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Editorial

If the period immediately after industrialisation witnessed a 'proliferation of discourses' on sexuality in Europe, in recent years, discussions around HIV/AIDS as well as (and inextricably linked to it) the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered) movements have led to a fresh 'proliferation' and in very new directions. These discussions have been constructed around multiple poles of differences and inequalities, questions of identity being at the centre of much of them. Thus, there have been questions of gender identities, sexual choices, of activists and academics and their very different investments in the politics of sexual choice. There are also major questions about the differences between the construction of gender and sexuality in the north and in the south in terms of cultures, laws and economies. A new research project, undertaken by SEPHIS in collaboration with the Ford Foundation seeks to address all these questions, specifically through the rubric of the last named. Are questions of sexual choice or gender identities the same in the south as in the north or indeed across the south? The project seeks to complicate our understanding of sexualities and gender identities by addressing the complexities and diversities of regimes of sexuality— through the matrix of self-understanding and social organisation— in a variety of south regions. It is in this context that the Sephis e-Magazine has prepared this special issue on sexualities.

At the heart of our concern is the way in which the power equations between the North and the South construct questions of sexuality. Thus, it seems the North cannot see sexuality of the South except in otherising tropes. One very common trope is that of the exotic. Whether it be the 'Middle Eastern Har-ems' or the sexual tourism to South East Asia, or indeed the mother of all exotica, the *Kamasutra*. And now, there is the surfeit of internet pornography featuring Latinas, and now 'Asians', particularly of the animated sort.

The AIDS issue has further sharpened these differences. From being the 'gay plague' to a disease that is rampant in Africa and Asia. And that, in turn, helps to firm up the prejudices as well as bolster the moral justification for aid economics, political filibustering and unequal commerce.

This special issue is a small attempt to break the stereotype, to open up new voices, talking about Southern sexualities in Southern voices, and an attempt to address the issues so as to create also a space for dialogues on these across Southern contexts.

Nandita Dhawan, through an issue that created public furore in West Bengal, looks into the issue of women's sexual and marriage choices particularly across divides of class and religion. Michiel Baud and Shamil Jeppie, both currently Co-Chairs of the SEPHIS Programme at Amsterdam, were part of a discussion on the History of Sexualities and Modernities in the Global South. Their report successfully mirrors the fruitful discussions in which scholars from different parts of the global south were engaged in. The presentations brought forward ideas and issues that need to be addressed in the course of further exercise with ideas of sexuality and its varied implications in the south context. Jishnu Dasgupta looks into some of the most marginalised sections in the South, the transgender, and highlights the inequities they suffer from in various contexts.

Like many *south* regions, Latin America too has its fair share of anxieties when it comes to recognising and incorporating the varied forms and dimensions of sexuality in the broader social structure. Andrea Allan, a doctoral student in Anthropology at Harvard University, recounts similar problems she had to face while conducting research on lesbians in Brazil. Her interview with Wangui Kimari, a Kenyan Anthropologist reflects the major hindrances with regard to her work with/on the lesbian community of Brazil.

This being a special issue on the history of sexualities in the global south, an attempt has been made to trace the 'politics' of it in the geographical space of two metropolis— Delhi and Kolkata. While the first has been looked into, by Anirban Ghosh, through the framework of right-wing politics in Jawaharlal Nehru University— one of India's leading points of accumulation for young minds; the second has been analysed by Garga Chatterjee in the left dominated city of Kolkata.

In the *Articles* section Debolina Dutta and Oishik Sircar, articulates the sex workers voice for legitimate recognition within the society. The movement has been imparted a definite shape by the Durbar Mahila Samanyay Committee (DMSC), the functioning of which forms the focus area of the article.

While protection from sexually transmitted diseases is a steady demand of sex-workers; the concept of safe-sex, through use of condoms, together with the basic determinants of a healthy sexual relation is still very much a taboo among the most conscious of individuals. Sreerupa Sengupta's article deals with the campaign through which an attempt was made on the part of the State to create a sense of awareness about HIV and AIDS in West Bengal.

A growing trend among the young generation of urban India has been the 'loss of virginity'. However with traditions raising its head time and again, virginity becomes a crucial problem at the time of marriage. Madhurima's piece on hymenoplastic surgery dwells on the practice of hymen reconstruction, as a possible way out for leaving behind the past, while moving ahead towards a blissful marital life.

Marc Epprecht raises issues concerning sexuality and its problems and dimensions in another *south* country— South Africa. His article analyses the prevailing issue of same sex sexuality in Africa, south of the Sahara. The paper deals with the concept of the LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex) and its impact on South African society and individuals.

Articles

From Sex Worker to Entertainment Worker: Strategic Politics of DMSC



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Abstract

This article maps the struggle of DMSC for recognition of sex workers as entertainment workers. In doing this, it seeks to bring out issues involved— of solidarity with other similar disenfranchised people, of sexual pleasure and rights thereto etc. It also brings out the problems embedded in the struggle.

Marking the Transition

"Blissful Revolution, Entertainment in Revolution", cried out the huge banner at North Kolkata's Rabindra Kanan where the first-ever All India Conference of Entertainment Workers¹ (EWC) on 3 March 2007— the International Sex Worker Day. This conference scripted another landmark in the activities of the Durbar Mahila Samanyay Committee (DMSC)— one of Asia's largest sex workers collectives— which had, for the first time in India, in 1997, held the National Conference of Sex Workers.

DMSC's journey over the last decade began with the slogan "Sex work is work, we demand worker's rights" and has now transitioned to redefining sex work as entertainment work. There are theoretical implications of such a transition, yet one cannot be sure of the practical impact of such a strategy on the future of the sex workers' movement in India. The need to make this distinction arises from the fact that in a movement what is desired through conceptual rigour has not often been reflected in resultant policies.

What informs this transition? Are DMSC's strategies for claiming sex worker's rights undergoing change in this process? What are the dynamics of such a shift in thought and language?

Pleasure and Entertainment

A pamphlet in circulation at the EWC read: "We

firmly believe that... (we, sex workers) provide entertainment to our customers. We provide sexual pleasure. Everyone has the right to seek pleasure and happiness. Like... other entertainment workers of the world we use our brain, ideas, emotion and sex organs, in short, our entire body and our mind to make people happy. As entertainment workers, we seek governmental recognition and, fulfilment of our just professional demands..."

An articulation of this nature marks a departure from not only demanding labour rights from the state, but expands the debate on sex work in India beyond the realm of 'right to work' and 'right to form trade unions', to include the 'right to pleasure' as central to the understanding of sex work as work. This claim deems the 'right to pleasure' to be intrinsic to sex work as the buyer of sexual services comes to a sex worker to seek pleasure; and the sex worker entertains the customer not only through sexual acts, but also through dance, music, modelling etc.

The reason for the claim is the fact that the activity of buying sex is both socially and culturally understood to be immoral and sinful— resulting in labelling any monetary transaction between the pleasure seeker and the giver as illegitimate, to the extent of being criminal² and stigmatising the one who sells sex.

DMSC argues³ that the sex worker, who gives pleasure, is providing enjoyment and in effect

1 The authors have attended and have closely followed the discussions held by DMSC prior to the conference and also at the conference.

2 After sustained campaigns by the National Network of Sex Workers, and a historic march by sex workers to the Indian Parliament in New Delhi in 2005 demanding the repeal of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, the government expressed interest to amend the Act by decriminalising the sex worker, but at the same time criminalising the client.

3 These arguments have emerged from a set of meetings and seminars that DMSC organised in Kolkata as a run-up to the EWC.

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entertains people– thus making possible the articulation of 'sex work' as 'entertainment work'. This claim offers a four-fold potential: First, it expands the solidarity base of the sex workers' movement by allying with other performers and artistes; second, it challenges the negativity surrounding sex, which makes sex workers unequal citizens simply because of the sexual nature of their work; third, it counters the essentialised understanding of women as perpetual victims of sexual danger and foregrounds a positive notion of female sexuality; and fourth, it makes political the notion of 'pleasure' by bringing it out into public space from the confines of the sanctified space of the monogamous, heterosexual marriage, and the bound pages of academic work on sexuality.

In a Marxist Feminist sense, when sex work is re-articulated as entertainment work, it takes on the responsibility of being a contributor in the process of production of capital, as thus is a means of constituting sex workers as autonomous 'sexual/citizen' subjects. "After a hard day's work, when a person comes to a sex worker he relaxes, reduces his stress and gets enjoyment out of having sex with her. The next day, when he goes back to work, he is rejuvenated, and that adds to his productive abilities at work," points out Bharati Dey, Director of DMSC and a sex worker.



All India Conference of Entertainment Workers Pleasure in Sex Work

A popular question which is repeatedly asked to the sex workers is: How legitimate is the articulation of 'right to pleasure' within the context of sex work as work when a majority of women are forced into it because of extreme poverty, especially in the Third World? Chaitali Pal, daughter of a sex worker who runs the group *Amra Padatik*⁴ (We are Foot Soldiers)– a sex workers' children's organisation under the aegis of DMSC responds: "It is not true that sex workers are always forced into the profession.

Even if I accept that they are, it is no different from any other person who is unable to get into the profession of her choice. For example, if I want to become a doctor or an engineer, but don't have the money, or I am not allowed by my family and I have to settle for being a clerk, will people say I was forced and talk about rescuing and rehabilitating me?"

A counter question to the popular imagination is: When there are so many women who want to continue in sex work– for whatever reason– and are demanding workers rights, how can one say that they don't enjoy the work at all? "Lives of women in prostitution are lives like any other, including pain, exploitation, victimhood, and coercion as well as pleasure, empowerment, agency, and choice. A woman can choose to enter prostitution and still face coercion from a client, or she can be forced into prostitution and yet assert her agency in refusing a client," observes Bishaka Datta, who made the film *In the Flesh* in 2002, documenting the lives of three sex workers from DMSC and *Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad* in Sangli.⁵ "Choice and force are not mutually exclusive positions; rather, both are situations that a sex worker can encounter and has to negotiate– like any other woman," she adds. It is this 'choice' that women in prostitution exercise that needs to be recognised and respected.

However, talking about pleasure in sex work should not be interpreted and used by the state to absolve itself from combating sex trafficking (especially in minors) and creating enabling conditions for ensuring their access to healthcare and other social justice measures. The violence in the profession should be treated as crime, instead of criminalising the profession itself. Given the protectionist tendencies of the state, it might attempt to trade the 'right to pleasure' claim with their right to protection from violence– justifying that if she claims to derive pleasure out of sex work, how can she ask for state protection.



⁴ *Amra Padatik* is a co-organiser of the EWC, and believes that the sex workers' children are their main weapons to fight against stigma and discrimination. It was founded in 2006.

⁵ A sex workers' collective in the western Indian state of Maharashtra.

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Trans-Solidarity

The EWC also saw an open emergence of transsexual, transgender and *Hijra* sex workers coming out in solidarity of the work that DMSC does. Trans and *Hijra* sex workers who have been part of the DMSC movement, but never enjoyed their separate space before formally establishing a group called *Anandam* during the conference. *Anandam* is a community initiative for diverse sexualities and their rights, which includes gays, lesbians, bisexuals, trans-people, *Hijras* as well as male sex workers. This collectivisation, especially of *Hijra* sex workers, was a very strong statement on behalf of DMSC's accommodative and plural politics.

On the one hand it opened up a space for positive assertion of all kinds of sexual rights, and on the other such a move can be read as a challenge to other rights claiming movements which have failed to be more politically inclusive. Like the Autonomous Women's Movement's Annual Conference that was held in Kolkata in September 2006 saw a contestation over whether *Hijras* (who think of themselves as women) should be a part of the conference. Some of the conference participants started a unique debate on whether *Hijras* or *Hijris* should be allowed in. What makes such a debate interesting is how rights claiming agendas use the violence of language to continue exclusion of people, and ensure that they remain at the receiving end of multiple forms of discrimination—one of the sources now being the very movement that had the potential for *emancipating them*.

Where will Entertainment Work take Sex Work?

The perpetuation of stigma around sex work can be connected to the way language has been deployed and used as a tool to identify and label the 'prostitute' as the 'fallen woman'. In colonial times, in Bengal for example, they were called *baijee* (dancer), *nautch girl* (dancer), *raanr* (widow or prostitute), *randi* (prostitute), *beshya* (prostitute— the Bengali version of a *veshya*) and so on.⁶ Over the last decade, with the demand for labour rights, a transition was made from the *Beshya* to sex worker— allowing women in prostitution to collectivise and identify themselves in a way to claim dignity and political legitimacy. Putting sex work within the ambit of entertainment work will hopefully be another step towards using language as a strategic means to rid the negativity around the profession.

A relevant question is whether sex workers

not part of DMSC think they are entertainment workers? If not, will this affect the solidarity built between sex workers' groups across India and dilute the movement's agenda? "If they say they are not entertainment workers, what is the work that sex workers do? It is important to name the kind and nature of work one does to demand workers' rights from the state," says Dr. Smarajit Jana, Chief Advisor to DMSC.

While one agrees with Dr. Jana's point, it is necessary to be cautious of the slippery slope that the 'entertainment worker' identity entails: Where does DMSC wish to locate itself within the vast universe of entertainment workers in India, given the stigmatised nature of sex work? How forthcoming will the other constituencies of entertainment workers be to ally with DMSC? A case in point here is the bar dancers of Mumbai, who have been rendered jobless because the state passed a law banning dance bars. In response, when the *Bharatiya Bar Girls' Union*, who claim to be entertainment workers, were protesting against the ban, they put up placards saying 'we are not sex workers', attempting to gain legitimacy for their claim to continue work as bar dancers.

DMSC's claim may therefore require a long drawn process of establishing themselves as entertainment workers, and one suspects whether such an agenda will detour the path followed by the movement so far— primarily, the repeal of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956— and create fissures within the National Network of Sex Workers, of which DMSC is an integral part. How does DMSC aim to frame the demands— of recognition as entertainment workers and the right to pleasure— to engage the state to respond with policy changes? One is not sure whether the present demand has emerged from the sex workers' movement, or has only been a process of intellectualisation within DMSC. But we cannot deny the potential of DMSC's strategy to bring the debate around sex work back into the realm of popular politics.



⁶ Prabha Kotiswaran, "Preparing for Civil Disobedience: Indian Sex Workers and the Law", *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 21, 2001, pp. 205–6.

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Brand '*Bula-di*': A Review of HIV & AIDS Campaign in West Bengal

Sreerupa Sengupta

Sreerupa, till recently at the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, is currently working with *The Telegraph*, the leading English language daily of West Bengal. In her school days, she was into elocution and karate. She had also participated in quite a few intra-school elocution competitions and won prizes too.

She calls herself a bookworm, who is mostly fond of fictions.

Abstract

For a really long time, the HIV & AIDS prevention programmes had glossed over the gendered face of the epidemic. The constant harp on 'high risk groups' rather than on 'high risk behaviour' had ignored the vulnerability of common women to the virus. The acknowledgement of the feminisation of the epidemic is a fairly recent phenomenon, globally. In 2004, West Bengal State AIDS Control and Prevention Society, the state arm of National AIDS Control Organisation, commemorated the World AIDS Day by launching a mass media campaign, which targeted women in monogamous, heterosexual relationships. Popularly known as the *Bula-di* campaign, it aimed at educating women and through them tried to generate awareness among men about the disease and other related issues.

This article attempts to analyse the first three phases of this media campaign, which endeavoured to create a dialogue on HIV & AIDS in the public domain.

Even after three decades, HIV & AIDS continue to be largely associated with 'types of people' or 'high risk groups'— men having sex with men, injecting drug users and the commercial sex workers— who are considered as the vectors of the disease. These 'types of people' form the building blocs through which the disease is addressed in policies and HIV & AIDS prevention programmes. In other words, the official response to the disease has been predominantly in the form of 'targeted interventions'. This focus on 'high risk groups' rather than on 'high risk behaviour' has had serious implications for a segment of the population. It ignored the vulnerability of common women who do not belong to the category labelled as 'high risk groups'.

Literature shows that it was in the late 1990s that the issue of women's susceptibility to the virus, which is compounded by gender and sexual inequalities, was given cognisance in policies and programmes on HIV. In 1999 Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/ AIDS (UNAIDS) pointed out that programmes addressing gender equality as a central goal maximise their overall effectiveness. Subsequently, the Millennium Summit held in 2000 as well as the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV & AIDS in 2001 endorsed that gender equality and the empowerment of women are fundamental elements in the reduction of the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV & AIDS. World Health Organization (WHO) held an Expert Consultation in Geneva in 2002 with the objective of developing a set of guidelines to help the programme planners to integrate gender-based issues at the national level HIV & AIDS programmes. Thus, the theme of World AIDS Campaign (WAC) in 2004 was identified as:

'*Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS*'. Acknowledging the growing feminisation of the epidemic, campaign groups in India also thematically joined the common umbrella of World AIDS Campaign.

On 1 December 2004, West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society (WBSAPCS), the state chapter of National AIDS Control Organisation, commemorated the World AIDS Day by launching a mass media campaign keeping in mind the broad theme of WAC with a tagline '*Have a Say*'. This campaign was premised on the understanding that HIV & AIDS are no longer confined to the 'targeted groups' of women (e.g. commercial sex workers). Rather, it focused on women in monogamous, heterosexual relations as being equally at risk as that of the sex worker because their husbands or primary sexual partners engaged in high-risk sexual behaviour.

