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What potential do queer perspectives offer to re-thinking migration studies?

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Queer theory can be argued to have impacted on the fields of health, race, and migration in the same way it has impacted on feminism (Manalansan 2006, Luibhéid 2008). Janet Halley's *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism* (2006) critiques the too confined state of feminist legal theory and the dangerous nestling of liberal and radical feminism which has deterred feminist legal studies from formulating queer theorisation. As such, my understanding of queer is one that challenges hegemonic modernist (Puar 2013: 39) structures and their influences on current societies. Therefore, I use,

the term *queer* to acknowledge that all identity categories are burdened by legacies that must be interrogated, do not map neatly across time and space, and become transformed through circulation within specific, unequally situated local, regional, national, and transnational circuits. (Luibhéid 2008: 170; emphasis hers)

This essay centres on the possibilities that queering and transing migration studies offer. In migration studies, queer overturns and complicates heteronormative understanding of borders, reproduction, kinship, and economics. As a theoretical framework, queer approaches further migration studies as a field of inquiry, and queer analysis enables us to reflect on migration and the ongoing normative issues posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Before discussing the potentiality of queering and transing migration studies, I ask: what makes the migrant?

The definitive ascription of the migrant is a contested category (Ahmed 1999). In my view, this ongoing contestation enables deliberation that is responsive to evolving power dynamics, spatiality, and temporality. Allowing the category of migrant and migration to remain open also facilitates for wider possible inquiries in migration studies. For Iain Chambers (ibid: 332), it is the experience of being dislocated from home and remaining without one that provides fertile ground for the migrant's states to be truly deciphered. Migration is defined as a "process of dislocation" (Chambers in Ahmed 1999: 333), as opposed to one that foregrounds social, historical, and economic inquiries. As such, the process of dislocation itself becomes the epicentre of investigation as opposed to the movement of people, what makes them move, which people can move, and where they can move to (ibid: 332). This process of being lost and of travels erroneously assumes that all beings can migrate and benefit similarly from migration at any given time and place. Therefore, Chambers' interpretation of migration hinders the possibilities that the field can offer in "questions of contexts (postcoloniality/globality), historicity, temporality and space" (ibid) as well as wider structural inequalities. His approach omits the differences between the distinct forms of migration, and all migrants are assumed to be the same – gender, race, class, and other factors are not scrutinised. In doing so, different forms of migration such as nomadism, exile, refugee status, travelling for work or out of poverty are conflated to an idealised envisioning of migration. Taking this position further, Michael Dillon describes "estrangement," not in the sense of stranger-ness and a loss of home, but as a human "condition of being here as the beings they are" (ibid 344). Therefore, for Dillon, estrangement is a universal state of being that all humans have in common. Both Chambers and Dillon's approach to migration evade complexities such as border politics, nationality, gender, and sexuality. As "an alternative to romanticized knowledge productions" (Tudor 2017: 1) on migration, Sara Ahmed reconfigures the concept of estrangement by taking into consideration the history of migration across borders in relation to the "stranger" subject formation (1999: 344). In this context, estrangement brings to light the understanding of how people and communities are impacted by the processes of migration. It is what Fatima El-Tayeb (2011) investigates in her deliberation on the

continuous othering of European people of colour through the construction of them as forever migrants, thus always strangers. El-Tayeb (ibid: xiii-xiv) argues that the ascription of the term “migrant” to those who travelled and have settled in Europe operates as a means to illustrate them always as outsiders. Her work further demonstrates that whiteness becomes a marker for defining who is allowed to belong, therefore given citizenship, and who is perpetually defined as “migrant.” El-Tayeb redresses the assumption of Europe as originally white, and thus challenges the notion of racial purity. Both Ahmed and El-Tayeb’s works differ from Chambers and Dillon’s definition of migration, in that they contextualise the different ways migration happens, thereby widening our understanding of home, belonging, and citizenship.

