

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Manon Tremblay, David Paternotte, and Carol Johnson, eds, *The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State: Comparative Insights into a Transformed Relationship*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011, 234 pp. \$99.95 hardcover (978-1-4094-1066-9)

If you are interested in sex and the state, this may be the book for you. *The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State* tackles crucial questions concerning how queer movements have affected state relations, and how state relations have transformed queer organizing and communities. In chapters ranging over the globe from Argentina, South Africa, Poland, Canada, France, and the Netherlands to India, Brazil, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, this is a unique collection of national and regional studies of the engagement of queer movements against and within state relations. For scholars and informed activists it is a necessary read, giving us a sense of queer organizing in diverse nation states. The book gives readers a sense of both the diversities and commonalties of organizing around the globe.

This book very usefully extends political science, political sociology, and social movement studies to address lesbian and gay organizing; it enables readers to see how movements have been shaped by the particular institutional and cultural contexts in which they operate. A number of chapters contain crucial (if often short) movement histories from which I learned a great deal. Oriented around a useful Introduction that sets the stage for the book and ending with a reflective Conclusion also by Tremblay, Paternotte and Johnson, the collection takes up a comparative political science and social movement studies orientation; this is shaped by analysis of “political opportunity structures” and sometimes “multi-institutional” analysis. Such an approach has the benefits of bringing important aspects of queer movement/state relations into focus with an emphasis on how specific features of legal, federal, and institutional state relations shape the terrains of queer struggle. At the same time this approach with its focus on institutional “structures” can shift our attention away from grass roots movement organizing. Like much social movement theorizing, it tends to produce queer movements as external objects to be studied and classified.

Many of the chapters provide crucial insights into the relation between queer movements and the state, including queers and the left, the significance of AIDS organizing, the relation between queer struggles and other struggles against oppression, and vital questions regarding the relevance of Western queer theorizing to struggles in the global South. Readers learn about the left (and sometimes revolutionary left) origin of liberation organizing in Argentina, Brazil, Spain, and other countries. This has often been forgotten in mainstream gay organizing in the North and West. The major impact of the social and state response to AIDS in facilitating connections between gay organizing and state relations is explicated, including for India and Brazil. One of the most important chapters for me was the chapter on South Africa by Croucher; it summarizes how queer organizing in support of Black gay activist Simon Nkoli (arrested as part of a rebellion against apartheid) and against apartheid more generally in the 1980s helped to create the basis for the African National Congress as the new postapartheid government officially supporting sexual orientation protection. As part of this struggle, the white-dominated Gay Association of South Africa — which refused to support Simon Nkoli and to oppose apartheid — was suspended from the International Lesbian and Gay Association. Offord's exploration of developments in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore questions whether organizing in these places can be understood through the concepts designed for queer organizing in the West and North and supports the call for decolonizing queer studies. I only wish there had been more about this in this collection.

Canada is covered in Miriam Smith's chapter, which focuses on the particular institutional relations in Canadian state formation that have facilitated legal rights; Smith makes some important critical observations towards the end. This includes some of the most substantial discussion of homonationalism — a term developed by Jasbir Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages* to describe queer identifications with their nation state in opposition to those identified as being "backward" and "homophobic" who are most often people of colour in the global South. While Smith's emphasis on political-institutional factors such as the equality rights section of the Charter is well taken, and it certainly made the struggle for formal legal equality easier, I found myself questioning her claim that it was these institutional factors, rather than movement mobilizations and alliance building, that brought about changes. The chapter is also marred by a few errors, including the assertion that the 1969 criminal code reform legalized homosexuality rather than it being a partial, limited decriminalization informed by the public/private, adult/youth regulatory strategy outlined in the Wolfenden report.

Despite its many insights there are a number of limitations to this collection. It is unfortunate that there is no exploration of Israel and Palestine given the current struggles against pinkwashing and Israeli apartheid (separation and subordination policies) by queer activists around the globe. It is also unfortunate that homonationalism, which relates quite centrally to gay and lesbian movements and state formation, is barely addressed. It is only addressed briefly by Smith and hinted at in the chapter on the Netherlands.

Regarding questions of state formation important technical features like federalism which can have important bearings on how struggles take place are focussed on. But there is no real critical analysis or theorization of the social form of state relations themselves. This is a common approach in political science oriented investigations, which generally take existing state relations for granted. Regarding critical theorization I am thinking about the important Marxist inspired work of Corrigan and Sayer in *The Great Arch* on the class and capitalist character of the social form of state relations, or Holloway's critical analysis of power over relations in the social form of "the state" in *Change the World Without Taking Power* or *Crack Capitalism*. An argument can also be made about the heterosexist and patriarchal character of the social form of state relations. Legal state equality in this social form of state relations does not create actual socially substantive equality. As Hekma and Duyvendak point out, homosexuality is accepted in the Netherlands but only under certain conditions and "male heterosexuality still sets the norm" (p. 114).

This critical analysis, barely addressed in this collection, allows us to begin to understand how entry into state relations for gay organizing has led to dramatic transformations from liberation movements into movements for limited rights and acceptance into (often) white, middle class "normality." This is what Hekma and Duyvendak characterize as the deradicalization and depoliticization of homosexual activism. Whether explicitly or less explicitly stated, the assumed theorization of state relations in the book is often liberal pluralist, thus dissolving state relations into a number of competing sources of power. This does not enable us to adequately grasp state formation as a social form where class, racial, gender, and sexual struggles take place in a social form through which oppression and exploitation are systematically socially organized.

While there is discussion of globalization throughout the collection, there is little engagement with neoliberal forms of capitalist globalization and consequently, little consideration of the export of the western hetero/homo polarity to the rest of the world. This both suppresses indigenous erotic and gendered practices (which is only mentioned in the Offord chapter) including third and fourth gender groupings which need

to be defended but also gives rise to the emergence of “heterosexual” and “lesbian/gay/queer” social identifications in countries in the global South. This complex terrain of global sexual and gender politics needs to be engaged with in exploring relations between queer organizing and state relations.

While important movement histories are recorded in the collection, this is often done from an external, objectifying vantage point rather than from the standpoint of an insider and participant. This can be partly explained by the fact that many of the articles draw upon academic social movement theory and especially the conceptualization of “political opportunity structures.” Such approaches often suggest that social movements are outside of rather than helping to create their own political opportunities through their own mobilizing, alliance building, and struggles. This can lead to classifying our movements as external objects taking up a social standpoint outside our movements rather than producing knowledge for activists and organizers. An insider approach which investigates the social relations of struggle queer movements are actively engaged in could be a more useful line of investigation in producing knowledge for queer movements.

Despite these limitations this book is an important start. On its basis we can develop more detailed explorations of national, regional, and global contexts and can move further in theorizing queer movements and state relations. This book, despite its expense, would be very useful for queer studies classes, and social movement courses in Sociology and Political Science at both higher undergraduate and graduate levels.

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