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QUEERING BORDERS: TRANSANTIONAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON GLOBAL HETEROSEXISM

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Traditionally, transnational feminists have examined the fields of gender, sexuality and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) studies by critically addressing issues of colonialism, white supremacy, globalization, capitalism, and heterosexism. Like most fields within higher education, gender and sexuality studies, women's studies, and LGBTQ studies are still dominated by white scholars; moreover these are predominately scholars from colonial 'western' cultures. In 2010 in the journal *Pedagogy,* Donald E. Hall asks the question: Can queer studies be taught across borders? Many universities and activist groups are arguing for a global queer community and movement for rights, protection, and freedoms for members of LGBTQ communities. From the academy to the streets, members of the LGBTQ community and their allies are challenging global heterosexism. This special issue of *Wagadu* is dedicated to an interdisciplinary, intersectional, multi-movement, and multi-dimensional critique of heterosexism, from a global social justice queer perspective.

Outside of LGBTQ and ally communities and the world of Queer studies, the general public may understand sex, gender and sexuality as binary constructs: There are males and females, and males should be masculine and sexually attracted to females while

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females should be feminine and sexually attracted to males. Even within Queer studies, some scholars have chosen to hold on to the binary of gay and "straight" identity but over time, Queer studies has created an intentional shift from the binary to a more intentional fluidity within gender and orientation. Scholarly journals, including *Wagadu*, purposefully publish manuscripts that embody this notion of fluidity and intersectionality of gender and orientation. These fluid and multidimensional constructs include male, female, cisgender, trans*, which can include transgender, transsexual, gender queer and gender fluid, intersexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual and heterosexual. Among LGBTQ communities and scholars, there is still a debate about whether to include the T and Q in the acronym. The varied trans* community often has different concerns and needs as the gay community. And queer, a term reclaimed from a derogatory slur, to that of pride, can be used as an overarching label that encompasses anyone with non-conforming gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Hall (2010) considers the challenge of defining the term queer as it can be used as a broad social identifier or a term based in poststructuralist theory. Others have transformed and expanded *queer* to be inclusive of the interrelationship of gender, race and class. Building on E. Patrick Johnson's (2001) use of the term "*Quare*" as an alliteration of queer and queer theory to include race and class, Lee (2003) coins the term "*kuaer*" as a "transliteration, using the pinyin system, of two Mandarin Chinese characters *kua* and *er*" (p. 165). Unlike much of queer theory, Lee's kuaer theory is race-conscious, womanist and transnational. These additions speak to the critiques of queer theory being by and about a homogenous population.

Heteronormality and heteronormativity are prejudices that favor heterosexuality as the norm and have a biased against those in the queer community. Heteronormality/heteronormativity is the view that all humans are either male or female in gender and sex, and that biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender roles are in alignment from a heterosexual point of view.

In this Special Edition of *Wagadu*, we explore the concept of a global queer community and examine multiple critiques of institutionalized heterosexism starting with the analysis of changing meanings of same sex desire in China, to challenging heterosexist U.S. immigration laws. We then examine the notion of metronormativity in Central New York and heteronormativity in China and Jamaica through a queer reading of *The Pagoda.* Lastly, we study U.S. college students' attitudes toward the LGBTQ community and explore heterosexism in public school curricula.

Within this volume, Tiantian Zheng gives an historical account of same-sex desire and it's changing meanings in homoerotic romance in China in her article "Contesting Heteronormality: Recasting Same-sex Desire in China's Past and Present." Zheng demonstrates that culture and political context produce sexual meanings and practices. From the imperial period, Republican era, Maoist times, and the post-socialist era, she links the past to the present as she works to contest the current discourse of heteronormality.

In more recent times, dating back to the year 2000, marriage equality is federally sanctioned in 17 countries globally. In the U.S. there has been the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" legislation and States are falling like dominoes to legalize marriage equality, with 18 states currently having full marriage equality. However, in Russia and Uganda, there is a new push to spread legalized and institutionalized homophobia including encouraging violence against gays and lesbians. Other countries such as Dominica, Italy, Yemen, Jamaica and other African countries such as Nigeria and Zimbabwe have varying formal laws and social stigmas against homosexuality. This begs the question, how can multiple nations come to such opposing conclusions about the LGBTQ community?

