

Reinventing liberation: Strategic questions for lesbian/gay movements

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Same-sex sexualities in the Third World are not identical to those in advanced capitalist countries, as the articles in this book make clear. Lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered (LGBT) people in the Third World are often very aware of lesbian/gay subcultures in North America and Western Europe, are often consciously influenced by them, are in some ways unconsciously converging with them. Yet men in the Third World who have sex with men and women who have sex with women have their own more or less distinct traditions, realities, sexualities and identities, which neither they nor outside observers always even see as 'lesbian' or 'gay'.

In the introduction I tried to give an overview of how Third World same-sex patterns are like and unlike those in the US, Australia or Holland. While many people involved in same-sex sexualities in the Third World do not have same-sex identities, I said, many others do. More and more of them are speaking openly about their identities, coming together and acting openly as communities, and forming public lesbian/gay movements. Now I want to raise some questions about strategic issues facing these Third World lesbian/gay movements, which are often wrestling with somewhat distinctive issues in somewhat distinctive ways.

The title of this article, 'Reinventing Liberation', itself raises questions. 'Liberation' is a word that harks back to the 1960s and '70s. It was adopted in Paris, New York, Mexico City and Buenos Aires by lesbians and gays who wanted to identify with women's liberation and Black liberation and with national liberation movements in places like Vietnam, Palestine and South Africa. Before the late 1960s and again since the 1980s, people have used words like 'rights', 'emancipation' or 'integration' more than 'liberation', including lately in the Third World. As Max Mejía says in his article, the time for general denunciations of oppression is past; now it is time to focus concretely on 'every abuse, outrage and form of discrimination'. Many activists would probably agree with Mejía's idea of a necessary shift from liberation to civil rights. To the extent that the word 'liberation' is used at all nowadays, it seems to be not much more than a vaguely radical-sounding, rough equivalent for 'rights'.

What then is the point of resurrecting the word 'liberation' now when discussing strategy in São Paulo, Johannesburg or Manila? I suggest three reasons why it may make sense in the Third World to talk not just about 'rights' but about 'liberation'. More or less following the categories Norma Mogrovejo uses in her article, we can talk about liberation in three different senses: in the sense of *achieving full equality*; in the sense of *expressing one's identity in every part of one's society*; and in the sense of *transforming a whole culture's sexuality*.

Increasingly in Western Europe in particular, these three aspects of liberation have gradually seemed less crucial—at least to many of those at the head of mainstream lesbian/gay organizations. Many European LGB people have secure enough jobs and lives to make legal equality seem like a reasonable approximation of full social equality. Even if there are still churches, bars, families and neighbourhoods that are not about to welcome an open lesbian/gay presence, that still leaves space elsewhere to live open lesbian/gay lives, both inside 'gay ghettos' and in many relatively tolerant workplaces and neighbourhoods in the secular society outside them. And even if drag queens, sadomasochists or people in intergenerational relationships are denied the tolerance granted to homosexuality as such, some lesbian/gay people seem able to live with that—particularly those who are trying to fashion an image of the lesbian/gay community that will be palatable to the officials they are lobbying.

I wonder myself whether most LGBT people will be happy in the long run with the model of emancipation that has been taking hold in Western Europe and North America in the last thirty years. Many are rebelling against it even now. In any event, it seems unlikely that it can succeed to the same extent in the Third World. While there are people and organizations in the Third World too who are attracted to this model, it is difficult there to avoid questions about its limits.

- First, not many Third World LGBTs have much chance of getting jobs at wages high enough that they can afford to go often to bars and discos, let alone live away from their parents. Legal equal rights to employment, housing and accommodations mean less to LGBTs who cannot afford them. So particularly in the Third World the question needs to be asked: how can LGBTs win substantive economic and social equality?
- Second, it is harder for economic reasons for large gay ghettos to maintain themselves in the Third World; and intolerance, in many cases based on institutionalized religion or communal divisions, is often pervasive outside the commercial scenes that do exist. So it becomes even more important to ask: can LGBT people be fully accepted and integrated into the families and communities they come from?
- Third, the Third World's same-sex identities are extraordinarily diverse. It seems like less of a victory there to win acceptance for that part of the same-sex spectrum that consists of gay 'real men' and lesbian 'real women', particularly if this implies marginalizing transgendered people and others. This makes it more important to ask: can the broad range of existing same-sex sexualities in the Third World win public visibility and acceptance?

In the following remarks I look at each of these questions about liberation in turn.