WBSAPCS appointed Ogilvy and Mather (O & M) Kolkata, a private advertising agency, to devise a communication package for generating awareness and educating people about the disease. O & M decided to use Bengal's traditional and much loved *nyakrar putul* (rag doll) for its campaign. Thus the brand ambassador took the shape of a fluffy doll called '*Bula-di*' who exuded charm and bonhomie. The campaign came to be popularly known as the '*Bula-di*' campaign.



Bula-di

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From end 2004 till date, *Bula-di* has nonchalantly dispensed advice to people, on issues pertaining to HIV & AIDS. In her three year innings, she has faced resistance from many corners of the society, debates around her have been plenty but she continues her march with an undaunted spirit and has become an integral part of almost every Bengali household. This article attempts to review only the first three phases of the campaign from 1 December 2004 till end 2006.

'*Bula-di*', the ambassador of this public health campaign, epitomised the archetypal social worker of indeterminate age with a warm deportment. She looked reliable, educated, well informed and spoke to her audience, rather than preach. The whole idea was to bring to life in the public domain a character that resembled a familiar person such as a friend, aunt or sister who could be approached readily for advice and would play the role of an educator in an amiable and non-controversial manner.

A communications expert associated closely with the creation of the campaign had pointed out that to generate awareness about HIV & AIDS a gradual and sustained media campaign was necessary. Thus, WBSAPCS conceptualised the campaign in phases wherein *Bula-di* became bolder with each phase— addressing issues of stigma, discrimination, human rights and rights of women more openly as the campaign advanced.

The broad objectives of this mass media campaign are¹—

- Educate women in monogamous, heterosexual relations and through them educate the men about the ground realities of HIV & AIDS
- Change the low self perception of risk of contracting the virus among the general population through dissemination of information
- Get people to talk openly about HIV & AIDS and empathise with People Living with HIV & AIDS
- Debunk myths related to the disease
- Motivate people to access the toll free helpline (1097) and Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centre (VCTC)

In other words the campaign aimed at both awareness generation and attitudinal change—the journey from "*AIDS cannot happen to me*" to "*AIDS can happen to anybody!*" And all this was to be done without generating social discord.

The campaign has achieved incredible visibility and reach through a strategically developed mix of print advertisements, television and radio

jingles and billboards, posters on bus shelters and several city crossings in all the major languages— English, Hindi and Bengali.

In *Phase I*, the campaign focused on educating masses about the modes of transmission of HIV & AIDS, debunking myths and prejudices associated with it. It also encouraged women to enquire about HIV & AIDS by calling the toll free number. The thrust of *Phase II* was to sensitise people about the symptoms of the disease and to provide information on VCTC. Some of the advertisements (of *Phases I & II*) are as follows:

- a) **Phase I**— A married woman was shown saying, "But *Bula-di* I can't be infected. My husband's a gentleman." To this *Bula-di* said "Why? Hasn't he ever received blood?" The message at the bottom of the billboard was—"Contaminated blood and used syringes can cause AIDS. Call *Bula-di* on 1097 (toll free)."
- b) **Phase I**— A married woman was shown asking, "But *Bula-di*, I have one partner. How can I be infected?" To this *Bula-di* matter-of-factly replied "Are you sure that your partner is not an HIV carrier?" The message below was "Unprotected sex can cause AIDS".

On this very theme a young man was shown asking "But *Bula-di*, won't using a condom mean suspecting my partner?" Pat replied the cheerful mascot, "Not at all. Rather it is a sign of a healthy relationship"

- c) **Phase II**— In another advertisement, *Bula-di* was seen in conversation with a worried housewife, "*Bula-di* I know my husband has another sexual partner." *Bula-di's* advice was— "Then, both you and your husband should go for a blood test without delay". With a tagline— "Get your blood tested at a VCTC in any hospital." "Call *Bula-di* on 1097 (toll free)."
- d) **Phase II**— A middle aged woman is shown asking "*Bula-di*, why am I suffering from lower abdominal pain and smelly discharge?" *Bula-di's* reply— "This could be a symptom of sexually transmitted diseases. Go to a hospital for treatment without delay."

In *Phase III* of the campaign, *Bula-di* unhesitatingly engaged in discussions on themes that even today are taboo in many Indian homes. Despite sexualisation of the media (both print and electronic), matters pertaining to sexuality is considered too private to go beyond the confines of the bedrooms. From being an amiable myth buster, she gradually attempted to bring Bengali middle class couples out of this shell of prudishness. Both conceptually and visually, *Bula-di* invaded the private space in

1 Source: Power Point presentation of the campaign prepared by West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society as part of their Annual Action Plan, 2005.

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people's lives. She blatantly talked about the unspeakable— condom use, safe sex— in the public domain and attempted to blur the rigid divisions between private and public. Through messages like— **"Have fun responsibly. Always carry a condom.... Protected sex is BEST SEX"** or **"Use condoms in conjugal sex"** she tried to break the culture of silence that surrounds sexuality and make it commonplace. Studies have shown that there is an absence of an everyday language of sexuality. The language of sexuality is either pornographic or abstract. In this context, the initiative on part of *Bula-di* is laudable for she attempted to generate a dialogue in the public sphere on sexual pleasure, safe sex and condom usage.

Part of my research included a small survey mapping public responses to the campaign. An important aspect of the survey was to document the views on the content and presentation of the advertisements. The responses to this were diverse. Almost all respondents agreed that the advertisements on the billboards and the radio jingles are direct, comprehensible and bold. *Bula-di* had made inroads into that part of Bengali culture which, to an extent, is still governed by a sense of Victorian morality. A young female lecturer pointed out that for the first time a woman's sexual health had been addressed. She referred to one of the advertisements (See advertisement no. D above) in this context. Besides, she pointed out that it is evident from the messages in this public health campaign that a shift had occurred in the public discourse of sexuality. The focus in the advertisements was on 'safe sex' rather than on 'abstinence' and 'being faithful to a single partner', which signalled an acknowledgement of the 'real' world of sexual practices.

However, a group of parents and teachers have found the messages in the third phase quite objectionable. They opined that such a candid campaign on condom promotion ("**Keep condoms handy: Nobody knows when cupid strikes**") might be misinterpreted by young boys who may think that carrying a condom gave them a license to indulge in sexual practices.

With regard to the style of the campaign, it has been pointed out that while the usage of puppets and narrative style presentation have lent a different flavour to the public health campaign, making it more appealing to the masses, some radio jingles and the ads on television are 'flirtatious' and 'titillating'. In other words, in their bid to pack entertainment in education, WBSAPCS used a language, which diluted the gravity of the issue being discussed.

The first three phases of the campaign were fraught with other problems too.

The thrust of the campaign is to educate women on issues of HIV & AIDS and sexuality so that they could sensitise the men in their lives. Interestingly, none of the advertisements in these phases foregrounded women or women's health issues. Except for a single visual where a woman talked about her sexual health to *Bula-di*; mostly there were visuals of married women who solicit advice of the protagonist for the protection of their husbands and children. The problem with such a projection is that it covertly reinforces the stereotypical image of a 'self sacrificing' woman as the nurturer and protector of her family. By accepting the promiscuous and irresponsible nature of men, women yet again take on the onus of sensitising their partners. Besides, portrayal of women as a homogeneous category of caregivers entrusted with the responsibility of sustaining the family undermines their multiple roles in social production and reproduction. The patriarchal system, that disempowers women by depriving them of their rights to information, decision-making and access to health care services but imposes the roles of nurturer/ caregiver on them, also remained unchallenged in the campaign.

As mentioned earlier, messages in Phase III of the campaign became more candid, with discussions centring on 'sexual pleasure', 'safe sex' and 'use of condom'. A textual message such as— **"Have fun responsibly. Always carry a condom..."** on the billboards is indeed bold as speaking of and about 'sexual pleasure' in public sphere is not easy. Besides, the pleasurable aspect of sexual activities is generally heard in the context of popular culture and rarely has it ever been the topic of discussion in a public health campaign. In this context, the *Bula-di* campaign is truly path-breaking.

However, it was disheartening to observe that none of the advertisements gave cognisance to the fact that not all sexual activities are 'fun filled' for a woman— house wife or a sex worker. The issues of growing incidence of violence against women, which heighten women's vulnerability to HIV & AIDS, remain unaddressed in this campaign. Several studies have revealed that violence or the fear of violence severely curbs a woman's agency to negotiate safer sexual practices with her partner, including within marriage. The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women had pointed out:

"... (W)omen and girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV/ AIDS owing not only to their biological conditions, but also to social and economic inequalities and culturally accepted gender roles which place them in a subordinate position vis-à-vis men regarding decisions related to sexual

2 Yakin Erturk, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Intersections of Violence against Women and HIV/ AIDS*, UN Commission on Human Rights, 61st Session (E/CN.4/2005/72), 2005, p. 5.

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relations. Relations of dominations are multiple and they intersect, creating for women layers of inequalities and subjection to different forms of violence."²



A campaign focused on women should address the ground realities of women's lives more directly (in terms of her status in society, right to health) rather than harping on the use of condom as the only method of 'safe sex'. Besides, condoms are male controlled technologies, where many women hardly have a say. A truly gender sensitive campaign needs to move away from the condom centric paradigm of 'safe sex'. It needs to highlight the fact that only when the sexual encounter is based on 'informed consent' which includes knowledge about HIV status of the partner and violence free, which ensures the woman's ability to negotiate terms with her partner, the conditions of 'safe sex' would be fulfilled. Despite being a public health campaign, these issues received a short shrift in the advertisements. Also whether this representation of 'fun' is empowering for women was not very clear from the visuals.

A particular advertisement on television and radio with a punch line "let's play ludo" merits special mention. This advertisement presented snippets from a conversation between a married couple— a woman says, "Please understand my request". To which a man with great resentment replies, "Ufff... again your request... do you think I will deliberately put you into trouble?" *Bula-di's* reply, "Protected sex is BEST SEX. Use condoms in conjugal sex". Even today the recall of this advertisement is quite high among the audience because of the captivating punch line. Undoubtedly, it was an innovative way to initiate a dialogue on safe sex within marital relations but because of its abrupt ending the message created confusion and ambiguity among a cross-section of the population.

The messages of the campaign did become bolder with each phase (as planned by campaign developers) but that did not challenge the existing social roles or educated women to

question the roles that make them more vulnerable to HIV & AIDS. None of the visuals or textual messages explored the kinds of physical, mental and socio-economic violence faced by women both pre- and post-contraction of the virus. A much-needed discussion on the range of human rights violations, that amplify a woman's susceptibility to HIV and post contraction of the virus makes her everyday survival even more difficult, has also been left completely outside the purview of this campaign. Besides, candid messages have not helped us to understand the epidemic better. Fundamental information regarding the disease has not been adequately communicated through the campaign.

Bula-di has been an immensely successful 'brand'. Over a period of three years both our imaginative and visual spaces have been bombarded with varied images of the icon. The flashy hoardings and catchy baselines have been an instant hit with all generations. The cheery disposition of *Bula-di* continues to mesmerise the audience. The campaign definitely has a high recall value. But popularity does not testify that this public health campaign successfully achieved its objectives. While the glitz and glamour of the icon helped her to carve a niche in the public mind, in terms of awareness generation and sensitisation about HIV & AIDS, the performance of *Bula-di* is far from being satisfactory.

In conclusion, the *Bula-di* campaign is a unique endeavour. It opened up dialogues and debates on HIV & AIDS and sexuality, foregrounded the risks involved within the institution of marriage (considered as a 'safe haven' for women), adeptly dealt with the notions of infidelity and questioned the norms of monogamy. However, in an attempt to avoid 'social discord'³ this mass media campaign glossed over many other pressing social problems. In spite of having a woman, as a protagonist of a public health campaign, West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society failed to highlight the double marginalisation faced by women because of their gender and health statuses. Rather than integrating the gender concerns in its HIV & AIDS agenda, the communication campaign ambiguously harped on male controlled technologies like the condom for prevention of infection. Women are fighting both a virus and systemic discrimination in trying to overcome the threat of HIV/AIDS.⁴ They are denied access to crucial information on the disease, to health care and other services.

³ One of the objectives of WBSAPCS as stated in the power point presentation of the campaign prepared for its Annual Action Plan, 2005.

⁴ Amnesty International, *Women, HIV/AIDS and Human Rights*, AI Index: ACT 77/084/2004, p. 1.

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They are also denied property and inheritance rights, employment and access to finance. Is it not time that we address the stark reality of human rights violations faced by women across strata that increases their vulnerability to HIV? If *Bula-di* intended to induce social change why have social constructions of gender, sexuality and health and the problematic relationships between them remained outside the purview of her discussions? As has been discussed earlier, this communication package is replete with stereotypical categorisations of women, where

they are worried about the health of their promiscuous and adulterous husbands, and never about their own health, sexual and other rights. Using stereotypes may be a useful communication strategy to easily reach out to the masses. However, it keeps us wondering—how effective is this baggage of stereotypes in *Bula-di*'s mission of 'educating women', who form a heterogeneous category and inhabit multiple worlds?

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Virginity Lost and Regained: Hymenoplastic Honour in Urban India



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Abstract

The issue of female sexual purity is key to any understanding of familial and communal honour in the Indian subcontinent. With the rising phenomenon of pre-marital sex this has come under a severe strain. This article explores how apparently 'liberated' women are also subject to these same old pressures and take recourse to modern technology in the form of hymenoplasty to maintain 'family honour'.

The question of virginity has been a crucial point when it comes to marriages in India. Ideologically it is held that 'purity' of women reflects on the honour and status of their families.¹ A virgin bride is the most desired one, but the recent rise of pre-marital sex among the youth in India is a potential threat to the notion of 'virginity'. *The Times of India* conducted a survey in Kolkata among eighty people between the ages 18 and 22. It showed that ten per cent people said yes to pre-marital sex as well as one-night stands. Of this group 53.75 per cent said yes to pre-marital sex but no to one-night stands. A further 36.25 per cent said no to both pre-marital sex and one-night stands.²

Though parents are not yet comfortable in India talking to their children about the S-word yet the high percentage of teen-tweens saying yes to pre-marital sex once more confirms that really few Indians bother about 'chastity' anymore.

There is again great amount of dichotomy when we analyse the words of a group of young Kolkatans whose chauvinistic demand is: "I'll enjoy it, but my wife should be a virgin". This demand conforms to Nur Yalman's analysis on the notions of virginity in India. He states, "The women's purity in particular must be controlled, protected against pollution.... Men on the other hand are free to have sexual relations with anyone." He further states, "Culturally, the Indians have distinguished between internal and external pollution. Women are subject to internal pollution in sexual intercourse, which is very hard if not impossible to cleanse, but men are subject only to external pollution in intercourse and can be cleansed by a simple ritual bath."³

The control of marriage system, always in the hands of men, transforms diffuse authority or charisma into beginnings of real power and control.⁴

With reference to the point mentioned above, it is interesting to look at the process of re-virgination, which is on the rise in India. The fast changing scenario of urban India in face of emerging global capital transforming life-styles is definitely one of the most important reasons for this rise. The question that follows is: How does virginity figure now in urban India? On the one hand there are opinions like: "A good sack session makes me feel kicked about life. I care a hoot for virginity."⁵ On the other hand there is a slowly rising demand for hymenoplasty. Does this restoration act by the women themselves indicate that Indian society is still traditional when it comes to the question of virginity and marriage? Or is it that women fear the husband, the marital family and/or the society? Or is it simply for experiencing the 'first-time feeling' all over again? The virginity of a woman is still valued for religious, social and economic reasons. The hymen is disrupted after the first intercourse but such a thing can happen even after strenuous physical activity. Men claim to have understood that, but hypocrisy still persists and the fact that women seek to restore their hymen indicates that urban India is still very traditional when it comes to such issues. According to ad filmmaker and former Miss India Rani Jeyraj, "We may lead very Western lives but when it comes to marriage and family, we are very traditional. Promiscuity by men is condoned, but women are expected to be the keepers of virtue. Which is what drives even

1 Sherry B. Ortner, "The Virgin and the State", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, October, 1978, p. 19.

2 Peden Doma Bhutia and Arpita Basu, "Straight Up", *Calcutta Times, The Times of India*, 5 January 2008, p. 1.

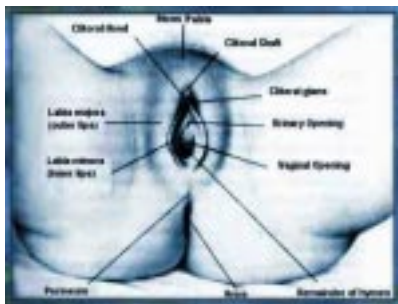
3 Ortner, "The Virgin and the State", p. 20.

4 *ibid*, p. 24.

5 Kalpana Sharma and Sudeshna Chatterjee, "Hi...Men!" *TimesLife!, The Times of India*, 23 March 2008, p. 1.

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urban Indian women to undergo such 'corrective' surgeries."⁶ This stance of urban India restricted to mainly the upper middle class and upper class is very intriguing and demands more in-depth attention as a lead to understand heterosexuality.



An article published in the *Times of India* titled "Nothing is Permanent"⁷ studies short-term relationships, which is on a rise in India. Casual commitment being a result of such relationship boosts the rise of pre-marital sex and extra-marital affairs. It shows how men and women have started believing in the theory of living for the moment and sex adds to the fun. A previous article published in the *Times of India* called "Sex on demand: That's what friends are for"⁸ shows how sex among friends and ex-lovers is becoming common among the youth. Even after the emotional ties break, the physical ties remain. The article refers to it as a 'game'. Here it would be relevant to quote a comment by one of the respondents of an article in the *Times of India* saying, "Once you've played the field, it leaves you wanting more." With such forms of sex on the rise, surgeries like hymenoplasty would easily conceal past physical relationships, which could still be a post-marital 'curse' for some women.