When examining this issue from a more wide-ranging, socio-ecologic perspective, Sykes-Kelleher discusses how the currant global governance system, run by dominant nations, controls less dominant nations by "fear and force" (2012, p. 13). She cites de Sousa Santos' view that those dominant nations create the non-existence of the dominated by multiple means including "the classification of people that normalizes differences and hierarchies enables racial and sexual classifications, for example, to be used as means of exclusion and to create dominator societies" (as cited in Sykes-Kelleher, 2012, p. 14). Using ideas from the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), Sykes-Kelleher suggests that an equitable governance system is possible by shifting from the current neoliberalism to the more equitable neohumanism paradigm. This would in turn decrease the hierarchies of sexual classifications.

Jackson (2009) echos Hall (2009) and LeBlanc (2013) regarding the emergence of a global queerness or a global queer presence which often stems from a Western (mostly U.S.) influence that does not appreciate the diversity of queers and queer communities across the globe. However, he describes cultural globalization and the existence of certain global elements of a queer community that are evident in very different cultures across the globe. Jackson (2009) focuses on capitalisms playing a role in global queerness starting at the local level, moving to the national and lastly the transnational level. He contends, however, that a postmodern rhetoric is focused on the promotion of global queerness to the detriment of local uniqueness. Jackson recognizes the importance of capitalism's impact on the local culture and performance of queerness, while at the same time, he appreciates the reciprocal effect of local agency and how that builds global queerness (Jackson, 2009).

In 2007, Puar developed the concept of "homonationalism" which is "understanding the complexities of how 'acceptance' and 'tolerance' for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer

by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated" (p. 336). However, in her 2013 work "Rethinking Homonationalism" Puar reiterates and rethinks the concept:

> Homonationalism, thus, is not simply a synonym for gay racism, or another way to mark how gay and lesbian identities became available to conservative political imaginaries; it is not another identity politics, not another way of distinguishing good queers from bad queers, not an accusation, and not a position. It is rather a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality. To say that this historical moment is homonational, where homonationalism is understood as an analytics of power, then, means that one must engage it in the first place as the condition of possibility for national and transnational politics (p. 337).

To further explain, Puar uses the example of Israel and Palestine: Israel practices homonationalism by encouraging LGBTQ rights of some Israeli's (pinkwashing) while increasing segregation of Palestinians. The U.S. assists in this pinkwashing through financial support, but more specifically by political capital and financial resources that invest in Israel. "U.S. settler colonialism is inextricably intertwined with Israeli settler colonialism. Through their financial, military, affective, and ideological entwinement, it seems to me that the United States and Israel are the largest benefactors of homonationalism…" (Puar, 2013, p. 338).

In this volume of *Wagadu*, Alix Olson examines the discourses surrounding the push for the Uniting American Families Act and how the Act is influencing the current path of homonational citizenship. In "Queer(y)ing Permanent Partnership," Olson draws on Puar's conception of homonationalism to position current LGBTQ immigration advocacy within the broader set of neoliberal

assimilationist practices. Olson's aim is to continue the dialogue to conceptualize alternatives to the alienating production that are part of the current immigration reforms.

In 2013/14, prior to and during the Sochi Winter Olympic Games, there was a global, albeit significantly Western, adverse response to Russia's legislation that banned propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships. Western LGBTQ rights advocates came together to protest the hosting of the Games in Sochi because of the legislation and its inequitable effect on gay Olympians and fans in Sochi.

With the 2012 law, banning gay pride parades results in a lack of mainstream visibility of the LGBTQ community in Russia. LeBlanc (2013) suggests that support from a global community does not necessarily improve life for LGBTQ Russians. He suggests that the Western approach (which is often mistaken for the *global* approach) in advocating for LGBTQ rights is not necessarily efficacious in the Russian culture because, using the LGBTQ community as a scapegoat, the Russian government positions gays as a threat to the Russian culture. Heller (2007) suggests that the Russian resistance to LGBTQ rights is yet another force that holds the Russian culture together which in turn continues homophobia and heteronormativity (as cited in LeBlanc, 2013). According to LeBlanc, it is "a politically useful time for the imaginative global LGBTQ community to demonstrate national and transnational ties against the goliath Russian homophobia." However, that demonizes Russia, which is hypocritical of some self-purported liberal and gay-friendly Western states whose LGBTQ citizens still do not have equal rights. "The insistence of one's nation's 'gay-friendly, tolerant, and sexually liberated society' enacts pro-national, pro-Western, and anti-Othering scripts that continually (re)produce the Other as intolerant, sexually repressed, and uncivilized" (LeBlanc, 2013, p. 7). This suggests that if they (Russians) are not like us (Western states), they are archaic and not respectable.