- On issues of equality, I discuss what democratic breakthroughs like the end of apartheid in South Africa can mean for sexual emancipation, and I raise the issue of whether full LGBT equality in most dependent countries will require even deeper-going economic and social changes that put an end to poverty and underdevelopment.
- On issues of identity, I discuss the thorny problems of building autonomous LGBT movements while seeking necessary alliances, and developing LGBT identities and subcultures while trying to survive

within and change existing families and communities.

- On issues of sexuality, I look at the implications that the diversity of sexualities included in their ranks, particularly the prominence of transgendered people, has for the demands and strategies of lesbian/gay movements in the Third World.

What kind of equality?

Victories for lesbian/gay rights in advanced capitalist countries have usually gone together with other changes in sexual culture—particularly the spread of contraception, abortion rights, and tolerance for pre- and extramarital sex in general. But the backdrop to these changes has been a relatively stable democratic capitalist order. In the Third World, by contrast, the backdrop has more often been emergence from dictatorship, accompanied by some degree of social upheaval.

Even in Third World countries that have multiple parties, elections and other trappings of constitutional democracy, it is often difficult or virtually impossible for independent social movements to have an impact on decision-making. In Mexico, for example, where a single party has in practice monopolized political power and dominated social movements for 70 years, Mejía describes the consequences for LGBT people: ‘the corruption of the authorities, the dead letter’ of the law, and police abuse. Mogrovejo points out that there are similar problems in other Latin American countries too—‘police abuses, extortion, murder and even torture’, charges of ‘corruption of minors’ and ‘immoral and indecent behaviour’—including in countries where dictatorships are a thing of the past and different parties are routinely voted in and out of office.

In many Third World countries today many of the most important policy decisions are not made by elected governments at all, but by unelected officials of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. This does not necessarily mean that politics is unimportant to people. On the contrary, particularly when unemployment is very high, getting a government job or official favour can make an enormous difference. Whole towns, ethnic groups, regions and extended families can line up behind particular parties and fight fiercely to put ‘their’ parties in office. But this kind of politics, even when it is formally democratic, often leaves little room for individuals to decide their loyalty on the basis of their personal beliefs, social positions or sexual identities. People may be able to change one government for another but be powerless to bring about any kind of structural or social change. Politicians faced with multi-party elections for the first time may even end up catering more to entrenched elites and communal prejudices than they did when they headed liberation movements or single-party regimes, particularly where multiethnic grassroots movements are weak.

Organizing LGBTs in the Third World is easier when there is a minimal democratic space in which to form an organization, hold a demonstration or hand out a leaflet. But winning victories usually seems to require a deeper kind of democracy than that: not just a free press and elections, but also a political culture in which there is room for individual, active citizenship and a lively civil society. Even a difference only in degree can make a big difference for gay organizing. The Philippines is a poor country where parties are often led by rival landowning families, but as Dennis Altman points out, ‘there is a more politicized gay world in Manila than in Bangkok, despite the latter’s huge commercial gay scene’, thanks to differences in political history and culture. Turkey is a country that has emerged only recently and incompletely from military dictatorship, but as I mentioned in the introduction, that still leaves room for gay organizing that does not exist in Egypt or Pakistan, which also have multi-party elections.

Wherever a minimal democratic space and lively civil society develop in the Third World, there is reason for optimism about the chances of lesbian/gay movements. This can be true even when

poverty and underdevelopment persist and deepen. The gay commercial worlds that were growing up until 1982 in Latin America and until 1997 in Southeast Asia have been set back by economic crises. For individual LGBT people, this has often had tragic consequences. But lesbian/gay organizing has often bounced back in the wake of these crises and sometimes even been stimulated as rigid political and social orders have been shaken.

The one country in the Third World where the widest range of lesbian/gay rights has been won, South Africa, experienced a deep economic and social crisis in the 1980s that is not yet over. Partly as a result, it went through a far-reaching process of democratic transformation with the end of apartheid in the 1990s. Vast sectors of South African society were mobilized in the process, including black LGBTs. It has not always been easy after the end of apartheid to keep the lesbian/gay organizations going that were built during the struggle. The mobilization has nonetheless resulted in gains for LGBTs that are unique in Africa, and one of the two national constitutions in the world (Ecuador has the second) that explicitly bans discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Mark Gevisser quotes a drag queen who sums up the constitution's importance: "You can rape me, rob me, what am I going to do when you attack me? Wave the constitution in your face? I'm just a nobody black queen.... But you know what? Ever since I heard about that constitution, I feel free inside." Discriminatory laws, including the sodomy law, have been struck down, and same-sex relationships are now recognized for immigration purposes. Resistance to lesbian/gay rights and the danger of backsliding still exist, of course; Gevisser describes the bigotry and intransigence present at the highest levels of the ANC and in many parts of society. Nonetheless, South Africa's legislative record is one that lesbians and gays in the United States should envy.