Times of India states, "Hymenoplasty is a boon for those wanting to sing Like a Virgin. By all reports those opting for it include women in the market for marriage, prostitutes wanting to turn housewives and women who want to experience that 'first-time' feeling all over again."⁹

Hymenoplasty is common in South American countries, Japan, China and it is most recently that India is experiencing a rise in the percentage of women opting for this surgery. Indian gynaecologists have also confirmed that there has been a fifteen per cent rise per year in actual surgeries since the last five years. The surgery costs between Rs. 25,000/- to Rs.

50,000/- and it usually takes less than an hour.¹⁰

The cost of the surgery again indicates the kind of clientele it could cater to. Here I would like to raise a few questions on what is it that is catering to such a demand of certain classes of people in urban India and most importantly what are the reasons that is making virginity such an important question amongst these classes? Sociologist Ritambhara Hebbar, of TISS, Mumbai, observes, "As long as women's bodies are seen as objects and not subjects of self-volition, virginity will continue to be an issue."¹¹ Does this echo the fact that ours is a cosmetic modernity, superimposed upon ancient totems and taboos whose potency is enhanced rather than reduced by the tensions between the two.

In conclusion it is worth noting what Sudhir Kakkar and Katharina Kakkar state in *The Indians. Portrait of a People*. "Modern, urban Indians, feasting their eyes on the erotic gyrations of scantily clad women in Bollywood movies, and fed on a steady diet of stories and surveys in the English-language media that proclaims a sexually rising India, may find it hard to believe that vast stretches of contemporary India remain covered in sexual darkness. In spite of somewhat more relaxed attitudes in the upper and upper-middle classes; Indian sexuality remains deeply conservative if not puritanical, lacking that erotic grace which frees sexual activity from the imperative of biology, uniting partners in sensual delight and metaphysical openness."¹²

Resorting to cosmetic techniques like Hymenoplasty might be a way to reconstitute the traditional within the modern. But, quite candidly, it brings to light a new dimension of the highly gendered and patriarchal nature of Indian societies that has imposed a huge burden of honour and chastity with sex/sexuality in case of the female. Instead, such techniques, on one hand exhibit the subjective practices of an 'objective' medical science and on the other, if adopted by women, partly exposes their vulnerability inside structures of tradition. Hymenoplasty, from this point of view, definitely is just another 'metaphorical closure' of agencies for women of urban India whose reflections in media are part chimera and part retrogression into the clutches of a highly demanding patriarchy.

6 Edison Thomas, "The Tissue of Marriage", *Calcutta Times, The Times of India*, 15 January 2008, p. 4.

7 Mini Chandran-Kurian, "Nothing is Permanent", *Times Life!, The Times of India*, 25 Nov, 2007, p. 2.

8 Anubhav Sawhney, "Sex on demand: That's what friends are for", *Deep Focus, The Times of India*, 11 November 2007.

9 Kalpana Sharma and Sudeshna Chatterjee, "Hi...Men!", p. 1.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Sudhir Kakkar, and Katharina Kakkar, *The Indians. Portrait of a People*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, India, 2007, p. 84.

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Certain Facts:

A study of the statistics of Canada showed that as of 2000, the average age of first-time brides and grooms was 31.7 and 34.3 years, respectively, while a Stats-Can survey released in May 2005 found that the average age for losing one's virginity was 16.5 for both sexes— it has become a method to regain some of the significance of the wedding night. (April, 2006)

Most clients (for Hymenoplasty) are Latin Americans, Saudi brides-to-be or British Muslims who fly in to be surreptitiously revirginised before marriage. But there is also a growing demand for "recreational" **hymenoplasty**. Indeed, it's now so common at two New York clinics that the price has dropped to \$1,800. (April, 2006)

A debate is raging among doctors over Muslim women who demand operations to reconstitute their hymens before marriage and medical certificates stating that they are virgins. The controversy has flared in France, where gynaecologists say that they are facing a growing number of requests from women desperate to avoid the repudiation that can follow the loss of chastity. The phenomenon, which is also dividing doctors in other European countries, America and Africa, is denounced by critics as a sign of social regression driven by Islamic fundamentalists. Isabelle Lévy, an author who studied the issue for her book *Religion in the Hospital*, said that the search for chastity certificates and hymenoplasties stemmed from conflicting pressures among the five million French Muslims. (May, 2007)

The trend (of hymenoplasty) has had noticeable growth: Vaginal surgery world-wide has become the fastest-growing segment of the plastic surgery industry, according to a December 2005 article on revirgination surgery in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Advertisements for Hymenoplasty:

"**Hymenoplasty**" or "**Revirgination**" is a controversial medical procedure previously known mostly for its presence in Middle East & Latin America, but these days it has become popular in US and around the world. No hard data can be provided because people do not want to disclose their identity. The American society of plastic surgeons says **Vaginal reconstruction & hymenoplasty** are one of the fastest growing trends in US.

Sex before marriage is becoming common in cities with girls, and yet the social expectations to be virgin at the time of marriage remains, and this trauma forces them to undergo hymenoplasty surgery. Hymenoplasty does cover past sexual activities & one feels relieved, but the guilt that she hides this from the man she marries remains for some time.

It is not a major surgery like any organ transplant, but its a very simple procedure which takes 30 to 45 minutes, and its being widely marketed in magazines, internet and other form of media.

Along with hymenoplasty surgery many females prefer to get their vagina reconstructed, i.e. to get their vagina tightened, so that the females and their partners get enhanced sexual satisfaction.

These days many husbands want their wives to undergo vaginal reconstruction surgery to enhance their sex life and get maximum satisfaction. And even wives on their own go for this surgery to give their husband a gift and sexual satisfaction.

These two surgeries " Hymenoplasty" and "Vagina reconstruction" can be done simultaneously and will take approximately one hour to complete the surgery.

<http://www.medicaltourindia.com/hymenoplasty-surgery-vagina-reconstruction-india.asp>

Hymenoplasty in Indonesia

Hymenoplasty in Indonesia, includes general information about Hymenoplasty Procedure, Hymenoplasty Indonesia Local News, Hymenoplasty Indonesia Surgeon Locator and other Hymenoplasty related material.

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More Advertisements for Hymenoplasty:

Hymenoplasty Procedure

(Hymen reconstruction, bringing to pre-sexual state)

Hymenoplasty is one of the three major areas of **cosmetic vaginal surgeries**. The procedure aims to correct dysfunctions and improve the woman's hidden aesthetics.

The way a woman feels about the look and sensation in her vagina and pubic areas has a major impact on her self-esteem, her sexual desire, and her intimate relationship.

There are three major areas of Cosmetic Vaginal Surgeries, aimed to rejuvenate a woman's sexual feeling:

- Hymenoplasty (hymen reconstruction, "bringing back to virginity")
- Vaginal reconstruction and rejuvenation (vaginoplasty, mainly vaginal tightening)
- Labia surgery (labiaplasty, labia reduction and look improvement, correcting the size and shape of the inner and outer lips)

Hymenoplasty is a surgical procedure designed to repair or reconstruct the ring-like skin membrane partially covering the opening of the vagina (the "hymen"). Bleeding occurs when the hymen tears, which is typically the result of a woman's first experience with intercourse. The Hymenoplasty surgery will pull the tissue back together to restore a "virgin-like" quality.

Quite rarely, a female can unknowingly tear her hymen by inserting a tampon. It may also happen during sports (e.g. bicycles or horseback riding).

The biological function of the hymen is still uncertain, however, its social function is popularly regarded as a mythical symbol in many cultures. Therefore, qualified plastic surgeons perform Hymenoplasty at the request of women who need the surgery for ethnic, cultural, or religious reasons.

There is a growing number of patients who desire higher sexual satisfaction by undergoing the Hymenoplasty procedure, not for religious or similar reasons, but because the vaginal walls are tightened.

Hymenoplasty generally takes about one to two hours, with patients able to return to work the next day. Restoration of the hymen is done on an outpatient basis, under local anesthesia or sedation. Prior to surgery, patients are required to have a pre-surgical consultation and thorough gynaecological examination. During this time, she should communicate her needs and expectations to the doctor, and in turn, will learn of the possible risks and benefits to hymenoplasty.

Vaginal physiological state significantly affects a woman's physiological state. Structure reconstruction of the vagina may well bring back the younger feel, and contribute the sexual life and self esteem improvement a woman is looking for.

Some surgeons perform procedures involving laser surgery, where others use methods such as radiosurgical techniques or scalpel techniques.

Depending on the choice of doctor and geographic location Hymenoplasty prices may range between \$ 2,000 and \$ 5,000.

Your doctor/surgeon will explain how long the surgery will take, the amount of time and care necessary for a full recovery, and exactly when after surgery it would be safe to resume sexual intercourse.

http://immersivemedical.com/hymenoplasty_indonesia_2.html

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Resources for Uncovering the History of Same-Sex Sexualities in Africa South Of the Sahara



Marc Epprecht

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Abstract

This paper challenges the dominant perception that LGBTI issues are hidden or insignificant in Africa south of the Sahara in relation to the pressing health, economic, and political concerns of the majority population. It examines the rich body of scholarship, art, and activist writing by and about African LGBTI people that is readily available for researchers and teachers, arguing that transnational queer and feminist scholarship, teaching, and activism could benefit from listening to these African voices.

The history of same-sex sexualities in Africa south of the Sahara has been substantively documented and analysed.² Yet this history continues to be marginalised in scholarship and activism around gender and sexuality, particularly as they pertain to HIV and AIDS. That disease, after all, "is based on heterosexual transmission" in Africa, as Susser and Stein³ would flatly proclaim in line with mainstream AIDS discourse, even in hip South Africa. Issues of specific concern to women who have sex with women (wsw), or women who may be infected

with HIV by men, who have sex with men (msm), are almost totally invisible in this discourse. The presumption, sometimes made explicit, is that research and open debate about same-sex sexuality are taboo or "dangerous" in Africa⁴ on account of deep-seated, pervasive and violent homophobia throughout the continent.⁵

This article argues emphatically against that presumption. It seeks to promote awareness of a wealth of research and resources that demonstrate the historical presence of indigenous LGBTI

- 1 The following is adapted from an article previously published as "'Hidden' Histories of African Homosexualities," *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme*, Winter/Spring 2005, 24, 2-3, pp. 138-144, and "Historias 'ocultas' de las homosexualidades en Africa," *Estudios de Asia y Africa*, No. 130, Vol XLI (2), May-August, 2006, pp. 215-232, with additional excerpts from GALZ, *Unspoken Facts: A History of Homosexualities in Africa*, Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, Harare, 2008, with permission.
- 2 I use the terminology now generally preferred by African LGBTI associations (see, notably, the pan-African sexual rights website *Behind the Mask* www.mask.org.za). This includes most commonly msm, wsw, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI, which recognises diversity within a common political rubric). Following van Zyl and Steyn, I have opted to use the lower case rather than the reifying upper case as a gesture to the mutability and contested meanings of the constituent identities. Some people prefer the term "queer" but I follow Morgan and Weiringa in scepticism about its appropriateness in African studies. See Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (eds.) *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*, Ravan, Johannesburg, 1994; S. O. Murray and W. Roscoe (eds.) *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexualities*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1998; Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The history of a dissident sexuality in southern Africa*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montréal, 2004; GALZ, *Unspoken Facts: A History of Homosexualities in Africa*, GALZ and Weaver Press, Harare, 2008; Mikki Van Zyl and M. Steyn (eds.), *Performing Queer, Shaping Sexuality— 10 Years of Democracy in South Africa*, Kwela Publications, Cape Town, 2005; Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa (eds.), *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives: Female Same-Sex Practices in Africa*, Jacana, Johannesburg, 2005.
- 3 Ida Susser and Zena Stein, "Culture, Sexuality and Women's Agency in the Prevention of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa," in E. Kalipeni, S. Craddock, J.R. Oppong and J. Ghosh (eds.), *HIV/AIDS in Africa: Beyond Epidemiology*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2004, p. 133.
- 4 William J. Spurlin, *Imperialism Within the Margins: Queer Representation and the Politics of Culture in Southern Africa*, Houndmills, New York and Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2006, p. 5.
- 5 Note, for example, the invisibility of LGBTI issues on the popular sexual health website, Love Life Campaign (www.lovelife.org.za). Searches for homosexuality, lesbian, msm, wsw, bisexuality, homophobia and anal sex on the UNAIDS website for sub-Saharan Africa turns up a total of precisely zero documents. (<http://www.unaids.org/en/default.asp#>, accessed 24 April, 2005). See Oliver Phillips, "The Invisible Presence of Homosexuality: Implications for HIV/AIDS and Rights in Southern Africa", in Kalipeni et al (eds.) *HIV and AIDS in Africa* pp. 155-166 and Cary Alan Johnson, *Off the Map: How HIV/AIDS Programming is Failing Same-Sex Practicing People in Africa*, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, New York, 2007 for astute analysis of this invisibility, the latter with a clear programme of action to address it directed at government, civil society groups and donors concerned with sexual health.

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people in Africa south of the Sahara, the often-sophisticated means of accommodating or even honouring that presence, and the contributions of indigenous LGBTI people to contemporary struggles for human rights and women's empowerment, and against HIV. It argues that scholars, teachers, and activists worldwide can benefit from listening to African voices on these and other issues. Indeed, racism and ethnocentrism are continuing concerns in the women's and gay rights movements in the West. Understanding some of the history of African LGBTI struggles could therefore offer insights into the often-subtle interplay of sexuality, race, and power that imbue those and other health and rights initiatives in Africa, within immigrant communities of colour in the West, and in other postcolonial developing world contexts.⁶

Anthropology and History

Most African societies traditionally placed a high value on heterosexual marriage leading to many children.⁷ Infertile women and impotent men tended to have very low, if not despised social status. But African cultures also had ways to explain and accommodate those men and women who did not fit the social ideal. These included a wide range of spirit possessions, for example, a male ancestor inhabiting a living female person, and vice versa. A person so possessed could hardly affront the spirit by having sexual relations with a living person of the same sex as the spirit and so would be given a companion, servant or even a formal husband or wife of the opposite sex, that is, a same-sex marriage between the living partners. Another situation derived from the fairly widespread notion of female "pollution" at certain ritually important times. This made it acceptable, if not imperative, for men to seek sex with males to protect their symbolic masculinity, usually with males designated for a passive role by virtue of temperament.

There were also various means by which appearances of fertility and virility could be maintained regardless of an individual's inability or disinterest in heterosexual performance. For example, the custom of *kupindira* among the Shona people of Zimbabwe allowed families to avoid the shame of a man's inability to make his wife pregnant. By this custom, a trusted male relative was secretly invited to fulfil the task. The problematic sexuality of the husband thus did not need to be named, and the needs and reputation of the family could be preserved.

Similarly, the widespread custom of woman-woman marriage was normally accounted for by spiritual, economic and political terms, rather than admitting the possibility of a sexual desire that could potentially endanger the norms of female fertility and respect for patriarchal hierarchies. For example, structural functionalist notably ethnography tended to explain woman-woman marriages as either a means to protect a powerful woman's ritual chastity (as in the famous Lovedu rain queen), or as an expediency in complicated kinship and inheritance cases. Kendall⁸ and Morgan and Wieringa,⁹ however, have shown that these marriages and other close female friendships at times acted to provide cover for lesbian-like sexual practices, including kissing, genital touching, and oral sex. Indeed, the women in Kendall's study steadfastly did not regard such practices as "sex" on the simple grounds that no penis was involved. There is growing evidence that African men played a similar trick to deny that sexual relations with other men or boys could be counted as "sex." Rather, they were "play," "accidents," or "relaxing" (see, for example, Jeay,¹⁰ Lockhart¹¹), again preserving the cultural commitment to heterosexual reproduction as the only legitimate expression of individual sexual desire.

Awareness of such subtleties and of discreet

6 See, for noteworthy examples with rich transnational evidence and argumentation, J. Lorand Matory, "Gendered Agendas: The Secrets Scholars Keep about Yorùba-Atlantic Religion," in S. Gunning, T. W. Hunter, and M. Mitchell (eds.), *Dialogues of Dispersal: Gender, Sexuality and African Diasporas*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2004, pp. 13-43; Margot Canaday, (ed.) (forthcoming) "Forum on transnational sexualities", *American Historical Review*.

7 Bleys gives a critical overview of the early ethnography, also discussed in the specific cultures described in the various studies cited below. The following compressed discussion is alert to ethnocentrism and anachronism in the ethnography, as well as the dangers of generalising about so vast an area. See R. C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion: Male-Male Sexual Behaviour Outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination*, New York University Press, New York, 1995; Epprecht "The Gay Oral History Project: Black empowerment, human rights, and the research process", *History in Africa: A Journal of Method*, 26, 1999, pp. 25-41 and *Hungochani* for expositions of methodology to mitigate those dangers.

8 K. L. Kendall, "Women in Lesotho and the (Western) Construction of Homophobia," in E. Blackwood and S. Wieringa (eds.), *Same-sex relations and female desires: transgender practices across cultures*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 157-178.

9 Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa (eds.), *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives*.