What happens when queers migrate? How can queer theory inform migration studies on movements, identity formation, geopolitical dynamics of space, and community creation of heterosexual subjects and queer ones alike? In not limiting queer to the field of sexuality, though without negating sexuality, queer theory offers new avenues to migration studies in addition to advancing the scope of the field. For instance, Martin Manalansan (2006) explores the concept of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich 1980) in relation to the study of Filipino migrants through the frame of heterosexuality. His analysis of feminist scholarship on migration and the global care system demonstrates that even though such work aims to query normative understandings of gender and race, they unwittingly reinstate certain conventional biases. A close deciphering of Rhacel Parreñas’ methodology when researching migrant care work (such as cleaning, cooking, and other domestic work) in *Servants of globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work* (2001) illustrates a foregrounding of data and analysis on married heterosexual women. In this case, Adrienne Rich’s “bias of compulsory heterosexuality” (1980) is seen at play over the inadvertent omission of data which negates analysis on single women and queers (Manalansan 2006: 238). While Parreñas’ work on Filipino migration is groundbreaking in that it illustrates class, geography, and various gendered dynamics of care work, the privileging of heteronormativity alludes to the notion that queers do not migrate for such work. It further relegates migration to the predominant purpose of attending to heterosexual family dynamics (such a reproduction). While keeping in mind that queers are not exempt from a “compulsory heterosexuality” mindset, the political and epistemological analyses that queer approaches convey aim at overcoming such bias. Thus, queering migration interrogates “how normalizing regimes produce heterogeneous, marginalized subjects and positionalities in relation to a valorized standard of reproductive sexuality between biologically born male-female couples who belong to the dominant racial-ethnic group and the middle class” (Luibhéid 2008: 171). I suggest a potential hypothesis for queer migration studies: do queer migrants reproduce? If so, which migrants? Class and nationality are relevant. Furthermore, what are the racial factors pertaining to queer migrant reproduction? Are they migratised factors (Tudor: 2017; 2018)? What are the institutional processes that queer migrants undergo for reproduction (surrogacy, pregnancy, adoption)? This inquiry is not an assertion of homonormative assimilation but an investigation of “stranger,” socio-political, and border crossing dynamics. In my query, I illustrate the potential that queering migration offers as opposed to the narrow heteronormative vision which migration studies is traditionally associated with.

Ahmed’s “stranger” (1999: 343-345) analogy is echoed in Manalansan’s illustration of queer Third World migrants’ affective position with regards to their struggle in belonging to their countries of origin and countries they migrate to (migrated countries). In either case, queerphobia manifests itself but is differently experienced. For some, queerphobia in their countries of origin is experienced through the

repercussions of the legacy of colonisation (Najmabadi 2005; Hussain 2019). In contrast, in their migrated countries, queerphobia is felt through racism, xenophobia, and the perception of them as necessarily heterosexuals. This impacts queer migrants' ability to form kinship with non-queer migrants from their communities as well as non-migrants residing in those countries. This struggle for kinship also informs how diaspora communities are shaped (which I conceive here as heterosexual communities) and how queer migrants navigate those communities. Drawing from my own migrant experience, I consider the possibility of queer migrants concealing their queerness when navigating their diasporic communities while presenting themselves differently in mainstream queer communities. In this context Ahmed's idea of home, the sense of belonging and lack of belonging, is relevant. In the struggle to settle in a new country, queer migrants form bonds with each other, thus carving out their home and chosen families (Manalansan 2006: 236). Defined as "uncommon estrangement" (Ahmed 1999: 344), the creation of their own community through their abject positions allows queer migrants to survive "stigma and ostracism from mainstream communities" (Manalansan 2008: 236). Thus, researching the formation of non-normative kinship and communities, exposes migration studies to ways of rethinking the concepts of family, community belonging and diaspora.

Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild's *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (2003) demonstrates that globalised migration results in educated Third World women taking up low paid migrant work to improve their families' wealth. Whilst their portrayal of migration intricately illustrates the impacts of capitalism on migration, at times their analysis unwittingly endorses a traditional understanding of family. Here, both motherhood and fatherhood are understood in a normative framing of family life. Moreover, the depiction of Filipino men as absent or unwilling to support their families connotes a limited analysis of Filipino masculinity. This construes Filipino culture as traditionally patriarchal, which Manalansan redresses¹ (2006: 240-241). Patriarchy is global in its materialisation; therefore, by reducing the agency of Filipina migrants to family life, and by drawing homogenising conclusions on Filipino men, research on migration studies become limited to reproducing normative knowledge production on marriage, motherhood, and fatherhood. It further results in limiting the field of migration to assumption of Filipino people as solely heterosexual or categorized within the male/female binary, thus excluding both historic and contemporary understandings of Filipino gender and sexuality. A socio-historical scrutiny on how and why sexism emanates in different countries is a more considered approach to theorising on gender disparity. Another meaningful element to contemplate in queer migration is an inquiry into whether and how gender performativity, as the repetition of acts that define binarised gender roles (Butler, 1999), is transgressed. The portrayal of Filipino cisgender men in domestic and care work, traditionally described as feminine work, can be read as a challenge to binarised construction of masculinity (Manalansan 2006: 240). That is not to say that taking on roles that are traditionally assigned as "feminine" automatically assumes the work of undoing gender. However, an investigation on how those assigned male at birth negotiate the gendered understanding of domestic and care work in their performativity can aid in developing analyses of the ways the masculine subjectivities change. Through such query, the formation and reformation of masculinity, and its implications with regards to feminine and fluid gender ascriptions, broaden the ways to investigate the transgression of the

¹ Manalansan states that an increasing number of Filipino male nurses are queer, (2006: 240-241) therefore examining Filipino male migrants as solely heterosexual connotes to the notion of queer as non-existent in the Filipino culture & tradition.

gender binary. Furthermore, such queries provide complex insights to different ways that masculinity exists beyond white male interpretations, and within ongoing neoliberal frameworks. Here, the potential that queering migration offers is an exploration of dynamics at play in relation to race, gender, sexuality, and geography.

Taking the concept of gender performativity further, Clare Sears (2008) examines gender construction and racism through the concept of transing in California's gold rush era. Here, transing is not to be conflated with its contemporary understanding: back then, a popular form of transing (ibid: 387) facilitated for racist idioms such as blackface, face painting, and the mockery of racially Othered migrants among cross-dressing men (ibid: 391-394). Furthermore, the emasculation of male Chinese workers (ibid) by white males at that time operated as a means to proliferate anti-Chinese sentiments, and led to racist legislations. For Sears, perceived transgressions to the gender binary does not necessarily overturn such binary (ibid: 384). The gold rush era's concept of trans operated as a tool which progresses anti-migrant sentiments and further modernist ideology with regards to race and coloniality. Whiteness became a privileged category used to designate racialised migrants as inferior, strangers, therefore not belonging.

In Sears' analysis, gold rush era's transing worked at re-asserting white "Euro-American" men as "real men," thus also re-instilling the belief of "white European masculinity" as superior. In par with this framework of understanding, Alyosxa Tudor's assessment of Sachar, a transgender Israeli soldier whose enrolment in the army makes him feel "like a real man for the first time" (2017: 18), is also situated within the need to conceive "real manhood." Defined by militarism and nationalism, it normalises in turn settler colonialism. Sachar's gender identity is legitimised in relation to his kinship with other male soldiers, their collective actions as soldiers, and their belonging to the state. Tudor reformulates a notion of transing that challenges "transgender nationalism" and "cross-border nationalism" (2017: 2). They assert that these nationalisms, when normalized, reinstate hetero and gender normativity. Thus, the concept of trans- as a fixed category becomes a neocolonialist mechanism, which Tudor further assigns to the concept of Jasbir Puar's homonationalism.² In both cases, the notion of home, belonging, and the stranger narrative are interlinked with gender identity, expression, and performativity. What happens when trans- is examined within an intersectional lens that considers state and transnational political assemblages? Such investigation can divulge introspection on issues relating to how class impacts transgender subjectivities, what such impacts do to trans people's ability to migrate, and which trans people can migrate, where to, and how. Thus, transing migration studies works at "recovering, theorizing, and valorizing histories and subjects that have been largely rendered invisible, unintelligible, and unspeakable in both queer and migration studies" (Luibhéid 2008: 171). It illustrates the need for trans-analysis to be deliberated alongside of historic and contemporary national and transnational power relations.