In this edition of *Wagadu,* Sean Wang uses a vignette to discuss queer visibility and political organizing in central New York and uses literature on sexuality and space to sketch out the production of metronormativity. In "Encountering Metronormativity: Geographies of Queer Visibility in Central New York," he suggests that when coming out of the closet, one moves to a city to be amongst like-minded peers. There is a stigma against rural areas in that they are not as LGBTQ friendly and therefore are seen as antiquated and not good enough for LGBTQ individuals to reside. He uses this discourse of metronormativity to examine how LGBTQ individuals in Central NY "articulate their sexuality in relations to their place and the dominant sexual politics in the U.S."

Also using the framework of literature, Minjeong Kim reads Patricia Powell's novel *The Pagoda*, through a queer lens using the theoretical model of David Eng which observes queerness in relation to diaspora. In "Globetrotting Queerness: Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda,"* Kim describes how Powell's novel illuminates the limits of one's belonging within national and heterosexual boundaries. In doing this, she describes the main character's efforts of assimilation and describes "home" having a triple meaning of his familial home, his Chinese national homeland and his female body. Kim suggests that *The Pagoda* calls for a new conception of home that concurrently reexamines both the borders of nation states and gender binaries.

Much of Queer theory comes from a white Western perspective, and this brand of queer theory knows little of what is actually happening globally regarding the multiplicitous lgbtq communities and lived experiences. The West purports to know the best way to advocate and increase LGBTQ rights, but the Western way of advocating does not always translate effectively to other cultures. Hall (2010) suggests that the field of queer studies is Anglo-American centric and knows little of the global

community. In his attempt to publish an anthology of queer theory, he ran into major barriers. First, there is no bibliography or database of global queer research due to the interdisciplinary nature of the field in English or any other language. He found that doing a thorough review of literature was nearly impossible partly because the word *queer*, as understood in queer theory, is not translatable across languages and cultures. In regards to translation, professors and students are predominantly monolingual and there is little monetary incentive for publishers to translate and publish anthologies of queer theory. Hall (2010) also considers the seemingly simple issue of defining the term *queer*. The term, which was reclaimed from a derogatory slur, to a label of pride, can be used as a broad social identifier or a term based in poststructuralist theory. When used within the more narrow definition, Hall acknowledges that queer research by non-Anglophones and from developing countries, which represent stories of practical, rather than theoretical works, is lost. Hall believes that queer studies can benefit from a "global diversity of belief and perspective …especially when it challenges some of the field's core tenets" (2010, p.74). Hall also discusses the difference in prose between theorists and social activists: There may be important research from a social activist that does not meet the writing standards of a theorist credentialed from an Ivy League University however, that social activist's work should be as important as the professor's work. In the field of queer studies, there "is a gulf between what happens in the Anglophone, privileged-class, queers studies arena and the rest of the world" (Hall, 2010, p. 76). Because of the West's contracted ideals of sophistication, and this dismissal of other's works, queer theorists are often seen as "jerks" to the rest of the world (Hall, 2010).

Hall's difficulty in compiling an anthology of queer theory poses a challenge to a universal curriculum of queer studies. In fact, there is debate as to the benefits of queer studies all together. One could see the inclusion of queer studies into a curriculum as participation in the marginalization of the LGBTQ community as the Other:

which is to promote a binary of heterosexual (norm/privileged) versus homosexual (deviant/marginalized). Alternatively, one might see the importance of including queer studies into the curriculum to normalize instead of marginalize the LGBTQ community. O'Connell discusses the narrative of higher education as being heterosexist and he argues that "truly vital and ethically sound programs must work against marginalization, which means, among other things, that they must promote the cultivation of gay and lesbian and queer studies" (O'Connell, 2004, p. 79).

O'Connell (2004) considers stories that are being told in general education curricula that marginalize the queer community and how queer studies can be favorably included into those stories. He examines three types of curricula: First, if a curriculum educates through a capitalist story, which sees education as preparation for the marketplace, an inclusionary curriculum "might prepare people to work in an increasingly pluralistic environment". Second, if educating through a cultural story, promoting assimilation, an inclusive program might "make a place at the table out of allegiance to certain Western ideals, such as commitment to the free exchange of ideas." Last, a program that educates through reason and science, might now "find it most reasonable to hold themselves accountable to challenges that they are being unreasonable" (O'Connell, 2004, p.82-83).

When queer studies "ghettoize" themselves as one pole of the binary, this continues the heterosexist narrative, but when the core curriculum steps outside of that binary and adds a third party that encourages advocacy for social justice, queer studies narrative will no longer be ghettoized, it will be just one part of the curricula. (O'Connell, 2004).