10 Anne-Marie Jeay, "Homosexualité et Sida au Mali, Variations sur l'Étrange et l'Étranger," in Michael Pollack, Rommel Mendes-Leite, Jacques Van dem Borghe (eds.), *Homosexualités et Sida: Actes du Colloque International*, Cahiers Gai-Kitsch-Camp, Lille, 1999, pp. 160-68.

11 Chris Lockhart, "Kunyenga, 'Real Sex,' and Survival: Assessing the Risk of HIV Infection among Urban Street Boys in Tanzania", *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 16, 3, 2002, pp. 294-311.

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same-sex practices was largely suppressed or self-censored by prudish officials, missionaries, and their respectable African acolytes during the colonial era. In the 1970s, however, research began to reveal not only African traditions around gender role inversion and same-sex sexuality, but also how new forms of same-sex sexuality among Africans emerged in modern settings. The latter included among criminal gangs and in the male-only migrant labour hostels that characterised the industrial system in southern Africa. Charles van Onselen, T. Dunbar Moodie and Patrick Harries, notably, showed that male-male marriages among African gangs and mineworkers had become widespread at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹² Long-term migrant labourers, and even their female wives back home in the rural areas, tacitly defended "boy-wives" (or *izinkotshane* in common parlance throughout the region). This form of safer sex (between the thighs) was indeed generally better for the stability of the real marriage than had the men turned to female prostitutes while away from home.

Sources for this research included government commissions of enquiry (native affairs departments, prisons, police), missionary polemics, forensic evidence of male-male sexual assaults, Africans' prison memoirs, and oral history. A tantalising study of prison graffiti suggests another potential source. These sources tend strongly to favour the twentieth century, however, Sweet drew upon court documents from the Portuguese Inquisition, and Newton-King on Dutch records from Cape Town to extend the research back in time to the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries respectively.¹³

Other specialised studies of new forms of same-sex relationships in South Africa include

Donham, who tracks the emergence of an out gay identity in the black township of Soweto, and Cage, whose analysis of gay argot suggests a profound internalised homophobia within the gay community.¹⁴ The evolution of the famous sexual orientation clause that was enshrined in the South African constitution in 1996 is the focus of Stychin and Hoad, Martin and Reid, the latter including reproductions of some of the key original documents housed in the Gay and Lesbian Archives at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.¹⁵ Sasha Gear and Kindiza Ngubeni and Gear, meanwhile, give sometimes chilling, explicit accounts of life for men behind bars. HIV/AIDS scholars in particular may care to pay attention to the men's reflections on anal sex in prison, both consensual and forced.¹⁶

By contrast, the "modernisation" of female-female sexuality in Africa has scarcely been researched. Gay was a pioneer in that regard.¹⁷ She found that young Basotho women formed lesbian-like relationships known as "mummy-baby" from at least the 1950s. This was partially in response to young men's prolonged absences at the mines and partly a means to act out or practice new, Western notions of romantic heterosexual love. Schreiner is also of interest in that it contains first-hand accounts by women prisoners about female-female sexuality in prison.¹⁸ A real research breakthrough, however, was with *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives*, edited by anthropologists Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa (cited above). It contains an overview of how patriarchy, homophobia and secrecy affect African women who love women differently than how those issues affect men who have sex with men. This is followed by ten chapters from around eastern and southern Africa and ranging from out lesbian

12 See T. D. Moodie, V. Ndatshe and B. Sibuyi, "Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14, 2, 1988, pp. 229-245; T. D. Moodie and V. Ndatshe, *Going for Gold: Men's Lives on the Mines*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994; Patrick Harries, "La symbolique du sexe: l'identité culturelle au début d'exploitation des mines d'or du Witwatersrand", *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 120, 1999, pp. 451-474; Harries, *Work, Culture And Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910*, Heinemann, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1994.

13 See, Adrian Koopman, "Scratching Out One's Days: Graffiti in the Old Pietermaritzburg Prison," *Natalia*, 27, 1997, pp. 69-91 and Susie Newton-King, "For the love of Adam: two sodomy trials at the Cape of Good Hope," *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 28, 2005, pp. 21-42.

14 D. L. Donham, "Freeing South Africa: The 'Modernization' Of Male-Male Sexuality In Soweto", *Cultural Anthropology*, 13, 1, 1998, pp. 3-21; Ken Cage, *Gayle: The Language of Kinks and Queens*, Jacana Press, Johannesburg, 2003.

15 C. F. Stychin, *A nation by rights: national cultures, sexual identity politics, and the discourse of rights*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1998; Neville Hoad, Karen Martin and Graeme Reid (eds.), *Sex & Politics in South Africa*, Double Story, Cape Town, 2005.

16 S. Gear, and K. Ngubeni, 'Daai ding': *Sex, Sexual Violence, and Coercion in Men's Prisons*, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Braamfontein, 2002; Gear, "Rules of Engagement: Structuring Sex and Damage in Men's Prisons and Beyond," *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 7, 3, 2005, pp. 195-208; Gear "Behind the Bars of Masculinity: Male Rape and Homophobia in and about South African Men's Prisons", *Sexualities*, 10, 2, 2007, pp. 209-227.

17 Judith Gay, "'Mummies and Babies' and Friends and Lovers in Lesotho", *Journal of Homosexuality*, 11, 3-4, 1985, pp. 93-116.

18 B. Schreiner, *A Snake with Ice Water: Prison Writings by South African Women*, Congress of South African Writers, Johannesburg, 1992.

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activists in urban centres to rural women who live in the closet or in relationships that follow the form of customary woman-woman marriages.

One of the first books to cover areas outside the industrial and cosmopolitan centres of South Africa is Murray and Roscoe, which includes new anthropological and historical research, journalism, and reprints of early travellers' accounts.¹⁹ Bart Luirink travelled around southern Africa in search of LGBTI people in largely rural places like Swaziland, with mixed success. Scott Long also travelled around southern Africa, in this case looking for evidence of the hurtful impact of homophobia. His report is one of the few sources of information available on LGBTI life in Zambia.²⁰ Epprecht is primarily focused on Zimbabwe while GALZ interprets that research for a non-academic audience.²¹ The historical narrative is fleshed in that book out with memoirs, reviews, and short stories that dramatise actual historical events. These include a first-hand account of a sexualised "traditional" woman-woman marriage, a collection of snippets of lesbian writing from the 1930s to the present, and discussion of sexual secrets emerging out of Tanzania and Nigeria. The geographic scope is widened further in my latest intervention.²² This traces the emergence of key stereotypes about African heterosexuality through various professional discourses including ethnography, ethnopsychiatry and the early epidemiological studies on HIV/AIDS. While still weighted toward southern Africa, where the sources and secondary literature are dense, the research here includes substantive evidence from Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and elsewhere around the continent.

The former Portuguese and French colonies of Africa remain notably under-researched on this topic, although the advent of HIV/AIDS has stimulated some bold investigations—Teunis and Niang *et al.* from Senegal in particular.²³ The very first academic book to investigate male-

male sexuality in francophone Africa is Charles Gueboguo's *La Question Homosexuelle en Afrique: le cas du Cameroun*,²⁴ based largely on sociological surveys. Another first from Cameroun is an edited collection of articles and book reviews by philosopher Fabien Eboussi Boulaga.²⁵ What makes this especially important is that it highlights the work of African-based African scholars, rather than European, North American or white South African researchers and activists, a breakthrough for the continent.

Literature

Given that most of the studies noted above were researched by cultural outsiders and published outside of Africa, and given the ugly history of colonial racism and sexism, as well as the manifest difficulties of cross-cultural research on such a sensitive topic, it should not surprise that Africans are often sceptical and sometimes actively defensive against this line of research. Yet Africans themselves have also depicted same-sex relationships in a variety of media outside professional academic venues. To begin with African literature, homosexual characters and themes have been cropping up for at least five decades. A common trope is to present homosexuality as coming from outside to corrupt or trouble Africans. Gays and lesbians in these novels act as foils that allow African protagonists to reflect on the dignity of African culture and struggles against cultural imperialism.²⁶

There are, however, some notable exceptions to that tendency. As early as 1953, for example, Lanham and Mopeli-Paulus depict a Mosotho character who becomes sexually infatuated with a young male hustler, and hint that male-male sex was known and was not necessarily controversial in traditional, rural settings. Yambo Ouologuem also complicates the picture of homosexuality as exotic and infecting. He balances scenes of cruel sexual abuse of African boys by corrupt "Arab" elites

19 S. O. Murray, and W. Roscoe (eds.), *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands*.

20 Human Rights Watch, *More Than a Name: State-sponsored Homophobia and its consequences in Southern Africa*, Human Rights Watch and International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, New York, 2003.

21 Epprecht, *Hungochani*; GALZ, *Unspoken Facts*.

22 Marc Epprecht, *African Heterosexuality? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2008.

23 Niels Teunis, "Same-Sex Sexuality in Africa: A Case Study from Senegal," *AIDS and Behavior*, 5, 2, 2001, pp. 173-182; Cheikh Ibrahim Niang, et al. "'It's Raining Stones': Stigma, Violence, and HIV Vulnerability Among Men Who Have Sex With Men in Dakar, Senegal," *Culture, Health, and Sexuality*, 5, 6, 2003, pp. 499-512.

24 Charles Gueboguo, *La Question Homosexuelle en Afrique: le cas du Cameroun*, Harmattan, Paris, 2006.

25 Fabien Eboussi Boulaga (ed.), *Dossier: L'Homosexualité est Bonne à Penser* special issue of *Terroirs, Revue Africaine des Sciences Sociales et de Philosophie*, 1-2, 2007.

26 See D. Vignal, *L'homophilie dans le roman négro-africain d'expression anglaise et française*, *Peuples Noirs, Peuples Africains*, XXXIII, 1983, pp. 63-81; Chris Dunton, "'Wheyting Be Dat?' The Treatment Of Homosexuality in African Literature," *Research In African Literatures*, 20, 3, 1998, pp. 422-48; D. Shaw, "Queer Inclinations and Representations: Dambudzo Marechera and Zimbabwean Literature." in F. Veit-Wild and D. Naguschewski (eds.), *Versions and Subversions in African Literatures I: Body, Sexuality and Gender*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2005; Unoma N. Azuah, "The Emerging Lesbian Voice in Nigerian Feminist Literature," in Flora Veit-Wild and Dirk Naguschewski (eds.), *Versions and Subversions in African Literatures* and Cheryl Stobie, *Somewhere in the Double Rainbow: Representations of Bisexuality in Post-Apartheid Novels*, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2007 for discussion of these themes.

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with a tender, loving homosexual relationship between the main African character and a European man in Paris.²⁷ The Tanzanian author D. N. Malinwa's short story "Everything Under the Sun" is even more remarkable for its portrayal of what is, in effect, a marriage between two struggling working class African men who bicker over money, their affection and need for each other, and their continuing desire for women.²⁸

Lesbian themes remain quite rare in African literature. Nonetheless, they do exist. To mention one highly provocative example, the Cameroonian author Calixthe Beyala, radically revises the commonplace assumption that African women's sexuality is more or less passive and subservient to men's needs. *Femme nue, femme noire* probably contains more—and more varied—descriptions of sexual acts than the sum total of African literature ever written before it, including oral sex by various combinations of men and women, very tender woman-woman sensuality, several scenes of group sex, and even a (heterosexual) sex act with a chicken! The young female narrator's aggressive, "masculine" sexuality allows Beyala to comment on both the nature of desire and on oppressive gender roles and hypocrisies in African and Islamic traditions. Indeed, Beyala seems to be saying that the achievement of pleasure, by whatever means, is a radical and necessary political act for women in particular in the contemporary context. Monica Arac de Nyeko's prize-winning short story is more demure in its presentation of a love affair between two Ugandan girls, but it too presents the affair in such a way as to offer a strong critique of busybody neighbours and sanctimonious family.

Nigeria has also produced its first gay-themed novel.²⁹ It tells the story of a man, Adrian, who hides his homosexual desire within a normal-appearing marriage and the emotional turmoil that this causes both himself and his wife when the secret is out. Interestingly, Adrian's predicament is not portrayed as unique: Several other characters in the novel are men who have sex with men but who publicly claim to be heterosexual and whose wives either do not know or are not really bothered by it.

A common thread throughout all these works is that African LGBTI existed in the past but they did not identify themselves as such. Rather, for family, economic, spiritual, political and a host of other factors, they would marry and have (or appear to have) children. The harsh homophobia that African leaders have voiced in recent years does not reflect traditional cultures of discretion and tolerance, but echo Christian missionary propaganda and Islamic fundamentalism among other exotic influences.

LGBTI Perspectives

African gays and lesbians have written their own memoirs, fiction, and poetry to add crucial insider insights to the discussion. The first collection of these included transcripts of the interviews with ex-miners that Moodie and Harries used in their research.³⁰ Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe then put together its coming out booklet.³¹ In both these works, African LGBTI people of all colours and creeds express their deepest feelings about growing up, learning to love, and learning to be confident in themselves and amongst their families.

Another essential collection is *Defiant Desire*.³² It contains especially insightful chapters on the law, on early efforts to organise a gay rights movement in South Africa, on gay language and culture, and on HIV/AIDS activism. There are interviews with and memoirs by leading LGBTI activists such as Simon Nkoli, Sheila Lapinsky and Zackie Achmat, plus reflections on more mundane lesbian love and family struggles by women in all of the race categories of the apartheid years.

Elsewhere, Achmat wrote an influential article that showed how previous researchers had ignored or understated evidence of same-sex sexual desire in Africa.³³ He made a persuasive case that culturally sensitive research might be put to the service of the wider community. A fine example of the latter is the adaptation of the historical work of scholars like Achmat, van Onselen and Moodie into a television documentary.³⁴ Another application of activist research is the play, *After Nines!*, which was performed by LGBTI members of the Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church of Johannesburg.³⁵

27 Yambo Ouologuem, *Bound to Violence*, Heinemann, London, 1971.

28 D. N. Malinwa, "Everything Under the Sun," in O. R. Dathorne and Willfried Feuser (eds.), *Africa in Prose*, Heinemann, Harmondsworth, 1969, p. 269.

29 Jude Dibia, *Walking With Shadows*, Black Sands Books, Lagos, 2005.

30 M. Krouse, and K. Berman (eds.), *The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian and Gay Writing from South Africa*, COSAW, Johannesburg, 1993.

31 GALZ, *Sahwira: Being Gay And Lesbian In Zimbabwe*, Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, Harare, 1995.

32 Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (eds.) *Defiant Desire*.

33 Z. Achmat, "'Apostles Of Civilised Vice': 'Immoral Practices' And 'Unnatural Vice' In South African Prisons And Compounds, 1890-1920", *Social Dynamics*, 19, 2, 1993, pp. 92-110.

34 Zackie Achmat and Jack Lewis (dir/prod), *Apostles of Civilised Vice*, Idol Productions, Muizenberg, South Africa, 1999.

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After Nines! has not yet been published but the full script is available on the *Behind the Mask* website (www.mask.org.za). The transcripts of the oral history research upon which it drew for its characters and themes are also available at the Gay and Lesbian Archives, Johannesburg. Written as a form of community outreach, it tells the story of a young African girl in the townships who wants to come out as a lesbian but faces the homophobic hostility of her parents. The living characters are then advised by ancestral spirits to overcome their modern homophobia and to love each other in a non-judgemental way as, they say, used to be the way in African traditions.

An insider perspective on the establishment and politicisation of GALZ comes from Goddard.³⁵ Aarmo is also effective in drawing out the strength of anti-imperialist, even anti-Western sentiment among Zimbabwean LGBTI activists. Another fact that often perplexes secular observers from the West is that many African LGBTI are devout Christians.³⁷ This perspective is explored in Alexander and Preston, Germond and de Grouchy, and Reid.³⁸

John Mburu and David Kuria reflect on gay life in Kenya, and Tamale on coming out in Uganda, but otherwise, LGBTI writing from elsewhere in Africa remains thin on the ground.³⁹ Cyberspace, by contrast, is alive with African voices. The website *Behind the Mask* noted above was the first and remains the best internet source for information on LGBTI activities throughout Africa. It highlights news, debates, and announcements from around the continent, interviews with activists and artists, book and film reviews, job opportunities, and discussion forums for people simply to meet and share ideas. Researchers can link directly to the Gay and Lesbian Archives of South Africa (www.gala.wits.ac.za) and to some of the many

nascent LGBTI associations in places like Uganda and Kenya.

Turning to the visual media, there are now several fascinating video documentaries and feature films that focus on LGBTI themes.⁴⁰ *Simon and I* looks at the sometimes-tense relationship between pioneering black gay activists Simon Nkoli and Beverly Ditsie. Ditsie was one of the first out black lesbians in Africa and a powerful feminist voice on the international scene. She fell out with Nkoli over his seeming lack of interest in feminist politics. Zackie Achmat is the focus of another documentary, *It's My Life*.⁴¹ The camera follows Achmat around in his capacity as a leader in the Treatment Action Campaign. It includes dramatic, David-versus-Goliath scenes of the court case where the TAC first challenged the multinational drug companies. TAC has since scored huge victories to establish the principle of placing human rights and public health ahead of private profit, and in campaigns to protest the South African government's bumbling or denialist approaches to HIV/AIDS in that heavily-affected country.