Wherever lesbian/gay movements have emerged in the Third World, they are fighting for the same equal rights that South Africans have fought for. The fight against sodomy laws continues in Nicaragua and Puerto Rico (the only countries in Latin America that still have them), in India and Sri Lanka. In some cases these discriminatory laws can probably be repealed through lobbying and organizing without major upheavals. Other demands will be harder to win. So far efforts to win national constitutional bans against discrimination have failed in Brazil, despite the breakthroughs for lesbian/gay movements as the dictatorship was dismantled, and been fiercely resisted in Fiji. The kinds of partnership rights that have been won in several Western European countries have not yet been achieved in South Africa despite the constitutional promise of equality, in Brazil despite the Workers Party's support, or in India despite the movement's call for them in its 1991 charter of demands.

Furthermore, even the kinds of breakthroughs for lesbian/gay liberation won in South Africa fall short of full lesbian/gay equality. There are after all limits to the lesbian/gay equality that can be won in countries marked in general by deep social and economic inequality, as almost all countries in the Third World are.

Even the South African lesbian/gay movement now finds itself wrestling with questions about the meaning and content of their newly won equality, because South Africans in general are struggling with such issues. The democratic transformation that the ANC called for from the 1950s to the 1980s included more than an end to formal apartheid: it included land for blacks whom apartheid had been made landless and a more just division of the economic power concentrated in white hands. Democratic transformation on this scale has still not taken place in South Africa. This constrains the lives of most LGBT people. Gevisser notes that in black townships, for example, where families often sleep eight to a room, 'there is simply no space to be gay'.

Full lesbian/gay equality requires Third World liberation in a broader social sense: liberation from

poverty and dependency. LGBT people need housing to give them physical room for their relationships, for example, and jobs that can save transgendered and young people from dependence on the sex trade. How can gay men deal with AIDS, in those countries where male-male sex is a major factor in the epidemic, without challenging structural adjustment programmes that decimate health care? How can LGBT people hope to escape from or remould their families without the protection of a genuine welfare state? 'In the late twentieth century', however, 'the resurgence of market dominance once again threatens to pull away a wide range of social supports and rights', including whatever fragile welfare states had been won in the Third World. [1]

Freedom and equality for lesbians in particular in the Third World means women's emancipation, so that women have other options than marriage and economic dependence on men. All these concerns help explain the links described by Mogrovejo that Latin American lesbian/gay activists made in the 1970s between lesbian/gay liberation, socialism and feminism.

There are many countries in the Third World that have the potential to build advanced economies. Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia certainly have the land mass, population, natural resources, know-how and industrial base to be economic powerhouses. Whatever the different factors holding back their very different economies, there are clearly structural reasons why not one dependent nation broke through into the closed circle of advanced capitalist countries in the whole of the twentieth century. Those Third World countries that achieved the fastest growth rates and most dramatic gains—like Latin America in the 1950s and '60s and Southeast Asia in the 1970s and '80s—have seen their gains undone by the logic of the world market as it is now structured. For this reason the idea of breaking with the world market as it is now structured—breaking with capitalism—will undoubtedly continue to be raised in these countries, including in their lesbian/gay movements. The idea will be more credible to the extent that the left understands that Marxist categories on their own are not adequate to deal with women's and sexual oppression—they must be enriched by the analyses of feminist and lesbian/gay theorists—and that socialist parties need to respect the autonomy of lesbian/gay movements.

Autonomy and alliances

LGBTs have experienced again and again their exclusion from democracy on virtually every level: from supposed democratic institutions, from minimal democratic rights, even from movements fighting for democracy. Even when constitutions guarantee everyone's right to demonstrate and organize, LGBTs have often found that police attack their demonstrations with impunity and officials refuse to register their organizations.

This means that LGBT people feel the need to organize themselves to insist on their inclusion in democracy, autonomously from the existing institutions that are supposed to embody it. This sense of the word 'autonomy', as Mogrovejo mentions, has been the subject of major debates among Latin American feminists in general and lesbians in particular. Since existing institutions make a difference to LGBT people's lives, it is inevitable that LGBT people will respond to them, confront them, negotiate with them and even sometimes take part in them. This raises a host of problems and dangers.

When LGBT people negotiate with or take part in institutions, they ought to be defending LGBT people against them, not representing the institutions to LGBT people. When the World Bank, Dutch or Scandinavian governments or development agencies fund social movements, there is a danger, as Sherry Joseph and Pawan Dhall say, that 'aid-giving organizations, whether governmental or non-governmental, will dictate terms and conditions'. The temptations and need for vigilance are great.