Not all higher education settings have a comprehensive queer studies curriculum, but LGBTQ focused courses exist on many college campuses. Within this volume of *Wagadu*, "Transformational Learning: Influence of a Sexism and

Heterosexism Course on Student Attitudes and Thought Development" is a research study by Ouellette and Campbell that examined students' attitude adjustment based on completion of a college course about prejudice and discrimination against homosexuals and women. The study specifically measured, attitudes towards gays and lesbians, modern sexism, and feelings of social dominance and the authors used an anti-obese attitudes scale as a control measure. The article also includes personal reflections that assessed the stages of students' thought development in regards to prejudice and discrimination. The authors found that the course lead students to significantly decrease negative attitudes towards gays, lesbians, and held fewer sexist beliefs compared to the control group. The course also lead to decreased feelings of superiority over those in marginalized groups, which challenges underlying notions of power and privilege. Ouellette and Campbell found that students' thought development matured as they learned new information and gained new perspectives from the course content. The authors suggest that courses such as this are a tool for decreasing students' attitudes of social dominance and assist in opening their worldviews.

In the late 1990's Herr found that homophobia and a heterosexist culture in schools was detrimental not only to individual students but to the school as a whole (1997). She discussed homophobia as a social constructed, school wide problem (1997). Across the globe, and 10 years later, Ferfolja (2007) found similar problems. Although non-heterosexuality has become more accepted in New South Wales, Australia, Ferfolja found that there was an implicit heterosexist culture that existed within some schools. Both Herr (1997) and Ferfolja (2007) stress the need for schools to be proactive in order to provide a safe and just education for all students. Homophobia and heterosexism in schools is a transnational issue confirming that immersing LGBTQ studies beginning in primary school and continuing in secondary school and higher education is imperative.

In her current article in this edition of *Wagadu*, Cynthia Benton advocates for inclusion of LGBTQ studies in the school setting. In "The Profession Feminism Left Behind: Heterosexism in Schooling and the Teaching Profession," she examines the interrelationship of teacher dispositions and identity, student socialization, school environment, and the content of curriculum on heterosexism in schools. Benton explores current curricula and social programs that have lessened the heterosexist norms that still exist in schools. She argues that it is crucial that teachers do not look to historic, heterosexist curricula and methods; it is their job to advocate for and recreate an equitable learning environment for all students.

Although women play a major leadership role in education, they (especially young women) are not often recognized as key players in politically motivated change including LGBTQ equality. However, feminist zines are educational conduits born from the alternative press of previous feminist movements that are lead by young women. Another example of taking LGBTQ rights global, these zines are do-it-yourself publications with no guidelines or rules in which people can describe their lived experience that is habitually suppressed by mainstream society (Zoble, 2009). Zines were originally self-published by individuals or groups as photocopies of handwritten or typed stories and poetry, which used clip art or other forms of artistic expression. They were a method of searching for a like-minded and often activist community around challenging patriarchal ideals in society. They have transformed into electronic zines (e-zines) and blogs, which are easier to produce and disseminate. From the riot grrrl movement of the 1990's, came zines created by college educated, middle to upper class, white, young women who were criticized for a lack of critical consciousness as they ignored their white privilege (Zoble, 2009). In the 2000's zines have begun to examine issues of the LGBTQ community: Zines have been used to "create an oppositional history and an alternative to the narrow and distorted mainstream representation of women, queer people, and

transgender people, an alternative that reflects and resists their cultural devaluation" (Zoble, 2009, p.5). Zoble stresses that this type of media is "VITAL" to create social change. Research about zines is mostly focused on English-language zines so Zoble (2009) created an online resource of international zines, which includes more than two thousand feminist zines from 43 countries in 15 languages. There is a vast potential for transnational networking, including that of LGBTQ rights and Queer studies. Zoble recognizes the lack of self-reflection of the homogeneous, privileged group of zinesters and acknowledges that little is known about zines in non-Anglophone countries. According to Zoble, "it is necessary to look outside personal frameworks and see what work is being done elsewhere to create connections an make local efforts known" (2009, p.8).

A paradigm shift from global heterosexism to a social and legal culture of equity and inclusiveness for difference is the goal of a global Queer community. Many universities and activist groups are arguing for a global queer community and movement for rights, protection, and freedoms for members of LGBTQ communities. However, as previously recognized, queer studies and LGBTQ activism are produced by and for a homogenous audience that doesn't generally consider issues of women, racism and classism. Nonetheless, members of the LGBTQ community and their allies are challenging global heterosexism. This "Queering Borders" edition of *Wagadu* explores the possibility and existence of a global queer community through the works of Zheng, Olson, Wang, Kim, Ouellette and Campbell, and Benson. Regardless of the topic or whether from a practical or theoretical perspective, all authors have challenged the current paradigm of heteronormality that exists locally, nationally and/or globally.

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