Another important video is *Dark and Lovely, Soft and Free*.⁴² This takes us on a road trip to discover black gay men who live more or less openly homosexual lives in the black townships and "rural areas", whether as healers, as mine wives, or as hairdressers. It expresses a fundamental optimism about tolerance and family in African culture. So too does *Everything Must Come to Light*, which follows the lives of three female couples who express their sexual and emotional love for each other under the rubric of traditional healers.⁴³ By contrast, *Dangerous Living* takes a fairly negative overall view of the human rights situation for LGBTI in six developing countries, including Namibia and Egypt.⁴⁴ Interviews with LGBTI political refugees living in Canada and the United States add to gloomy picture of

35 R. Colman, *After Nines!*, unpublished play transcript and oral history research, Gay and Lesbian Archives, AM 2894, 1998.

36 K. Goddard, "A Fair Representation: The History of GALZ and the gay movement in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Gay & Lesbians Social Services*, 16, 1, 2004.

37 M. Aarmo, "How Homosexuality Became 'Un-African': The Case of Zimbabwe", in Blackwood and Wieringa (eds.) *Same-sex relations*.

38 See M. B. Alexander, and J. Preston, *We Were Baptized Too: Claiming God's Grace for Lesbians and Gays*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 1996; P. Germond, and S. de Gruchy, *Aliens in the Household Of God*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1997; Graeme Reid, "Going Back to God, Just As We Are: contesting identities in the Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church," *Development Update*, 2, 2, 1998, pp. 57-65.

39 See John Mburu, "Awakenings: dreams and delusions of an incipient lesbian and gay movement in Kenya", in P. Drucker (ed.), *Different Rainbows*, Gay Men's Press, London, 2000, pp. 179-191 and Sylvia Tamale, "Out of the Closet: Unveiling Sexuality Discourses in Uganda", *Feminist Africa*, 2, Oct/Nov, 2004, pp. 42-49.

40 Idol Productions of Cape Town, notably, has produced a number of powerful videos on both LGBTI history and HIV activism (www.idol.co.za). For a critical assessment of the feature films noted below from a feminist perspective, see, Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, and Maureen Ngozi Eke (eds.), *Gender and Sexuality in African Literature and Film*, Africa World Press, Trenton, NJ and Asmara, 2007.

41 B. Tilley, *It's My Life*, Steps for the Future/Dominant 7/Big World Cinema, Cape Town, 2001.

42 P. Alberton and G. Reid, *Dark and Lovely, Soft and Free*, Gay and Lesbian Archives, Johannesburg, 2000.

43 Mpumi Njinje and Paolo Alberton (dir.), *Everything Must Come to Light*, Out of Africa Films, Johannesburg, 2002.

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homophobic violence and seemingly growing intolerance.

Finally, three films from West Africa cut new ground in the treatment of homosexuality in African cinema. First came the full-length feature film, *Dakan*.⁴⁵ This provided a sympathetic look at two young gay men who fall in love in Guinée. *Dakan* is notable not only for its sensitive treatment of the theme but also for the first male-male erotic kiss ever to be shown in African cinema. Yet it is far from a celebration of coming out in the Western sense. On the contrary, it contains a strong celebration of family in traditional terms, including marriage and children. *Woubi Chéri*,⁴⁶ on the other hand, does come closer to representing the modern gay scene. It examines the ups and downs of life in a transgender community in the very chic city of Abidjan. Finally, the first-ever feature film from Africa to depict a lesbian relationship is *Karmen Gei*, a musical set in Senegal but adapted from Bizet's famous opera (*Carmen*). Ramaka's *Karmen* is not just a physically stunning and extremely sensual character who tempts men. She actually opens the movie by seducing the warden of the women's prison, Angelique. *Karmen* subsequently has affairs with men, but her real love interest (and the most erotic scene in the movie) is unquestionably with the sad, strikingly beautiful Angelique.

Conclusion

A substantial body of scholarship, art, and activist writing on African LGBTI people is now fairly readily available to researchers. It appears, therefore, that the history and current struggles of LGBTI people in Africa only remain taboo or hidden to those who actively desire not to see them. Why that would be is the topic of another essay. It bears reiterating, however, that homophobic, biphobic, heterosexist and

other exclusionary or denialist scholarship does not contribute constructively to the development of a culture of sexual rights and women's empowerment. By common consensus, including UNAIDS and the African Union, such a culture must be nurtured if headway is ever to be made in the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

A second conclusion is that the histories of African LGBTI people offer powerful insights into global hegemonic cultures, including Western queer identities. Not only do they reveal different and often relatively humane ways that African societies have understood or even honoured people who did not fit heterosexual ideals. The importance of family and spirituality also comes through quite strongly. This provides a stark critique of the fervent, individualistic materialism of much contemporary urban life in the West. African LGBTI activists like Nkoli, Ditsie, and Achmat also tend to emphasise the need to locate the struggle for gay rights squarely within the fight against corporate globalisation. Winning sexual rights for a rich, consumerist elite in the North and in select enclaves in the global South, in this view, is a crime when the majority Africans are consigned to poverty, alienation, and ill-health by neo-liberal economic models and neo-colonialist structural adjustment regimes.

This is a refreshingly radical perspective. Knowing that Africans today are arguing from it eloquently and courageously can help to dispel commonly held stereotypes of Africa as uniformly heterosexual, and as a passive victim of the international development scene. That knowledge, in turn, could enrich struggles against the exclusionary attitudes and vocabularies that still sometimes bedevil human rights and public health activism in the global North.

44 J. Scagliotti, *Dangerous Living: Coming Out in the Developing World*, after stonewall productions, New York, 2003.

45 Mohammed Camara (dir.), *Dakan*, ArtMattan, Conakry, 1997.

46 P. Brooks and L. Bocahut (dir.), *Woubi Chéri*, ARTE France, Paris and Abidjan, 1998.

Some Conversations within a City: With Hindutva and JNU on Top



Anirban Ghosh

Anirban, formerly of Presidency College, Kolkata, and presently of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, is a student of history interested in a variety of issues and forms. Radical forms of politics and culture are merely two of those. A generally fun-loving thing, he is much-loved among those who know him for his sense of humour, even when he is at the receiving end. He also has a (slight) fondness for the good things of life.

Prologue

Things change within the walls of a city, no matter, if they are imagined ones. Questions concerning ideologies, identities and desires morph their way through serpentine lanes and alleys of the city. Locating my feature around certain wafting and wavering conversations with feared cadres, the city where the story unfolds, is Delhi and within the institution of JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University). However, this story could have taken place in any city and within any urban institution, what matters is the form in which it is dictated and repeated here. In repetition some things are lost and yet something is sieved and the sieved material is that which forms the content of my essay.

Rumination about the Gujarat riots remains a vague phantasm in the wonders of our academic and personal cosmologies. Big words effortlessly try to explain in more quixotic terms how and most importantly why the riots took place and effaced numerous lives; theory intervenes in the dark recourses which violence took support off in those dreary days of blood and tore up bellies of pregnant others.¹ My piece may seem to initiate another of those vivid, literary, journalistic pieces on the riots that rocked the 'nation' and ending up with consolatory and amazed conclusions of why things went wrong in this place called India. Moreover, this place is easy to denounce in textual spaces though extremely difficult to evade and erase in the spaces which I would call the public. Pardon the homogenisation, my attempt is not a theorisation of the public/private or the nation, much has been written quite convincingly on these issues; my aim is to initiate and repeat some dialogues with some right wing² activists

within a small institutional space called JNU, which in turn inhabits the primary museumising agent of the Indian nation state, Delhi.

Introduction

Memory is not anodyne; passive in creating meanings. And my essay is a reconstruction of the dialogues through the mode of memory. And in the process certain claims towards reconstruction and representation should be cleared because "specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies. Not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in **the very changes wrought by memory**".³ These changes are not only indicative of the institutional and social position of the narrator/interpreter but also set the interview and in this case sporadic conversations within a particular social, political and cultural context. The claims towards truth and authenticity, placed within the context of conversations and dialogues have different trajectories, in the sense, the oral testimony can never be false, the importance of orality from established and conventional sources of information (the written or the painted) is located within its departures from these sources through modes of imagination, symbolism and desire.⁴ To give concrete examples, when the conversation with the cadres was going on, there were revelatory moments when the interviewees lost track of their 'official line' of propaganda and more than often distanced themselves from toying with the written party line. Now, when I write, I would also like to waver along my disciplinary training of being a historian, emphasising my departures and **their** arrivals at similar academic, political and cultural nodal points.

The conversations operated around several constraints. First, me being a member of an

1 Vaguely and self-consciously simplifying the term other, by other I mean the lot who were at the receiving end of the Hindutva sword, women, and workers. More than often the sword also struck down lives of fellow Hindus whom the RSS vowed to protect.

2 Specifically, RSS and ABVP

3 Alessandro Portelli, *What Makes oral history different*, in, Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson (ed.), 'Oral History Reader', emphasis mine.

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ultra left political outfit; secondly these people never operated within my social spaces and places; thirdly, there was a sense of apprehension in initiating a dialogue with them, because of their relation to one of the worst genocides in the recent history of the nation and also the campus reflected a distinct polarisation of socialisation based on the Left and the Right.

However, when things started, though these constraints seemed to loom in the background, several new things emerged.

Now, the influence of the urban and its consequent institution: When placing my collection of dialogues within an urban framework, certain questions regarding locality and neighbourhood⁵ arise. Within an institutional campus, solidarities are formed along academic and political lines, however, they are also formed (more potently) along spatial lines i.e. the hostel and its subsequent wings. Within the overarching reference of the campus resides the hostel with its labyrinthine corridors. Within these corridors, social bonds are formed, around gossip, tea and scandalous gazes. One may call behavioural aspects of these bondings offensive and parochial (in the sense, a group of men leching at a woman) these bonds are hard to erase. When we place the right wing cadre within an urban space, s/he differs both from his/her counterpart in the long left village or the swanky urban political worker. To explain it further, the group in investigation within this paper, comes from the rural areas of Bihar, UP and Jharkhand. For them (as revealed from the interviews) Delhi and especially JNU has been a dream come true for them. However, in their social manifestations of behaviour, they emulate distinct urban identities of glamour and lifestyle. Their hybrid identities seem to dwell in a perpetual limbo, which is one of appropriation and of rejection, though the forms keep reversing. The questions of locality are important, rural ties based on caste and kinship are reproduced within the urban secular spaces of the mess and the corridor leching, yet a neighbourhood of solidarity emerges which is based on the penchant for the urban resources and political groupings on the questions of Hindutva. The secular and the communal overlap in their lifestyle to a substantial extent and one may explain this by saying that the social norms which restricted certain behaviour in the village are gone in the campus while religious strains of

these norms prevail in the political sphere. The discursive constructions of the public and the private then comes into the forefront, if politics is a public phenomenon, then how do we explain its cadres walking along lines of modern behaviour, when their very politics tells them to stick to strict norms of indiginity and castigate all forms of westernisation? Locality is produced within a grid of spatial proximity, the hostel corridor and is reinforced by dependency ties such as regular leching and sharing each other's packaged clarified butter or *ghee*.

The text and the conversations

There is a hostel, named Lohit, after a disappearing and calm river; quite ironically, this place is famous for occasional reappearances of turbulent and abusive fights. On the steps of this place, I began, meandering through my broken Hindi and carefully chosen questions and answers. Yet the conversations, somehow changed their course and the anxieties were silted, for some moments.

Skirting Away, homosexuality and heterosexuality within right wing discourse

There is a continuous critic against legalising same sex relationships by the right wing in India (and also internationally). The debate is articulated within the conventional nationalist and traditional narratives of history by the right wing and the whole Hindutva tenet is pitched in strong, masculinist fashion. However, within certain moments of unreason, their claims fall flat and practice diverges from theory. One of these moments is the moment of the carnival and the festival. And the festivals traverse the secular, the political and the religious domains.

The *Chaat Sammelan* and a snippet

Interviewer- "What do you think about homosexuality and sex in general? (I was amazed by my own simple question.)

Person A- "Sex is a very personal thing and homosexuality is nothing but American culture and their blind emulation."

I- " But... don't you think that when you guys hang out together, slap each others back, and have fun at the *sammelán* (which is almost an all male thing) then there is a possibility that , some of you may like each other, romantically?"

Person A- "Are you out of your mind, these things don't happen, all of these **new** ideas are crappy and unnatural, between men, men will always be men."

⁴ Ibid.

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I- "So tell me. What do you think about sex?"

Person A- "It is a very private thing, but should only happen after marriage."

Interviewer- "Tell me something... how do you explain that whenever, there is a case of sexual harassment on campus and near the university premises, most of the men from your organisation are implicated?"

Person A- " I think that all these urban (*sheheri*) girls, they don't know us, they should know us, we are good people, there should be formal introduction between us... these women of the city have an arrogance, which **I** hate.... (Referring to me) You have a girlfriend, you don't have any arrogance like these city boys with cars, we are **more men** compared to them... it's all a matter of class, you see."

I could only gape at the last sentence. Here I am, speaking to this person (who loves to shout "*chao, Mao jo kehte ho, bharat mein kyun rehte ho*", meaning, if you shout chao Mao, then why are you living in India) referring to the primary organising unit of the Marxist front, *class*.

Mimicry and performance are intrinsically related to gender identity. As gender operates as a cultural artifact and not as an essential or innate identity, its contortions can be located within the performative space of the *Sammelan*. Moreover, before attempting to locate performance and the performative aspects of gender, the mimicry should be explained.

Mimicry in simultaneity can be signified as resistant and subservient in its operation. When the cadre, emulates the urban individual, his social roots are eroded and delegitimised, the cityscape becomes his field of asserting his identity and appropriating certain symbols of the urban life, he wishes to rise in the social ladder and become an accepted individual within a different (urban) group. The cityscape imposes its landscapes upon this emulating individual in the sense, to be socially accepted, his routes of travelling and destinations are morphed. For example, there is a shopping complex near JNU, where, the occasional cadre (vowed to stay away from western markers of modernity, specifically the pub and the coffee shop) is seen, bargaining, cheap jeans and moving from one pub to the other. Also, for this individual, the everyday sense of work and leisure are also

disrupted within the cityscape and the institution. For example, a first year B.A student (from ABVP) when he comes to JNU, is seen as getting up at early hours and if he is a devoted *shakha* (the training wing of RSS) person, he would hit the training grounds at 6.00 am. Also the night would start very early for that person. However, things change, when he falters through his friend circle and ends up lonely in his room, with his temporal routine, turning completely against him. Then, if that person is not headstrong, the shocks of the city would morph his ways and he would end up having the **occasional 3.00 a.m. tea everyday**. However, mimicry can be resistant, in the sense, the routines of the city, by altering the temporalities of work and play (which was imbibed by that person in his village) would allow him more agency to operate.

Conversation- "The first thing I am going to do after I have my first salary is to buy a motor-bike, so that, I can drive like Pawan and get all the girls" (person B, third year student, right wing cadre).

The performative space of this *Sammelan* is very interesting, the *Sammelan* generally can be explained as a social festival of humorous and snide poetry coupled with crowning the greatest fools of JNU and the language is vivid with innuendos and euphemisms on the sexual line.

In the performing space of the festival, although the language and the form is very masculinist the carnival forms a place, where certain hierarchies of the social order are done away but a heterosexual solidarity is generated and reproduced through every performative act. The hierarchies which are delegitimised are that of the religion, for example, the majoritarian rhetoric of the right wing is diluted when a Muslim nominates a **great** ABVP leader as the greatest fool. Moreover, community and patriarchal ties are reproduced through acts like small skits on homosexuality and amorous love stories. My point, is that, though the *Sammelan* serves as a regressive space, reproducing patriarchal structures of control, it tries to delegitimise certain national agendas (and in my case that of the RSS) of culture based on generalised and governmental priorities. Now, whether, destabilisation in a singular moment is resistant enough or not, is a completely different story altogether.

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Growing Up in Red Kolkata , Where Kollontai was Whore and Lenin was King



Garga Chatterjee

Garga is a maverick. Starting off as a high-ranking student in the Medical Entrance Exams of his native West Bengal, he gave up practising medicine almost before starting. A man with unconventional ideas about most things, Garga has also been a regular, if itinerant, participant in the radical political circles of Kolkata, and is presently an non-Marxian radical, with a large influence of Ashish Nandy. He is currently working on an audio-visual documentation of radical student politics in his native city in the 1990s. He is also a PhD student in Cognitive Sciences in Harvard.

At the outset, it should be mentioned that this article, exploring the praxis, attitude and approach to intimacy and sexual pleasure in certain politically charged left-wing circles in Kolkata of the late 1990s and early 2000s, are just that. I dare not extend its scope to others. Although it is my suspicion that the experience might be similar in other left-wing urban circles elsewhere in India, I cannot be sure. The set of events, observations and instances that will be related are in the third person. While this stance of relating to it from a third person perspective may not be entirely true in some instances, it does, in the process, broaden the ambit of what one can talk about. Though narrated from a single person's perspective, it is meant to be only illustrative, and can even be called a fiction, in the sense that the characters might be untrue, though not the characteristics.

There can be a certain growing up in Kolkata—where one is born to an 'ex-Communist Party member of the sixties and seventies' father who, though now sufficiently liberal to have deep shades of patriarchy and 'pragmatism', could not bring himself to sell *Ten Days that Shook the World* to the Sunday paper recycler. This father, who cannot 'still' bring himself to vote for the Congress party over the undying seduction of the hammer and sickle, nonetheless is deeply concerned by his progeny's delving into the books he could not sell. The promised land of his youth is not a place where he thinks his children should plan pilgrimages to. His hypocrisy is perhaps explained by the triumph of filial love over the 'call of history'—in most case it is an instinctive no-brainer. But one can imagine that this ex-Communist father, during his youth, went through some suppression of instinct for 'the people'. He was around heroes—high caste Bengali communists—some of whom were driven to a life of bachelorhood. This veneration of the "unmarried" "simple-living" communist possibly left some impression in his mind, just when his hormones were surging. He grappled with this veneration of holding back the seed— a veneration which conflates the revolutionary with the hermit, the militant atheist with the mendicant

immersed in the divine. This was not the deliverance and salvation that a latter day German non-saint had in mind for his followers. For he could only preach and then die. He has no control over what high caste Bengalis made out of his second hand Bengali edition elaborations or worse, third hand précis versions based on hearsay from people purportedly knowledgeable about the second hand editions.