Narratives on home and migration have become more relevant following recurring national and global lockdowns as a response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. A COVID-19 perspective on queering

² Homonationalism occurs when queer identities become normalised under institutionalised parameters of the state, militarism, and capitalism. Through homonationalism, colonial or rather neocolonial projects are furthered. In the analysis of homonationalism (and trans-nationalism), queer migration studies query the geopolitical influences at play in the different manifestations of coloniality and the rigid categorisation of identities. See more: *Terrorist Assemblages: Honationalism for Queer Times* (2007) by Jasbir Puar.

migration demands attunement to normative, ongoing geopolitical and historical processes that are opportunistically expanded by transnational neoliberal state governance, as a result of the lockdowns. Niharika Pandit (2020) writes that the intensified heterosexualised norm brought about by “staying at home” excludes “deviants” such as Muslim women and queers while constituting nationalist ideological foundations that originate from colonialism. Therefore, home consists of protecting the nuclear heterosexual family, as well as the modernist nation. For Chambers, migration is a process of dislocating oneself from this notion of home, in order to seek a personal sense of fulfillment and freedom. This liberal sense of freedom for adventure as personal growth is dependent on Edward Said’s (2006) definition of Orientalism, one which exoticises places that are not defined as (the Western located) home. This belief refutes query into the reproduction of the hetero- and racialised norms in governmental responses to the global health crisis. It illustrates indifference to being accountable in critical thought, and self-reflexive praxis that empower those situated at the borders of precarious lives.

Parreñas’ work illustrates that the inter-relationship between globalisation and migration (2001) results in curtailing the freedoms of low income migrants in their migrated countries. For example, many domestic migrants in Lebanon are dependent on “sponsorship” whereby their passports and other legal documents are held by their employers (Pande 2012; 2013). This limits the migrants’ freedom to move and be independent. Furthermore, they are reliant on the employers’ provision of housing and wage. During the early onset of the pandemic, many domestic migrants were rendered unemployed and forcefully made homeless as a result of Lebanese elites and upper middle-class response to the country’s ongoing economic downturn (ARM 2020; Collard 2020). The precariousness of migrant domestic workers’ lives magnified as the country’s healthcare system weakened (Chehayeb & Sewell 2020; Rose 2020). Simultaneous to the global fightback against anti-Blackness, in Lebanon, female ascribed Black bodies were brought to a state of “bare life” (Agamben 1998). This denotes that certain lives and bodies are viewed as disposable and unworthy of being livable. The act of bringing these lives closer to peril and death bares to light the proximity of capitalist ideology and its reliance on racial disparity, especially anti-Blackness, to a politics of subalternity and necropolitics. The expulsion of Black and of color migrant women from homes to Lebanese streets for monetary reasons signifies an inability to conceiving the humane implications of placing the women’s health at risk. The devaluing of migrant women bodies consists of a dual process of degendering and dehumanizing: despite their labour in providing care and hygiene to homes, they are always deemed outsiders. As such, in Lebanon, Black and of color bodies are the “queer, ‘impossible’ subjects in heteronormative discourses of nation as well as migration” (El-Tayeb 2011: xxxv). The depth of colonialism’s influence in the Arabic-speaking countries denotes that conceptualising Lebanon as a home for migrants is an impossibility. This process of migratisation (Tudor 2018: 1058) divulges elite and upper middle-class aspirations to distance Lebanon from the African and Asian continents, in favour of being closer to Europe and the privileges of whiteness. In this context, I argue that queering migration entails understanding the history of global health and eugenics, in the exploitation of migrant women bodies in tandem to ongoing anti-Black and classist effects of colonialism across West Asia. Furthermore, it necessitates the identification of pro-Black acts of solidarity from those in Lebanon to undo the legacy of normative ideologies from both the Global North and West Asia. This form of active introspection incorporates radical queer praxis among non-Black, non-migrant communities in Lebanon in order to bring intersectional queer thinking to the revolution, so that revolutions can be re-imagined, and the legacies of migrants are accounted for.

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