernization" of Male-Male Sexuality in Soweto' in Inda, Jonathan Xavier and Rosaldo, Renato (eds) *The Anthropology of Globalization. A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.410-427; Amanda Lock Swarr (2004) 'Moffies, Artists, and Queens: Race and the Production of South African Gay Male Drag', in *Journal of Homosexuality* 46 (3/4): 73-89; Katrin Sieg (2002) *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*. Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany Series. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Limakatso Kendall (1998) "'When a Women Loves a Woman" in Lesotho: Love, Sex, and the (Western) Construction of Homophobia', in Murray, Stephen O. and Roscoe, Will (eds) *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands. Studies in African Homosexualities*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 223-241; Ruth Vanita (2005) *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriages in India and the West*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Gloria Wekker (2006) *The Politics of Passion*. New York: Columbia University Press. [↵]
12. Such practices include, for example, the tendency for Western organizations providing funding to lesbian and gay organizations to utilize the categories of a Western sexual politics, thus forcing non-Western organizations into conceptual and, ultimately, political modes that operate in very different ways in non-Western contexts. This instance reminds us of the 'adhesion contract' that the recent US government forced on NGOs that are dependent on US funding worldwide. The US government threatened to only fund organisations that are in line with their HIV/AIDS politics (meaning those who preach abstinence) as well as with their pro-life, meaning anti-abortionist, stance/politics. As a consequence NGOs changed their constitutions in order to receive further funding. Needless to say that this form of blackmailing is not only undertaken by the US government but also by other main funding bodies. [↵]
13. See, for example, Henriette Gunkel (forthcoming) *The Cultural Politics of Female Same-Sex Intimacy in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute. [↵]
14. See, for example, Alan Sinfield (1994) *Cultural Politics - Queer Reading*. London: Routledge. [↵]

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