But the father did move on, for he was mortal, the hormones still surging and deliverance no-where in sight. It is not easy to keep mum about sex and pleasure and at the same time follow the dictum to 'question everything'. His could not articulate his questions among his unmarried *dhoti-panjabi* clad gurus of the Red Party. But he did find some solutions and release, if not answers, as his child might have discovered years later. His child, somewhat taken in by John Reed's story, also started reading some Kollontai, about 'free love' and being of 'college age', thought that it was a darn good idea— good enough to delve more into hammers and sickles and ideas of 'comradely love'. The child thought that is how the whole world should be. A chance find of crumpled Bengali erotica from the father's stack of old communist classics restored a lot of faith of the child in the father. And then the child went off to college and where else but to College Street—where apparently Lenin lived but Lennon rocked.

Activism breeds close encounters of various kinds. The college-goer (the child of yore) meets various characters in and around his campus. Some of them are students and some are ex-students. In the ('radical') left-wing political circles around elite colleges in Kolkata, one can find them. Fiery in idealism and a curiously unflinching claim of being privy to the 'right' and 'pure' method of deliverance, they nonetheless are numerous and generally disagree about such methods.

The college-goer has now seen porn and has a certain liking for artless erotica. He has joined a left-wing campus outfit. The outfit has close links with a 'fraternal' outfit of a neighbouring college. This is where he had first seen a girl,

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senior by a two years and a firebrand-politico, smoke. Having developed the hots for her, and having engaged in certain debates, he did the error of trying a complicated long shot method of seduction– to talk about liberty, including the liberty to seek pleasure. Playing the libertarian, when the debate turns to enjoying visual erotica, the left-wing *didi* asks him whether he enjoyed such things. This is really a rhetorical question for to say yes to this would immediately entail a fall from grace. And then there were lies and retreat. One might suspect that many communications or expressions of simple pleasures, sensual and otherwise, have been muted by such moments by many, in similar situations. This does give rise to a culture of feigned and imagined moral 'uprightness'. It is a deeply discomforting falsehood but it helps keep the liberation army intact.

This coherence, generated by falsehood or by self-delusions, is important for long-held worldviews to not come crashing down. Fellow-travellers of the college-goer might remember encountering such characters. Perhaps talking from a perch, which denies or even worse pooh-poohs human conditions and expressions beyond the economic, there is, among such middle class characters a conviction of righteousness which helps them make judgement calls on what is and what is not bourgeois decadence. Sex and sensuality is generally the first casualty. Their opposition can range from opposition to overt displays of intimacy to opposition to overt interest in the pleasure aspect of sex itself, not to mention the opposition to sex education to adolescents. Righteousness can be intolerable enough. When that is combined with a vague notion of scientific validity of such righteous stances, scientific in so far as such positions purportedly help advance the onward march to 'scientific socialism', they become excellent specimens to study the expanse of human behavioural patterns. The intolerability remains though.

Many such left-wingers (and this is true for admirers of post-enlightenment visions of polity and governance of occidental vintage in general) have little or no faith in the 'masses'. The 'masses' need to be educated, their consciousness raised in prescribed ways, as if the 'multitude', as it appears to such admirers of homogenous regimentation, have no history, culture, knowledge and vision, which is of any value, let alone parallel their vision. Hence human expressions of intimacy and sexuality are thought to be pre-occupation of the lascivious bourgeoisie. The effort to declass hence does not take its cue from how their purported underclass behaves but rather it is an externalised projection of a potent mixture of late Victorian sensibilities as well as vestigial ideas of penance as practiced by some purity seeking strength repositories in *Sanatan Dharma*. It is a self-serving

mixture for it expects that by imbibing this mixture they command a certain amount of value for a stance. This is much akin to the stance of certain people in armed forces– they want higher salaries for their apparently spontaneous patriotism.

The college-goer encountered a specific heterosexual couple of this kind. It was their belief that they were the advancing vanguard for an age whose time had not come but was round the corner. They were heterosexual to the college-goer for they never mentioned any other preference and did produce a child two years after a marriage recognised by the state. On the face of it, the college-goer did get snubbed once when he counter-critiqued their critique of 'excessive' indulgence in love and intimacy and how that 'de-radicalises' even activists with what they termed 'revolutionary potential'. One can just wonder whether this worldview of conviction is real or a front. If it is real, then it is not a good idea to point out the inherently hypocritical stance of denying sexual urges as irritating diversions which take away time for revolutionary activity. To the morbidly delusional, taking away the basic planks of their worldview might leave them as psychological wrecks. One might ask, what are they thinking or feeling when they do have sex? Are they producing 'new socialist man'(sic) in the process or actually deriving pleasure as other judgemental comrades are not watching, so they can indulge for the night and come out in the morning, complete with a jute *jhola* pretending that they were discussing the evils of revisionism? It is interesting to note that this let up and indulgence is widespread and so is the public downplaying of the pleasure aspect of sexual activity, at least for others. In certain sectors of that left-wing world, a culture prevails where certain questions are 'unquestionables'.

In this real or feigned emphasis of total dedication to a 'cause', sensuality is a usual prey. In this puritanical worldview with a healthy dollop of the value of denial of pleasure, self-deprivation of the same generates ethical currency for oneself. This possibly helps keep this model of their living afloat, for one needs to constantly generate answers to existential questions like "Why am I living how I am living?" For the newly initiated and the half-initiated, as they hesitantly enter the doors of such a system of thought, really enter into a silent system of coercion for they often cannot admit their very human 'failings', lest their genuinely red dreams are branded pink and bourgeois or Gods forbid, branded red and black. To be morally degraded or depraved by self-constructed notions of the same can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. And one can wonder, what would Alexandra Kollontai say looking at such unique specimens of Bengali middle class Marxians. What would their Chairman say? Why does not

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one find among these self-professed vanguards of our common good, love and intimacy between a woman and a man like Pavel Dybenko, seventeen years younger than her. What stops them? The college-goer did not buy the moral degradation story. He was listening to his hormones and

responding accordingly. He possibly found promise beyond the Promised Land. Perhaps he found free love subversive. Perhaps some leftists called him to be a renegade when he did so.

The Princess and the Pauper



Nandita Dhawan

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Once upon a time, not very long ago, in a land not so far away, lived Priyanka, a beautiful young princess. She lived in a huge castle... a castle fenced all around... she was secured, she was protected... she knew no misery... all that she laid her hands on was hers!! She grew up in the fenced castle, never trying to look beyond the fences... she was happy... she had all the comforts life could promise. Priyanka's father, the King, Ashok Todi, owned an empire worth rupees two hundred crores, the empire was called LUX HOSIERY. Priyanka was her father's darling, who left no stones unturned for her!

As Nature adorned the little Princess with youthful beauties, thoughts of her marriage dawned upon the King, her father... after all she should have the best! A King of not very yester years, his daughter Priyanka was given the best of education... he wanted her to be modern, educated, well versed in English, excel at computers. He spared no efforts in embellishing Nature's gifts with his mighty hand. The King wanted his little Priyanka ready for an ideal match with a fitting royal family that paralleled theirs in wealth and grandeur- he dreamt of the royal Prince in his daughter's life... Priyanka would then belong to that Prince... the Prince in return give her all pleasures and luxuries in life... the King's eyes closed in fulfilment at the thought...

Priyanka grew up learning to believe that one day she had to leave the fenced castle that she so fondly thought was hers... she would move on... move on to her real abode... a paradise of happiness... the home of her husband... that would finally be hers!! She witnessed all the grand family weddings with the dream growing deep down- some day it would be her turn! How beautiful the bride looked in her bridal wear, decked with exquisite jewellery, waiting for her Prince Charming to take her to her real home! Romantic thoughts filled her mind. She believed that somewhere out there a young and handsome Prince was waiting, just for her. He would love her with all his heart. She would love him too, unflinchingly- just as she saw in films, just as

she read in romantic novels. She never spoke of her dreams... she knew it was not decent to do so. She had faith in her father- he would definitely find her a perfect match... the Prince she often dreamt of. No one could possibly understand her needs better than the father who had tended to her from the moment she was born. She would marry whomsoever he deemed fit for her.

Little did the Princess know that life would change so drastically! It all happened with Priyanka joining a Computer Training Institute. A young computer teacher at the Institute, Rizwanur Rahman, caught her attention quite often. He was a graphics designer, a popular teacher at the institute. He was tall, handsome, and had deep eyes that had a beaming intelligence. She felt that he looked at her differently... a difference she quite liked. They started exchanging silent glances every now and then. She often felt an urge to talk to him but resisted. She was thrilled the day she got introduced to him through a common friend. They liked talking to each other, spending time together. Priyanka saw no harm in befriending him. She loved the way she could frankly discuss everything with him. With no one else could she do that. The Princess all of a sudden felt a strange kind of happiness filling her!

The King started getting suspicious- why is her little darling repeatedly talking to someone on a particular phone number? He started enquiring... he did not like what he learnt... he was angry... after all this was not what he expected his darling Princess to be! He forbade Priyanka from indulging in any action that might tarnish his honour in society. Moreover, it was his duty as a father to protect her from all dishonour. She could only dream of a royal Prince, no pauper was her match... she could not afford to think of any stupid pauper... a computer teacher!!! The princess assured her anxious father that she would not shatter his dreams. She decided to mend her ways. She stopped meeting Rizwanur. She even stopped responding to his calls. She could not hurt her

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father.

Despite all attempts, the Princess found it difficult controlling her emotions... it was new, it was different, she was liking it! Once she stopped talking to Rizwanur, she felt lonely, unhappy– the Princess who so far never knew what it was to be unhappy! She was restless and pained at not being able to talk to him. She realised soon that she was in love! She was tense. After all he was a Muslim while she was a Hindu. He earned a meagre sum that compared most unfavourably to her father's abundance. She knew that the King would never accept a pauper as his son-in-law. She had to put an end to all of this. She had to endure the pain and suffering for the sake of her parents. After all, they had brought her up amidst all comforts and luxuries. How could she be so selfish?

Poor Rizwanur could not understand the change in Princess Priyanka's attitude. He missed her terribly. What was wrong with her? Why was she avoiding him? He decided to confront her. He had to let her know about his feelings for her. Rizwanur loved Priyanka. He told her that he could not live without her. The princess was in tears. She wanted to tell Rizwanur that she loved him too. But how could she? She knew her father would never approve of him. For the King, Rizwanur was no better than a pauper! Moreover he hailed from a different religious background. She tried explaining her position to Rizwanur. Rizwanur understood her situation. He assured her– there would be a way out... the King would eventually approve... it had to be a happy ending!

Priyanka was well aware that her father would not leave any stone unturned to separate her from Rizwanur if he got to know about their proximity. She could not risk being imprisoned within her house... for the first time in her life she realised that the fences around the castle had a meaning... they were not meant to be crossed. The King may even force her to marry someone else. The Princess could not imagine such a future.

Days went by... Priyanka lost in deep, never ending thoughts... dilemmas everywhere. What would she do? What should she do? What would be the correct step? The once upon a time little princess, for the first time started thinking– thinking about herself, her life! Would she take the plunge? Should she respond to her feelings?

It was a difficult fight... after all, it was a decision of a lifetime. She finally took the plunge. The princess married the pauper! Priyanka decided to leave her father's home forever... she crossed the fences for the first and final time– she thought.

Before leaving home, Priyanka wrote a letter to her father. The letter had all her emotions

laid bare. She wrote about her happiness at sacrificing all her luxuries for Rizwanur, how much Rizwanur cared for her, how much he loved her, how all her father's riches carried no meaning in his life! Somewhere, the Princess knew her father loved her, and after all the anger it was only natural that a King has to forgive... after all she is his little darling!

The Princess stepped into Rizwanur's family to a very warm reception. His family was very supportive of their decision to marry. Her brother-in-law assured the Princess that once her father comes over to talk to them, they would discuss matters and things would be fine again. But the princess was scared. She expected her father to be there any moment. She was worried. Rizwanur tried to calm her down but to no avail.



Rizwanur Rahman and Priyanka Todi

When the King got news of his daughter's elopement, he was shocked. He stared with utter disbelief at the letter she had left for him. His princess had written, "If you force me back home, I will die... I won't be happy ever. I can't imagine living without him." The King was outraged. How dare that pauper mislead his daughter? He had to get her back at any cost. He had to preserve his honour in society. He knew Rizwanur had lured his daughter for money. He would teach him and his family a lesson. The pauper should be punished.

The King visited the pauper's house. He was sure his little princess would return to him. He met her alone in a room. He tried to explain to her that she could not be happy with somebody like Rizwanur. She was used to living in luxuries which Rizwanur could never afford. Priyanka gathered all the courage to plead with her father. She told him how much they were in love. They needed his approval and his blessings to start a new life. The King could not convince his princess to return to his palace. To his utter disbelief she refused. The little princess had grown up all of a sudden and had dared to defy the King. It was unacceptable. He tried to buy his princess back by paying the pauper some money. The pauper refused. The King left with a feeling of being let down, defeated... and that to by a beggar, who dared to do so because his daughter, the once upon a time little princess had betrayed him. For the first time he felt that the fences were not

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strong enough... he should have been stricter... should not have allowed such liberties.

Though the princess had faced the King courageously, she was scared once he had left. Did she read a different message in his eyes? Fear and panic gripped her. At the same time she was sad— how could her father not understand her! Rizwanur assured her that once the King saw them living happily together, he would surely accept the marriage; it would be a happy ending. Priyanka seemed convinced. She decided to start her life on an optimistic note. Her father loved her a lot. Things would surely change for the better soon.

Rizwanur, in fact, had expected such a turn of events. He had already taken some precautions. He had informed four local police stations and the Human Rights Commission about their marriage. He was now the man who had to safeguard the interest of both of them— how could he let her worry— he had to manage at any cost.

Priyanka was happy in her new role. Her mother-in-law loved Priyanka very much. The Princess took great care of Rizwanur's family. She cooked for them. She wanted to be a good daughter-in-law... after all she had nurtured the dream for so many years. This was her real home. Had her parents not taught her that? She had seen the way her mother had served their family all her life. She wanted to do the same. She would prove to her father that differences of class and religion would not stop them from being happy. It did not matter if Rizwanur did not keep her in great luxuries. He loved her. She had got all that she wanted in life. All she needed were her father's blessings. That would make her life perfect!

But the King cared nothing for love. He firmly believed that his daughter was driven out of her senses by this evil boy. Persuasion had failed, but the might of the state was his to use against the pauper. He had the money, he had the power— so, he knew the battle would be won, everything would be purchased... his experience told him that every thing in life can be put to sale, only one has to make the right bargain.

The corrupt police and state officials supported the King. They could not accept a pauper crossing his limits and daring to lure a King's daughter into marriage. The pauper had to be taught a lesson. The innocent princess needed to be saved.

The princess was totally unaware of what her father had in store for her. She was horrified to find that the evil police officials to whom they had appealed for protection, created tremendous pressure on her and her husband. Rizwanur was harassed and the villainous police officers issued threats to arrest him on grounds of abduction and theft. The princess was being advised to return home. She refused. However,

she succumbed to the pressure when she was informed that the king was sick and hospitalised.

The wicked cops assured Rizwanur that the princess would return to him in seven days. Rizwanur was not convinced. Rizwanur was scared of letting his beloved go. He did not trust her family. The King was powerful. Was this a hoax to separate Priyanka from him? He was suspicious. But he allowed her to leave for her natal home when he saw her in anguish. He let her go with a heavy heart.

It was only after Priyanka had left that Rizwanur realised how complex the whole situation had become... it was no longer in his control... he started sensing defeat. The evil men followed all his movements. He was being threatened with dire consequences if he did not forget the princess. How dare he even dream of marrying a Hindu princess? He was not even allowed to talk to her. The princess, on the other hand, was trapped in the palace... the fences were re-built, re-strengthened. Like a good daughter, the Princess did not want to defy the King during his illness. Gradually the King recovered. She began to get restless once the seven days were over. Why was no one letting her talk to Rizwanur? Will her father not allow her to go back to Rizwanur? The King, however, assured her that they were just taking some time. She will soon be united with him. Also he told her that Rizwanur was fine. Priyanka was not convinced. She wanted to talk to Rizwanur. She was hoping that he does not misunderstand her.

Rizwanur was worried. Seven days had passed but there was no news from his beloved. He was constantly trying to get in touch with Priyanka, but to no avail. No one responded to his phone calls. He was tired of the harassment of the cops as well. He could face all of it if his wife was with him. Without her he would rather die!

Priyanka could not sleep well at nights. She needed to be with Rizwanur. She was missing him. She was worried about him. One morning, her father came and informed her that Rizwanur had met with an accident. She felt her whole world collapse. She was sure her love could never desert her. But then, she had been sure of a lot of things in life. She had felt sure her father loved her. That he wanted to see her happy. She had even been sure that their love would win over everything. She had been so sure... Her world came to a standstill when she heard the fatal news later in the evening. Her beloved was no more. Was she sure of anything anymore?

