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Reviewed by Shraddha Chatterjee¹

Scholars working at the intersections of queer theory and postcolonial studies have often focused on the question of how discourses on sexuality are determined by legacies of empire in the postcolony. This has been complicated by the tendency within erstwhile colonized states to argue that homosexuality is a 'Western' construct on the one hand and claim that homosexuality has indigenous roots in precolonial histories on the other. Relatedly, this question is given certain contours when we focus on the ways in which histories of colonialism map onto contemporary practices of transnational aid, that flows from first world contexts to third world locations under the guise of development. Rao's *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality* contributes to the advancement of this area of scholarship, and is invested in outlining "the manner in which contemporary struggles over queer freedoms turn to the scene of the colonial" (p. 9), especially in the postcolonial landscapes of Uganda and India. In this review, I focus on three major contributions *Out of Time* offers us — first, it pulls us away from the unproductive dialectic that situates homophobia and homosexuality as Western constructs in the postcolony; second, it theorizes *homocapitalism* as a category of analysis, and; third, it examines the ways in which queer becomes a metonym for race, imperialism, modernity, and other vectors of power, and asks us to interrogate "the foundational grammar of the state" (p. 214) in determining our understanding of queerness.

Across Chapters 2 and 3, "The Location of Homophobia" and "Remembering Mwangi" respectively, Rao deftly articulates how global processes of development and transnational aid tend to offer universal definitions of homosexuality and homophobia that are defined with the metropole at their center. In assuming that certain nation-states have dispelled homophobias from within their midst by granting human rights to their queer citizens, we also assume that the nation-states that have not done so must catch-up with those that have. Therefore, reinforcing queer liberalism becomes synonymous with modernity, and it is often postcolonies that are categorized as underdeveloped. In this way, it is easy to see Uganda as a "gay 'heart of darkness'" (p. 33), or to make queer acceptance the condition for India's escape from its third world status (p. 39).

By attending to the nature of homophobias in postcolonial landscapes, Rao is able to expertly argue that if homophobias exist in the postcolony, it is more productive to engage with the socio-political, economic, and religious conditions that make homophobia so popular, rather than argue that homophobia, or homosexuality, are Western imports. Not only does this vacate the agency of local advocates who propagate homosexual freedoms and homophobias, it is also an inadequate framework to understand how homosexuality can be read, at different moments, as

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Western and as decolonial, as imperial and as anti-imperial, along with other simultaneously opposing perspectives. Rao tracks these contradictory narratives through ethnographic research in Uganda, widely understood in global development discourse as ‘the world’s worst place to be gay’². There, Rao focuses on the oral histories and memorialization practices associated with Mwanga, a 19th Century King of Uganda who was rumoured to be homosexual, and his execution of Christian martyrs during his rule. By tracing how Mwanga’s homosexuality is either denied and displaced from public memory in these memorialization practices, while simultaneously being hailed as Uganda’s queer decolonization by LGBTQ activists, *Out of Time* provides examples of how queerness circulates in narratives and contributes to contradictory affects, intentions, and materialities.

In Chapter 4, “Spectres of Colonialism,” and Chapter 5, “Queer in the Time of Homocapitalism”, Rao furthers his tracing of the different uses of queerness and explains the nuances of how homophobia remains so popular in Uganda. This is despite an almost global injunction against Uganda’s homophobic laws. Here, the shrinking role of Uganda’s nation-state becomes important, as that space becomes filled by non-governmental Christian conservative actors, who begin to offer the community support that the Ugandan nation-state no longer does. Rao highlights how increasing neoliberalization also creates moral anxieties and familial insecurities in Ugandan society that then correspond with increasing homophobia. From this perspective, homosexuality becomes a floating signifier for eroding Ugandan culture.

Simultaneously, in the British metropole, the nation-state finds it easier to apologize for its own homophobic past than to apologize for its history of slavery. Rao skillfully outlines how these apologies for homophobic violence under the British empire symbolize the metonymization of race with queerness, where the unmarked queer is assumed white. Additionally, it becomes apparent that to apologize for slavery would have material repercussions for Britain that it could not possibly afford, especially in light of the rising discourse of reparations. Setting this scene allows Rao to acutely reflect on how homosexuality increasingly functions as a signifier for global modernity, and in apologizing for its past homophobia, Britain shores up its own status as a nation-state embracing advancement, development, and progress.

