

Beyond the “Coloniality of Gender”: Decolonial and Postcolonial Perspectives on Development, Gender and Sexuality

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Sexual orientations and gender identities are highly diverse and shaped by multiple contradictions. In the context of postcolonial power structures, colonial ideas pervade indigenous concepts of different masculinities, femininities and third genders (e.g. two spirit), thereby creating deeply contested terrains. Struggling for equal rights, legal status, and representation, feminist and women’s movements in the Global South are strategically adopting western concepts of “feminism” or “queerness”.

De- and postcolonial perspectives on gender and sexuality or on LGBTIQ (lesbian gay bi trans* inter* queer) aim at investigating the social world especially with regard to potentials for resistance, and with a focus on subversive (gender-)practices and epistemologies. Research engages intensively with social movement activities, judiciary power and dissidence, as well as with power structures and transformation within international development cooperation.

Indeed, international development cooperation has been and is still shaped by western and heteronormative ideas about gender hierarchies that are transferred to societies seemingly in need of “development”. While interventions based on modernization theory had mostly neglected questions of sex and gender, concepts such as the “basic needs” approach discovered “women” as *the* new “poster girls” showcasing successful and contextualized development cooperation. Since the 1990s the rise of “gender mainstreaming” resulted in several gender assessment tools that constituted the basis for vulnerability analysis and for gender-sensitive policy-making. Still, the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler 1990) dominates both perception and practice in the field of international development cooperation. Within this logic, development cooperation still exhibits binary thinking and keeps (re-)producing dichotomies with regard to gender and sexuality. At the same time, queer topics are increasingly met with positive response by international development politics. In 2007, the International Commission of Jurists, the International Service for Human Rights, and other Human Rights activists adopted the Yogyakarta Principles. They comprise 29 alternative principles for promoting and safeguarding sexual and gender-related diversity. Since then they have motivated international development politics to engage more intensively with social realities beyond a bi-gender matrix.

In this context, however, new problems are materializing, for example when (dichotomous) dynamics of othering are reproduced even within a more inclusive agenda. While

the “Global North” is still being conceptualized as liberal, enlightened and queer, “the South” in turn is portrayed as homo- and transphobic, religiously fundamentalist and lacking enlightenment. These perceptions obscure the fact that many laws which criminalize lesbians and gays for instance in Zambia or Uganda are based on colonial principles of law combined with a Christian background.

To support lesbian, gay, homosexual, trans- and inter*persons and communities in their everyday struggles in a feminist way and in a spirit of solidarity, western understandings of gender and sexuality need to be decolonized. Furthermore, the ways in which colonial histories, i.e. “own” cultural traditions and their intertwining with western secular or missionary concepts, need to be systemically reconstructed.

Still, any debate about LGBTIQ in the Global South is characterized by ambivalences and contradictions. “Queer” is a concept that originally evolved towards the end of the 1980s from the struggles of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-people and was used to counter essentialist identity politics in the context of the AIDS-crisis, homophobia, racism and homosexual normalization. Later, “queer” made its way into academia and found appraisal as a theoretical approach, which considers gender and sex as performative and de-/reconstructs a naturalized understanding of gender and its effects. Still, feminist and/or women and lesbian movements in the Global South have not adopted the idea of “queer” without critique. Given that queer is perceived as an element of western individualist politics, it may in fact stand in the way of collective livelihoods and may support an individualized and neo-liberal understanding of the subject, which fails to reflect the social realities and struggles of marginalized women* and the materiality of gender hierarchies. As a result, decolonial thinkers such as Oyéronké Oyewùmí or María Lugones have pointed out that precolonial gender relations have been more diverse than the heterosexual matrix actually assumes. They have pointed out that gender is a colonial product which was introduced systematically, and brutally, to “civilize” people, cosmologies and communities. Still, postcolonial “translation processes” are taking place and in this light, queer may work as an emancipatory concept on an individual basis, in the sense of an “enabling violation” (Spivak).

Research on LGBTIQ movements in the Global South and on queer development cooperation is still in its initial stage. We are convinced that it is high time to change this. For this special issue we kindly invite contributions concerning the following topics (as well as further topics that may be individually chosen):

- The “queer turn” in Western development cooperation: what does “queer” development mean and how do these approaches transgress the coloniality of gender?
- Cross-pollinations: Which processes of adaptation and translation are necessary for intertwining post- and decolonial approaches with feminism, gender and sexuality? Which analytical strategies seem adequate for doing so?
- Social movements and activism by LGBTIQ: Which conditions are required for developing more intense solidarities and for deepening cooperation between Western and non-Western Feminisms?
- (Un-)usual suspects? Sexism and heteronormativity in volunteer work;
- Queer development cooperation and its subjects/objects: critical analyses of existing programs by organizations such as GIZ, DFID, USAID or Norad;
- Indigenous feminism, indigenous gender practices, third gender spaces.

- Queer legal structures in the Global South: which progressive politics can be found, how are gender-relations and orders changing and which contradictions appear along the process?

The submission deadline for articles is September 2, 2019. Articles may comprise 6,000 to 10,000 words (absolute maximum). All research articles are subject to a double-blind peer review process. Besides, shorter pieces (interviews, essays, activist statements) may also be published. if they correspond to the aims of the CfP.

For manuscripts, consultations about potential contributions and further questions, please contact the editors of the special issue:

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