The story does not end here. The moment the news about Rizwanur's death spread there were widespread protests across the kingdom. Many questions were raised. Was Rizwanur killed or did he commit suicide? Many believed the 'messiah of love' was killed by the villain

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Ashok Todi. And what happened to the young princess? Why did she still stay at her father's place? Though Rizwanur gave up on his life for the sake of the Princess, what did she do for him? Many blamed the princess for the whole problem. Why was she so whimsical? How dare she marry against the King's wishes? Why did she elope like a coward?

The princess was aware of all the questions that life had put forth to her. But she could not answer them at that moment. She was too tired to look for answers. Maybe she needed to wait for the storm to lull before she could start thinking afresh. Maybe she needed more time. Life will go on, life must go on.

Priyanka Todi is the daughter of an industrialist who is the owner of Lux Hosiery, a company worth over Rupees Two Hundred crores. She belongs to an upper-class Hindu family living in Salt Lake, one of the affluent areas of Kolkata.

Rizwanur Rehman was from a middle-class Muslim family of a lower middle class locality of Tiljala. He fought his own battle in life to study English honours from a reputed college of Kolkata and finally became a graphic designer and teacher of one of the reputed computer institutes of Kolkata, earning a monthly salary of Rupees Ten Thousand.

As evident, the categories (which signified an individual's status in the society) to which both Rizwanur and Priyanka belonged were in sharp contrast to each other. There was every possibility of sharp binaries being created in the discourse in terms of class (high/low), religion (majority/minority), geo-political location (Salt Lake/Tiljala) and profession (business/salaried). It was obvious that marriage between two such individuals disrupted social orders of an ideologically conservative framework. Marriage is an essentially public and political act and one that structures alliances, hierarchies and social networks. Therefore marriages that are potentially disruptive to kinship and political alliances, religion, community, caste and class boundaries frequently provoke opposition.

The above case has been in national and regional headlines in media since last September and this issue has developed into a very important media event. The primary source of my data has been the representation of this media event in print¹, television² and internet blogs. I

have also conducted a small random survey among the Hindu privileged section of Kolkata.³ There have been varied responses and reactions of the civil society to this media event, which have led to various crucial debates. The opinions generated in the media discourse emerged from two starting points— Ashok Todi and Rizwanur Rehman. One broad opinion was against Ashok Todi. This camp blamed him for his barbarity towards the couple, some claiming that he got Rizwanur murdered, while others claiming that his pressurising tactics to win his daughter back were inhuman and tempted Rizwanur to commit suicide. On the other end was a section of the mainstream, which did not believe that Ashok Todi was the culprit for he reacted the way any father would have and he was justified in pressurising Priyanka to come back. It is important to understand that the premise on which the confrontation was taking place was Priyanka Todi— her sexual and reproductive control. I will now focus on the various issues in the debates triggered within the civil society by this media event.

The voices in the discourse had a strong conformist dimension, which reinstated institutionalisation of marriage with regard to class. These opinions came from that section of the society, which sympathised with Ashok Todi. Marriage signifies an orderly exchange of women between two families belonging to the same social order, class being an important determinant of this order.⁴ Rizwanur Rehman will never be able to match Ashok Todi in terms of class, however well he does in life, because Priyanka's value is in crores. So, he stands accused of robbing Priyanka of her class status. There were many who blamed Priyanka for being impractical for having left the riches of her family and having married Rizwanur. She was judged as being impractical, immature and even foolish for not realising the hardships that she will have to face after marriage. There was an evident anxiety regarding the breaching of class order in society. There seemed to be a reflection of the Marxian critique of capitalist marriages among the wealthy as merely a contract to preserve capital and to ensure its smooth and undiluted transmission across generations.

Another issue, which went in favour of Ashok Todi, was the religious differences between the couple. This was one of the prime factors that led to the marriage being deemed socially 'inappropriate'. A Hindu girl marrying a Muslim boy

1 The newspapers I have referred to are English dailies of Kolkata— *The Telegraph*, *The Times of India* and a Bengali daily of Kolkata, *Ananda Bazaar Patrika*.

2 In television, I have referred to local Bengali channels primarily— *Star Ananda*, *Tara News*, *Chabbis Ghanta*.

3 The sample size was 20, which ranged from men and women from different walks of life, both working and non-working, between the age-group of 18 to 65.

4 Only then will the sexual contract between the father of the girl and her husband, for control over the sexual and reproductively active woman, be effective. See Veena Das, *Life & Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, Chapter 2.

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was a social taboo. On one hand, Priyanka was held responsible for bringing shame and dishonour to the Hindu community. On the other hand, Rizwanur Rehman was being held responsible for seducing the 'innocent' Priyanka.⁵ Priyanka became a symbol of deviance who ran away to marry a Muslim boy. She was setting wrong examples to Hindu women. She (Hindu) was also being seen as a victim who had been seduced or duped by Rizwanur Rehman (Muslim). All these points were in accordance with the Hindutva⁶ rhetoric according to which her action may lead to rupture of the Hindu patriarchal family structure—the primary and most important unit for imparting good *sanskars*.⁷ The projection of innocence of the Hindu woman also becomes essential for the 'otherisation' of the Muslim women and thereby inferiority of the Muslim community.⁸ The Muslim men are targeted for luring Hindu women to marriage for religious conversion. The Hindu fundamentalist voices in the discourse thus proved the moral 'inferiority' of the Muslims which was used as a tool for continuous retaliation against Rizwanur Rehman.

On the contrary, there were secular voices opposing Ashok Todi as well. These recommended marriage between people from different class and religious backgrounds to bring about social justice and equality. They firmly believed that love was capable of conquering all class and religious barriers and by separating Priyanka from Rizwanur, Ashok Todi has done "gross injustice against love and there cannot be a more serious crime". This discussion in the discourse brought forth the importance of love in the rhetoric of marriage. This was the love, which knew no boundaries of class, caste or religion. On one hand this 'undisciplined' love is looked upon as potentially disruptive of patriarchal social order if not kept in check. On the other hand, this romantic utopia seems to be the overarching emotion behind mate choice during marriage. In such a case, the couple in question may not realise that once the euphoria

of love begins to wane and the actual, rather than the idealised, characteristics of the partner are revealed, marriages may become subject to stress.⁹ It may also be important to understand this romantic utopia in the context of popular culture as well as consumerism in an age of globalisation. The advertisers have tied the purchase of beauty products, jewellery, cars, hi-tech products to success in love and happiness.¹⁰ This "romantic utopia" then becomes a common theme for dating and marriage for the 'modern' middle class segment of Indian society.

This also brings us to the discussion regarding 'traditional' and 'modern' views on the nature of choice of marital partner. In India, traditionally, arranged marriages are the norm. However, in the age of globalisation, the 'tradition' is being reinvented to challenge the 'modern'. The middle class is beginning to see the practice of love marriage as a marker of 'modernity' vis-a-vis the 'traditional' arranged marriages. So we have many 'traditional' voices in the media discourse supporting love marriage provided the parents give consent to it. What we see here is the contemporary idealisation of 'arranged love marriage'. Patricia Uberoi has specified two different forms of 'arranged love marriage'. One is a style of matchmaking whereby a romantic choice already made is endorsed, post facto, by parental approval. Another is the type where a couple proceed to 'fall in love' after the parentally arranged match.¹¹ It is thus not surprising to find the advertisement of a matrimonial website Shaadi.com suggest, "Arrange your love marriage". Significantly, what remains underlined is the frantic effort taken to essentialise affirmation to patriarchal authority.

Many voices have referred to the 'elopement' of Priyanka Todi to marry the man of her choice as something 'unacceptable'. It is important to understand what is disturbing about a girl 'running away' to get married. She defied the elementary principles of the Indian culture of kinship. The problems with Priyanka Todi's actions were manifold. To begin with, she

5 The Hindutva brand of politics has portrayed the Muslim men as potential rapists, lusting after and raping Hindu women. See Paola Bacchetta, "Hindu Nationalist Women as Ideologues", in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *The Sangh Parivar*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 131.

6 The term 'Hindutva' has been used throughout not in the sense of Hinduism, but to indicate the contemporary communal organisations and movements that use this banner.

7 Refer to Paola Bacchetta, *Gender in the Hindu Nation: RSS Women as Ideologists*, Women Unlimited and Associate of Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2004, p. 8.

8 The Hindutva ideology had always projected the Hindus as the 'dominant' community vis-à-vis the 'inferior' Muslim community. Women had always been centrally implicated in the formation of such communal identities.

9 Baum Martha has contended that "romantic idealisation" during courtship leads to a high incidence of dissatisfaction and disruption which she terms as "dysfunctional aspects of the love marriage". See Baum Martha, "Love, Marriage and the Division of Labour", *Sociological Inquiry*, 41, 1, pp. 107-117.

10 Eva Illouz studies American love in the twentieth century and analyses the experience of "true love" as deeply embedded in the experience of consumer capitalism. See Ela Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradiction*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997.

11 See Patricia Uberoi, "The Diaspora Comes Home: Disciplining Desire in DDLJ'", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1998, 32, p. 305.

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challenged the authority of her father (patriarch) by running away and had to be corrected. It is all right as long as women's deviance is knowledge limited within the family members. Once the transgression is public knowledge it can adversely affect the family's standing in the community. Ideal notions of femininity in conservative families require 'shame' inculcated as a virtue in girls from an early age. It is gravely immodest for young women to discuss their marriage prospects openly, leave alone getting married without the family's consent. Her actions threatened the father's duty as a Hindu father to gift his daughter in marriage. This also challenged the principle of 'alliance' in a marriage, which is a union between two families through the 'exchange' of women. Priyanka's action led to compromising her virtue, which resulted in the depreciation of her purity as a gift-object in addition to the loss of honour of her father.¹² In this connection, there has been constant reference to the lack of 'family values' in Priyanka Todi. What is problematic is the valourisation of 'family values' which conform to distinctive gender roles (symbolic of gender oppression), recognise individual's purchasing power and consumerist living as essential conditions of success (both symbolic of privileged section of society discriminating against the subordinate classes) and also encourage antagonistic feelings towards other religions (in this case Hindu-Muslim).

Priyanka's return to her father's home brings us to another important question raised in the discourse. Many who had looked at Priyanka Todi and Rizwanur Rehman as symbols of love were unhappy with the way Rizwanur's widow refused to fight for justice for her late husband. Rizwanur was projected as a 'martyr of love' and Priyanka was his widow who was expected to grieve her husband's death publicly, and maybe throughout her life. However, Priyanka did not do what was expected of her and instead maintained a prolonged silence in her father's home even after Rizwanur's death. The above voices started to demand that she come out in the

open, leave her father's home and fight for justice for her husband. It has to be remembered that powerlessness, once she was back to her father's place, may have forced Priyanka to cultivate patience and tolerance as stratagems for survival.¹³ It is important to mention that Priyanka Todi issued a public apology in a newspaper interview almost three months after her husband's death. The reporter asked, "Why did you leave home like that instead of trying to explain to your parents?" and she replies, "Looking back, that is one of the things I regret- I made a mistake by not getting my family to meet Rizwanur and get to know him better before marriage."¹⁴ This reflects the core of patriarchal reasoning and arrangements which induces notions of guilt and fear in women after they go 'wrong' which makes them apologise for questioning norms and leads them to bear responsibility to regain their submissive social status. However, there were discussions on one of the television channels of Kolkata, which suggested that the interview was monitored as the questions were sent to Priyanka Todi in advance and she 'chose' to respond to just a few of them.¹⁵

It becomes essential to say that throughout the discourse Priyanka Todi has been treated as means and not as an agent who has ends of its own.¹⁶ Her agentic role was either denied or rendered invisible. It is important to analyse this silence. Why was she never looked upon as possessing agentic freedom to initiate social change? I look at this act as an error of commission for the kind of social change that the agency of Priyanka Todi may have initiated is something that patriarchy cannot afford. The discourse had a strong conformist dimension in the guise of dissidence, and had invariably reinstated the institution of heteronormative patriarchal marriage. Socially 'appropriate' matches are necessary to reinforce kinship ties, enhance social networks and status and affirm group boundaries. Women are in no position to exercise their 'choice' in the selection of marriage partners and there is little scope of taking

12 *ibid.*

13 It was reported that Priyanka's father had snapped all communication links she had with her husband after she was forced to return to his house. In the interview, Priyanka tried but could not hide the fact that she was being harassed by her family. She said she was never left alone. Her relatives kept telling her that she had made a "grave mistake" by marrying Rizwanur. She was often blackmailed emotionally into changing her mind. Receiving or making phone calls were not permitted. Neither was watching TV or reading newspapers— for the "betterment of her mental health". See "Father Cut Me Off From Rizwan", *Times of India*, 5 November, 2007. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Father_cut_me_off_from_Rizwan/articleshow/2517700.cms.

14 Priyanka Todi's interview published in *The Telegraph*, 8 December, 2007, p. 1.

15 Discussion held on a local Bengali channel, *Star Ananda*, 9 December, 2007.

16 Martha Nussbaum has referred to the 'capabilities approach'. She argues that the capabilities in question should be pursued for each and every person, treating each as an end and none as a mere tool of the ends of others. Women have all too often been treated as the supporters of the ends of others, rather than as ends in their own right; thus this principle has particular critical force with regard to women's lives. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2002.

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decisions on when to marry and whom to marry, leave alone whether to marry at all. While the class and religious differences in this marriage raised social protest, gender oppression, especially within the family, remained invisible. This case has led us to analyse the way the gender question figured in the discourse along with other questions of injustice. It was amazing to observe how gender violence was normalised in this case.

Feminists like Julia Kristeva think that "intimacy has rebellious possibilities that can send ripples to the public sphere of life, a change in

intimate relation certainly helps to challenge and change social practices." The Priyanka Todi case has proved this to be true. But my biggest concern is that when an incident of such extreme violence could not place the gender question strongly in the discourse created around this media event, how will we account for the subtle violences faced by women regularly during the process of marital choice. And if this be the structure of the institution of a heterosexual marriage, what will the situation be for women who want to move out of the heteronormative framework and choose to exert choices in alternative sexuality framework?

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Expert Meeting on 'Histories of Sexualities and Modernities in the Global South'



Shamil Jeppie

Shamil Jeppie and Michiel Baud are currently Co-chairs of the SEPHIS Programme.



Michiel Baud

In order to explore possible directions about the newly established programme on 'Histories of Sexualities and Modernities in the Global South', in February 2008 SEPHIS hosted a small gathering of scholars working in the field of sexualities in non-Western contexts. Invited experts were: Marc Epprecht (Queens University, Kingston, Canada), Maria Manarelli (National University of San Marcos, Lima, Peru), Elaine Salo (African Gender Institute, Cape Town, South Africa), Ruth Vanita (University of Montana, U. S.), Dror Ze'evi (Ben Gurion University, Israel) and Samita Sen (Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India). Sephis was represented by Michiel Baud (Sephis co-chair), Shamil Jeppie (Sephis co-chair), Samita Sen (editor of *Global South*) and Liese van der Watt (former coordinator, Sexualities programme). The oral presentations and ensuing discussions produced many interesting points that the on-going research programme has to take into account.

The most important is, of course, the critique of Western views on Southern sexualities and the search for the diversity of sexualities in the South. Western interpretations have been influenced and determined by colonial and Orientalist views. These views continue to have an important role in contemporary debates, although they may be couched in more politically correct formulations. Today's social scientists often fall into the trap of exoticising and simplifying Southern practices. This may lead to negative, colonial and romantic visions. It is an important objective of the Sephis programme to make these debates and underlying visions explicit so as to be able to discuss them.

Dror Ze'evi arranged his talk around a critique on Joseph Massad's *Desiring Arabs*. Without denying the qualities of this book, he was very critical about its approach. He demonstrated how important it is to study Southern sexualities, but at the same time to also reflect on the premises and conceptualisations of the results of these studies. By suggesting that the idea of explicit homosexuality has been imposed on the Arab world by Western sexual discourses, the danger exists of denying existing forms of local

homosexualities.

This is also clear in contemporary Zimbabwe where Marc Epprecht concluded that homosexuals are seen as non-humans and 'agents of imperialism and structural adjustment' by the state. His interesting conclusion is that at least in Zimbabwe, these politically motivated interpretations appear not to be shared by the majority of the population. This was echoed by Ruth Vanita's observation that female cohabitation and same sex relations in the Indian countryside were not uncommon and generally tolerated in popular culture.

This leads to a second, but connected issue: The often stark contrast between ideology and daily practice. Governments and religious leaders pronounce whatever laws and morals may be condoned in the realm of sexual practices. Another set of morals operate in practice among various groups and publics. This theme was very relevant to all presentations. Southern family relations can be very flexible and all kinds of alternative sexual practices exist under the umbrella of accepted family relations. Ruth Vanita's presentation explored same sex marriage and suicide among women in India. She showed how both cross-sex and same-sex love relationships are sometimes accepted by families after initial resistance, and the couples get married, while in other cases the resistance persists and the couples are driven to joint suicide. Marc Epprecht mentioned generally accepted male-male marriages on the mine compounds in Southern Africa; female-female marriages in Lesotho.

It is clear that one of the principal challenges of the programme will be to find ways to penetrate all kinds of state and religious discourses and to attempt to see how (alternative) sexualities have been handled in daily life. We need, therefore, thorough social histories of sexualities using multiple sources of documentation.