These attachments between queerness and global development lead Rao to engage with ‘homocapitalism’ as a concept distinct from homonationalism, even if in relation to it. *Out of Time* pushes us to ask what is at stake when we make a “business case for LGBT inclusion” (p. 138) and suggests that this is an invigorating liberal queer future in the postcolony precisely because the postcolonial past is riddled with colonial baggage. Situating the rise of homocapitalism within a larger network of relations where capitalism is rehabilitated by the inclusion of gender and sexuality, while also ossifying opposition to these developments, Rao argues that “these narratives evoke central tropes of homonationalism, deploying queer tolerance to reproduce extant geopolitical hierarchies” (p. 144). This produces a context where queer mainstream representation gives queers an opportunity to access more resources that makes lives livable, while also consolidating capitalist queer subjectivities in ways that push non-market driven queer lives into unintelligibility and precarity. As such, homocapitalism signifies “the folding into capitalism of some queers and the disavowal of others” (p. 164), where productivity becomes a criteria for queer citizenship and queer legibility. Homocapitalism also calls our attention to the ways in which capitalist ideologies remain resilient and malleable, profiting from the contradictions they create.

² Scott Mills, a white, gay Radio 1 DJ in the UK, travelled to Uganda and made a documentary titled “The World’s Worst Place to be Gay?”. The documentary aired in 2011.

In Chapters 6 and 7, “The Nation and Its Queers” and “Epilogue” respectively, Rao turns to questions of resisting homocapitalism, and asks us what it means to turn away from this orientalist mapping of development in linear time. In doing so, Rao attends to the contemporary demand for reservations by trans persons in the Indian subcontinent — a demand Rao reads as a claim to backwardness, given the close association of reservation and caste in this context. Paying attention to how caste and gender are co-constituted in trans lives in India allows for an analysis that not only seemingly opposes the linear futurity of global homocapitalism, but also allows for an exploration of “the emancipatory potentials of this recognition of backwardness” (p. 180). Rao astutely engages with how the dominant figure of the hijra allows trans politics in India to situate trans persons as a backward caste rooted in tradition, whereas the homosexual figure remains oriented towards modernity and futurity. Reading the claim of backwardness in Dalit and trans narratives together enables an Ambedkarite (Ambedkar, 2014/1936) vision of resistance to emerge, where an escape from the dialectic of normativity and resistance becomes possible. Rao’s close reading of Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demonstrates how Anjum, the hijra protagonist of the tale, is able to hold all the fragments of the Indian nation-state together and provide them a home through an “agonistic refusal to resolve the contradictions” (p. 209) of her subjectivity, something Rao compares to Anzaldúa’s formulation of a mestiza consciousness.

It is indeed fitting that *Out of Time* arrives at a provisional conclusion that transcends borders, given that the text is focused on the various borders that limn homonationalist, homonormative, and homocapitalist lives and contexts. There are many contributions *Out of Time* makes to the discussion of queerness — its weaving of diverse locations and global queer liberalism through the knotted-ness of temporality, its consistent focus on the systems and structures that determine the transnational articulations of queer lives, its dedicated evidencing of the ways in which queer circulates as a metonym for power and resistance. However, one of its most valuable contributions is its focus on what queerness does to the “foundational grammar of the state” (p. 214), and what is done to queerness in return. To be attuned to how queerness becomes legible through the grammar of the state is to shift our focus to the processes that persist in rendering some forms of queerness as legible, and others as illegible. Queer legibility — through citizenship, capitalism, futurity, and so on — ensures a kind of livability, while also contributing to a queer illegibility that pushes queer persons into precarious, necropolitical conditions.

Out of Time can be read as a psychoanalytically informed text in its understanding of temporality, where the past remains present through hauntings, and imaginations of the future continue to determine the present. As such, to think of the grammar of the state through a Lacanian (Lacan, 1957; 1960; 1966) lens, where the unconscious is structured like a language, allows us to extend the provocations Rao leaves us with. Insofar as queerness is about desire, and desire *is* the grammar that determines subjectivity, within a Lacanian framework, there will always be a part of desire that remains outside legibility, beyond language. Because desire is the organizing principle for the grammar of legible subjectivity, it partly exceeds being fully apprehended by its own grammar. To this end, we are able to ask — what happens to queer desire that exceeds the grammar of the state, therefore remaining outside the realm of legibility? Rao leaves the reader with questions for greater exploration. Does queer desire, then, offer us an opportunity to expand the grammar of what is legible to us as politics? Or, what possibilities emerge if we surrender ourselves, politically, affectively, and even materially, to what remains illegible around us and about us?

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