

[Editor's introduction to the themed section *Queer/ing Regions* published in *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* (online publication in 2016)]

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Themed Section: Queer/ing Regions (ed. Cüneyt Çakırlar)

Cüneyt Çakırlar, 'Introduction: Queer/ing Regions':
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2016.1160570>

Camila Bassi, 'What's radical about reality TV? An unexpected tale from Shanghai of a Chinese lesbian antihero': <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2015.1136809>

Jon Binnie, 'Critical queer regionality and LGBTQ politics in Europe': <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2015.1136812>

Howard Chiang and Alvin Wong, 'Queering the transnational turn: regionalism and queer Asias': <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2015.1136811>

Introduction: Queer/ing Regions

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Contemporary scholarship on queer globalizations and transnational sexuality studies is increasingly attending to identities and assemblages that transcend or dislocate national identification, as a way of engaging with the partialities, the intersections, and the imbalances that inform lived sexualities. At the same time, these studies have challenged exclusively national and nationalist deployments of homonormativity, opening the way for narratives and analyses that not merely unsettle the normative/national nexus (e.g. Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco 2014; Kulpa 2014; Puar 2007) but also the politics of 'value extraction' inciting sexual subjects to enact the 'drama of queer lovers and hateful others' in contemporary wars on terror (Haritaworn 2015). Drawing on Gayatri Gopinath's (2008: 343) theorization of 'queer regions,' this themed section questions how useful regionality is as 'a concept through which to explore the particularities of gender and sexual logics in spaces that exist in tangential relation to the nation but that are simultaneously and irreducibly marked by complex national and global processes.' Having been launched at a symposium at Nottingham Trent University in February 2013, *Queer/ing Regions* addresses the potentials of a non-hegemonic 'critical (self-)regioning' in queer studies (Çakırlar 2015). The themed section explores the ways in which the complex regional/local formations of sexual dissidence emerges, if not being instrumentalized, as objects of theoretical inquiry when addressed within a global context by means of transnational formations of academic and activist practice.

Investigating critically the transnational turn in queer scholarship which questions the globalized intersections between race, ethnicity, class, nation/diaspora, gender and sexuality, the symposium *Queer/ing Regions* aimed to facilitate an intellectual exchange focusing on the discourses of regionalism and the politics of scale in contemporary queer criticism. The contributors revisited the critical potentials and risks of reclaiming regionalist approaches in the field. Rather than presuming regional actors as passive recipients of global flux, this

conversation has focused on the complex multi-scalar dynamics of sexual ideoscapes and epistemologies. Through critical regionalist frameworks, the authors of this section continue to discuss alternative ways of understanding transnational formations of sexual subjectivities without assuming an uninterrupted continuity or a radical difference, within and across different spatial and scalar registers. The section focuses further on the questions initially raised in the symposium: How can we identify modes of negotiation and contestation in the encounter between the regional sexual politics/practices and the Gay International - without reducing our critique to a radical alterity between the sexual epistemologies of 'the west and the rest' with the former interpreted as monolithically imperialist and the latter localized as a passive recipient subject to gay imperialisms (Massad, 2002; Traub 2008)? How can politics and discourses of scale/scaling be taken into consideration while giving an account of the geopolitical operation of sexuality and of sexual identity categories?

Jon Binnie, in his contribution to this section, reminds us of the 'conceptual messiness' of the region (as in queer as a conceptual marker) and notes that it may be more productive to focus on 'the political effects of certain usages and deployments of the region' rather than to call for a set of corrective redefinitions. Binnie focuses on the studies of LGBTQ politics in Europe and critically explores various scalar and regional models, if not constructions, of Europe in sexuality studies. He argues that the discursive inconsistency within the scalar operation of the region-as-concept, containing both supra- and sub-national units of governance, has the capacity to 'further existing critiques of methodological nationalism by offering another alternative spatial theoretical framework that does not uncritically [address] the nation-state as the taken for granted natural starting point for analysis and critique.'

Howard Chiang and Alvin Wong extend Binnie's discussion to inter- and intra-regional circuits of queerness outside the West. The scholars problematize the transnational turn and its 'area unconscious' in contemporary queer studies, which, they contend, operates as 'a critical hermeneutical aporia' investing predominantly in Euro-American imperialism, and failing to address wider and deeper trans-colonial webs of signification. 'Strategically highlight[ing] the rhizomatic citationality across hubs of queer peripheral ontologies,' Chiang and Wong's close analyses of two Singaporean cross-media case studies propose a Sinophone regionalism that could 'recast the center and periphery of our worlding episteme.' Through their debate, the scholars intervene into the regional situatedness, if not the 'area unconscious,' of academic production in queer studies: Who/What counts as 'regional' and 'transnational'? Who is entitled to explore and interpret these identity formations? How do the discourses of 'comparison' and 'translation' operate when the regional, as an object of inquiry, is made to encounter the global production and circulation of queer academic knowledge? Chiang and Wong address these questions by not only offering an alternative regionalist counter-discourse against global queerings but also uncovering the scalar norms of contemporary queer theory's investments in the transnational.

In her rigorous theoretical examination of gay political economy and contemporary queer trends in intersectional analysis, Camila Bassi proposes a more cautious approach to processes of capture and escape when giving an account of transnational formations of capital, value and identity. Bassi considers gay political economy as not simply producing symptoms of hegemonic market containment but 'traversing dialectical waves of capitalism: a restless motion through which identities are sought out and brought within the assimilative relations of exchange-value, while moments of cultural transformation are born from newly differentiating use-values.' Introducing an intersectional Marxist framework (a dialectic of universality and specificity) through her analysis of the Chinese reality TV show *Super Girl*, Bassi critically

intervenes into what is recognized, if not prioritized, as intersectional in contemporary queer scholarship. The popular intersectional trend in queer studies, she contends, ‘slid[es] into a conceptual collapse through its kaleidoscopic, intersecting structures of oppression, and nullif[ies] universality whilst in pursuit of specificity.’ *Super Girl* becomes almost a performative tool for Bassi to argue that cultural commodities are being co-created by producers and consumers ‘amid capital’s push for a universal production of specificities,’ through which a lesbian subculture came into existence in China.

To sum up, this themed section revisits scalar and regional discourses of queer practice. Rather than appropriating queer theory through a global-local vector and affirming the complex alterity of the local vis-à-vis the flattening performative of the global, it underlines the complexities of sexual politics, the multi-scalar aspects of its spatial production, and the discourses of its worlding.

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