It would be necessary to include in such a social history of sexualities a deconstruction of 'sexual language'. Because of the confrontation and co-existence of local sexual practices with imperial or global ideologies and the often sub-

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versive ways of discussing them, it is essential to understand and clearly define the words and concepts used to describe sexual practices. This is even more important today when sexuality is often confounded with identity and the debate around sexuality has become part of larger ideological debates. To state the obvious: Same-sex relations are not necessarily 'gay'. Dror Ze'evi mentioned in this context Mahfouz's book *Midaq Alley*. Epprecht's talk also pointed at an ethical dilemma. By discussing and thus defining certain sexual practices, his book became instrumental in changing certain views on sexualities in Zimbabwe. It is clear that describing and defining their practices does not always have beneficial consequences for 'sexual agents'!

This meta-discussion also questions the idea of genuinely Southern perspectives. The presentations during the meeting made clear that Southern ideas on sexuality have often been informed, and even determined by Western ideas, colonial or critical. The idea that homosexuality is a Western imposition has become very popular in many South countries and has led to a denial of existing forms of sexuality and the repression of 'degenerate' Western expressions of homosexual practices. Marc Epprecht observed that this idea of an 'imposed' homophobia in the South creates images of the colonised man and woman as passive victims. These images have been reproduced by post-colonial elites and need to be criticised by historians.

One of the discussion points was how to really understand the history of ideas on sexuality and their different sources. It was interesting to see that in the region where Western ideas and practices have been most solid, Latin America, increasing attention is given to alternative, non-Western views and sexual practices. At the same time, the experiences in this region demonstrate how strongly these views and practices are connected to class. Bastardy, honour and servitude are elements of sexual relations that are strongly class-based, leading Maria Manarelli to the conclusion that servitude, class and sexual favours are strongly connected. She observed a patriarchal complicity between civic and religious elites. Samita Sen mentioned the sexual exploitation of women on the plantations in British colonial India which later would be used to forge a nationalist discourse. In this context the importance of slavery and servitude was discussed. Can it be said that the persistent unequal and often personalised hierarchical relations in the South could be considered its most important unifying element?

On the other hand, the focus on class may be seen as a perspective typical of Latin America, where class relations have traditionally been considered as the core of historical

change. It is necessary to also address other, possibly more 'cultural' issues. One issue is the culturally determined relation between 'friendship' and 'sexual relations'. For instance, Dror Ze'evi pointed at the importance of 'male bonding' which is very important in many Middle Eastern societies. Maria Manarelli talked about the importance of the idea of 'purity' in Latin American sexual (and political) discourses.

Samita Sen drew attention to the plurality of co-residential and sexual relations. In India one uniform law on marriage does not exist. Different forms of marriages therefore continued to exist. Bigamy was widely accepted for men and there even existed something like 'temporary marriages', often related to migration. Still today there is no general common law defining marriage and both Hindu and Muslim marriages co-exist with marriages under civic law. Because the penal code was uniformly applied in the whole country, the regulation of sexual relations in India showed many ambiguities and contradictions.

Another important warning raised during the discussion was that we should not exaggerate the state's power over sexual relations. The authority over sex was, and is, often fragmented and divided among a multitude of, often competing institutions. In the same vein, Samita Sen asked for the 'unpacking' of the colonial encounter. Colonialism was not 'one thing' but showed itself differently everywhere, also in its influence on sexual practices and ideas. In the same vein, it is necessary to take into account that there is not one Western sexual discourse and that we have to understand different sexual viewpoints accompanying colonialism and globalisation.

This contrast between ideology and reality of course poses great challenges to the historical researcher. Ruth Vanita pointed at the importance of literature (so-called fiction) that allows exploring the development of imaginative possibilities which a culture can then move towards. Therefore, methodological issues also played an important role in the seminar's discussions. How is it possible to describe and research these historical practices that were already occulted during the life-time of the historical agents? How can we understand the possibilities and limitations of sexual horizons? It is no wonder that much of modern sexualities research is strongly influenced by literary and discourse oriented methodologies. This research programme, however, should try to push beyond a focus on discourse and literary interpretation and look for historical sources that can give insight into the private and often occult worlds of sexual relations.

The following is a list of useful books and articles that were suggested by the scholars at the meeting in Cape Town:

- Zackie Achmat, "'Apostles Of Civilised Vice':

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- 'Immoral Practices' And 'Unnatural Vice' in South African Prisons And Compounds, 1890-1920," *Social Dynamics*, 19, 2, pp. 92-110, 1993.
(A powerful early intervention, critique of "white" scholarship on African desire.)
- S. Arnfred (ed.), *Re-Thinking Sexualities in Africa*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 2004.
(Includes a strong overview of the history of writing about African sexuality.)
 - Signe Arnfred, "'African sexuality'/Sexuality in Africa" Tales and Silences," in Arnfred (ed.), *Re-Thinking Sexualities in Africa*, pp. 59-76, 2004.
 - John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980.
 - Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, (trans. Richard Nice), Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2001.
 - Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in Nineteenth-Century England*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, Mass. 2003.
 - Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, William Morrow, New York, 1981.
 - GALZ, *Unspoken Facts: A History of Homosexualities in Africa*. Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, Harare, 2008.
(Activists, with some help from scholars in the field, interpreted for a less elite audience—can be ordered, probably for a discount, from the Director, Keith Goddard director@galz.co.zw)
 - Asunción Lavrin, *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1989.
 - Hoshang Merchant (ed.) *Yaarana: Gay Writing from India*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1999.
 - Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards*, University of California, Press, Berkeley, 2005.
(Very good and creates a fascinating connection between sex and politics in Iran's history.)
 - Nnaemeka Obioma, "If female circumcision didn't exist, Western feminists would invent it," in Susan Perry and Celeste Schenck (eds.), *Women Practising Development Across Culture*, Zed Books, London, pp. 171-189, 2001.
(A polemical but quite interesting treatment of an important topic.)
 - Nnaemeka Obioma (ed.), *Female Circumcisions and the Politics of Knowledge*, Westport, Praeger, Connecticut and London, 2005.
 - Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton (eds.), *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, University College London Press, London, 1999.
 - Ashwini Sukthankar (ed.) *Facing the Mirror: Lesbian writing from India*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1996.
 - Giti Thadani, *Sakhiani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India*, Cassell, New York, 1996.
 - Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (eds.), *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*, Palgrave-Macmillan, New York, 2000 and Penguin, New Delhi, (forthcoming 2008).
 - Ruth Vanita (ed.), *Queering India*, Routledge, New York, 2002.
 - Ruth Vanita, *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West*, Palgrave-Macmillan, New York and Penguin, New Delhi, 2006.

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Trans(cending) Gender?¹



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When not in the thick of political fray, he is an aesthete, lover of book and music, old things and this city of joy.

Few things tie humanity together as prejudices. Far more often than other, more genteel sentiments, prejudices, biases and hatreds have resonances across cultures, time and space. Thus the history of gender(s) is marked by this similarity. And few have suffered more, in terms of their very basic identity being denied, as the 'third sex'!

Mired in such infinitely varied and differently connotative terms as eunuch, transvestite, transexual, transgender, intergender, hermaphrodite, (the list could go on and on) it is difficult to make any sense of this often disparate group. Perhaps, it is almost impossible to mark them out as any one category save in terms of the prejudice the world bears to them, and thus, clubs them together. Indeed, even the term Third Sex is considered insulting by many who have been ascribed this identity, and they prefer other nomenclatures. (This author apologises to such people, and confesses that he uses the term for want of a better, more widely understood one.)

Researcher Sam Winter encountered this problem when he asked his one hundred and ninety respondents of the Third Sex, referred to in Thailand as the *kathoeys* (or 'ladyboys'), "whether they thought of themselves as men, women, *sao praphet song* ["a second kind of woman"] or *kathoeys*. None thought of themselves as male, and only 11 percent saw themselves as *kathoeys* (i.e. 'non-male'). By contrast 45 percent thought of themselves as women, with another 36 percent as *sao praphet song*.... Unfortunately we did not include the category *phet tee sam* (third sex/gender); conceivably if we had done so there may have been many respondents who would have chosen that term.... Around 50 percent [of non-transgender Thais] see them as males with the mistaken minds, but the other half see them as either women born into the wrong body [around 15 percent] or as a third sex/gender [35 percent]." However, while a significant number of Thais

perceive *Kathoeys* as belonging to a third gender, including many *Kathoeys* themselves, others see them as either a kind of man or a kind of woman.²

Any long-distance traveller on a non Air Conditioned or First Class compartment of the Indian Railways will tell you what a *Hijra* is. Or rather (s)he will describe 'it' in terms of otherness, in terms of what they are not. At the most, (s)he will describe some actions on part of these creatures, and go on to either be angry about them, or ridicule them, or be shocked.... And, if the commentator or one or more of the listeners is a 'sympathetic human being', then, all this will lead to an understanding statement of how all these actions are a result of a 'lack'—of frustration, sexual and otherwise and a few sympathetic clicks of the tongue.

In many ways, the Third Sex has always been defined as such— as a collection of the undefinables, or of all that is not 'us'. Thus in an Akkadian myth four thousand years old, a "third category of people" is created which includes such apparently disparate groups as demons who steal infants, 'barren' women and priestesses who must remain virgins. Such a categorisation based on reproductivity would remind many of us of the image of the colonial virile man, so useful to the maintenance of colonial rule, and to the fight against that.

This North-South duel, has an ancient provenance in this regard too (though played out in West Vs East terms). The Roman Emperor Elagabalus was severely criticised by contemporaries and historians alike for his excesses. Curiously, his habits of ostentation, personal display of powers, the important role some women played in the business of empire etc. to eastern/oriental nature as he hailed from Syria. Even more importantly for our story, a lot of contemporary and historical animosity was generated by his own sexual acts. Opinion was outraged by his violating the sanctity of a Vestal

1 I am indebted to those most popular web-searches, Google and Wikipedia for much of the information garnered in this piece.

2 Sam Winter, *Language and Identity in Transgender: Gender Wars and the case of the Thai Kathoey*, Paper presented at the Hawaii Conference of Social Sciences, Waikiki, June, 2003, http://web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/paper_language_and_identity.htm.

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Virgin, whom he married, but even more so of his 'other' sexual proclivities. Though several Roman Emperors were known catamites and pederasts, Elagabalus was held guilty of the submissive role in his homosexual relationships, and thereby violating his 'proper' position. Thus Cassius Dio and Herodian both condemned him for calling his slave chariot-driver, Hierocles, his husband publicly. Herodian also condemns his taking too much care of his looks, which to them was unbecoming of an Augustus. Cassius even says that the Emperor took care of his looks to attract male paramours, whom he would entertain as a prostitute. And all this, of course, was traced to his Eastern origins. The characteristics classical histories noted above and the notoriously inaccurate *Augustan Histories* attributed to his Oriental origins by these Latin Patrian authors have led later commentators like Harry Benjamin and Louis Godbout, writing in or after the 'liberation' of the Swinging Sixties to conclude that he was a Transgender/Transsexual.

But, of course, otherisation does not merely mean disparaging or derogatory references. In this case, it has also taken forms of *great* elevations. Thus there is the pagan Hermaphrodite and the Hindu *Ardhanariswar*, both representing an androgynous divine union. But that can be scant comfort for the ignominies of everyday life. And, as any student of South Asian gender will tell you, even with women, such divinity can merely be the other side of the coin for discrimination and domination, often justifying them. [A curious coming together is revealed in the short autobiography published on the web called "Hijra for Nearly Ten Years". There, the anonymous author writes about the period immediately after his ritual castration, "The first weeks, it's been very hard for me, because I had to learn a girl-like behaviour, although I (was) raised as a boy for thirteen years. Before I ran away (from home), I was laughing about girls with my friends, we persecuted them and I'm a girl myself." <http://www.bmezine.com/ritual/A00227/rithijra.html>]

Closer to actually existing perceptions than these distant divinities are the portrayals in art and literature, and even histories. Thus, the eunuch has appeared often in popular (Bollywood) films from the industry's inception as comedians—subject to ridicule. In the Hong Kong Kung Fu and Wuxia films portraying ancient China, a eunuch or group of eunuchs, holding some position of power, often appears as the villain. This is in the tradition of Wei Zhongxian, the powerful Ming eunuch who rose to be the second most powerful person in the empire, and whose very position of a eunuch wielding power earned him eternal calumny (along with his own

death). The character of a eunuch Wei remained for centuries the arch-villain in many Chinese tales.

The Sexual Revolution of the Sixties, the Gay Liberation of the 1970s and the Feminist Movement have managed to lessen some of the opprobrium 'earned' by the Third Sex. In some countries they have their own organisations, and in many others, they are part of LGBT movements. They have resulted in some small victories too. In India, thus, the *Hijras* gained the right to vote in 1994, and Eunuch was entered as a third category on the passport in 2005. (There have been similar events in the North too. For instance, the Harvard Business School has included Transgender as a third category for gender in their application forms. Also, in the United Kingdom, the Government received an online petition asking for the legal recognition of a third gender and a change in laws like the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 that allows a victim to seek legal redressal to gender discrimination only if the person is a he/she.) Between the two events, Shabnam Mausi became the first *Hijra* member of a State Legislative Assembly, that of Madhya Pradesh, precipitating the entry of other Third Sex politicians. A tiny, but very significant victory was achieved when the Chiang Mai Technology School of Thailand allocated a separate restroom for the *Kathoey*s. Again in India, some recent films have seen several sensitive (sympathetic seems such a patronising word) depictions like Mani Ratnam's *Bombay* (1995), Mahesh Bhatt's *Tamanna* (1997) and Deepa Mehta's *Water* (2005). There even has been a biopic on Shabnam Mausi by the same name (2005).

But before we take a deep breath of peace and pat ourselves on our backs for the ultimately tolerant nature of our society, let us not forget a few things.

1. The petition to the UK Government managed all of 235 signatures.
2. In his famous work challenging many of our most closely held assumptions about Indian sexuality, the noted psychoanalyst and scholar, Sudhir Kakar hardly ever mentions the Third Sex by any of its names.³
3. For all the sensitivity of recent Hindi films, in the very successful *Nayak*, the hero's sidekick keeps abusing everyone as *Hijra* till he uses the term for people who are *Hijras*, and gets beaten up.

In the North too, in the hugely successful *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, Captain Jack Sparrow keeps calling the rather insipid and colourless character played by Orlando Bloom a eunuch. And this, apparently, is an innovation by the actor Johnny Depp, otherwise known for his support to many 'progressive' causes.

3 Sudhir Kakar, *Intimate Relationships: Exploring Indian Sexuality*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1989.

Encounters

Interview with Andrea Allan, Doctoral Student and Researcher in Bahia, Brazil



Wangui Kimari

Wangui Kimari is a Kenyan Anthropology student who graduated from Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada with a degree in Anthropology and Political Science in 2006. Since August 2007 she has been a Special Student at the Centre of Afro and Oriental Studies (CEAO) in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil.

Aside from Women's History, Sexuality and Reproduction, she is very interested in issues about the African diaspora, particularly in Latin America and has been researching the experiences of African Immigrants to this area who are part of a new "Diaspora in Diaspora."

If you could talk a little bit about yourself....

I was born in Chicago; the youngest of five girls. I graduated from Northwestern University with a B. A. in Religion and African American Studies. I received a M. T. S. (Masters of Theological Studies) from Harvard Divinity School and currently I am a doctoral student in the anthropology department at Harvard.

What is your research about?

My research is about lesbians in Brazil, specifically Salvador da Bahia, and issues surrounding race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship. I am especially interested in interacting with self-identified non-white and black lesbians and other women who engage in same-sex relationships (whether long-term or otherwise).

Why Brazil, and why Salvador da Bahia?

Interestingly, I learned Portuguese while I was an Army Reservist and became more intrigued by Brazil than Portugal. Before entering the Defense Language Institute in Monterrey, CA, I had no interest in either country.

Are there any similarities in struggles between this community you are researching and the Lesbian/ LGBT community in the States?

I think that there are a lot of similarities, including the contentious relationship between gay men, lesbians and transgender individuals, the prominence of gay male leadership in LGBT organisations, and the "invisibility" of lesbians in the public sphere.

Do you think that there can be an exchange between the Lesbian / LGBT Community in Brazil and in the US?

Historically, there has been a dialogue between these two countries; however, this dialogue has been primarily one-sided with the U. S. influencing perceptions about same-sex sexuality in Brazil. Notwithstanding this, LGBT Brazilians seem to live in a space where they can draw from multiple sexual frameworks. I also think that new dialogues with different actors are emerging on the scene, particularly the conver-

sations that are occurring between U.S. black and Brazilian black lesbians.

What were the difficulties in conducting research within this community?

I would say one major difficulty is that there really isn't "one" community, thus it is important to reach out to a diverse group of women. In addition to the network of lesbian activists who all seem to know each other, there are various social networks of lesbians around the city; there is no one central neighbourhood that could be characterised as a lesbian neighbourhood. Sure, there are lesbians that are believed to populate some neighbourhoods more than others, but many of these women form close, and closed, circles of friends and acquaintances.

What other questions- which initially did not form part of your research- are arising from this process of inquiry and that you now would like to investigate?

I think it would be interesting and necessary to investigate the relationship between lesbians and MT transsexuals and with transvestites as well.

What advice would you give to other researchers with similar themes who are conducting their research in the Global South?

The most important advice I could give would be to make sure that you build strong relationships not only with key leaders in the LGBT movement, but with ordinary women as well. It will greatly facilitate the execution of your research if you are able to have a reliable network of people who feel invested in your success.



Andrea Allan

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