But refusing to engage at all with institutions, trying to build LGBT communities while ignoring institutions' existence, is not a solution. It does not respond to reality or to the urgency and scope of LGBT people's needs.

The ultimate goal can be to transform institutions rather than be co-opted by them, to create institutions that are not just formally democratic but substantively and genuinely democratic. But lesbian/gay movements usually do not have the social weight to bring about such large-scale social and cultural change on their own. This makes it a matter of basic self-interest for them to ally with broader and more powerful democratic and radical movements, which as in South Africa can win lesbian/gay rights as part of more sweeping political and social changes. In Mexico, for example, breakthroughs for lesbian/gay rights seem unlikely while the 70-year-old party-state regime remains in power. Radical democratic forces fighting against the regime, by contrast, have expressed support for lesbian/gay rights. Mejía notes LGBT participation in the Zapatistas' Aguascalientes Convention and the fact that Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas' Democratic Revolutionary Party is Mexico's only major electoral party to come out in support of LGBT rights.

Similarly in Indonesia, gay leader Dédé Oetomo has turned to the radical People's Democratic Party for changes that the Suharto regime did not deliver despite its tolerance of LGBT groups. Joseph and Dhall note the obstacle posed to LGBT rights in India by the strength of 'fundamentalist, communal and sectarian parties': if lesbian/gay rights are ever won in India, the odds are that it will be as a result of radical democratic movements against these forces. In Muslim countries like Pakistan or Egypt, Islamic fundamentalism will have to be confronted in a radical and democratic way. In all these countries true democratization will require mobilizing and organizing the poor majority, which in turn can set in motion fundamental social change.

Lesbian/gay liberation in the Third World thus means not only legal rights achieved through the normal mechanisms of constitutional democracy, but transformations achieved together with other social forces fighting against dictatorship, clientelism, racism, fundamentalism and poverty. Even when LGBT activists see the need to join in these battles, however, it does not follow at all that other democratic and radical forces will welcome LGBT allies. This implies a second kind of autonomy alongside autonomy from state institutions: autonomy from other movements. Independent lesbian/gay organizations, initiatives and thinking are indispensable. Very little organizing for LGBT rights happens if LGBTs do not organize themselves. Occasionally there are exceptions—ABVA in India is one broad human rights group that has advocated lesbian/gay rights, and early law reform efforts in some advanced capitalist countries provide other examples—but generally they occur in relatively brief take-off periods, before LGBTs have succeeded in organizing and taking control of their own movements.

Lesbians in particular feel the need to organize their own lesbian groups. Otherwise they end up too often being subordinated in broader movements in at least three different ways: as gay people in left, democratic and human rights movements; as lesbians in mixed gay organizations dominated by gay men and their sometimes blatant, sometimes subtle misogyny; and as lesbians in feminist groups, facing what Mogrovejo calls 'internalised lesbophobia, as much from heterosexual feminists as from closet lesbians'.

Building autonomous communities and organizations should be combined with working in broader movements that have the social weight to bring about change. As James Green says, autonomy and alliance can be combined. Mogrovejo gives the example of lesbians who as 'loyal daughters to their mothers' have 'continued to fight for space as women and feminists within the feminist movement'. There are many other examples of a persistent, increasingly visible and vocal LGBT presence inside radical movements in South Africa, Brazil, Indonesia and other parts of the Third World. The gains made through working with the Sandinistas and ANC, to mention only two examples, show that

visibility and vocalness can pay off. Admittedly, LGBT radicals run occupational risks: a double burden of activism and a tendency towards split personalities. Only as their numbers grow and understanding grows in both LGBT and other movements will the burdens and pressures on them ease.

Dialectics of identity

Along with autonomy from institutions and autonomy from other movements, there is the issue of autonomy from the families and communities that LGBT people are themselves born into. This kind of autonomy means the development of distinctive LGBT identities and subcultures. The obstacles to this in the Third World are particularly great. Many LGBT people even doubt the practicality or desirability of this kind of separate cultural identity, at least if it reaches the point of ghettoization.

Gloria Wekker has argued that 'the notion of a sexual identity in itself carries deep strands of permanency, stability, fixity, and near-impermeability to change'. [2] The identification of sexuality with core selfhood that she describes, drawing on Michel Foucault's work, has come to be deeply rooted in European cultures. But it is not unique to Europe. Transgendered *kathoeys* in traditional Thai culture were also perceived as having natural, unchanging identities, to the point that changing *kathoeys* to men or men to *kathoeys* was forbidden in Buddhist scriptures as a form of witchcraft. There are thousands of transgendered people on every continent who have little choice about developing a separate identity, since a separate identity is thrust upon them from a very young age.

On the other hand, where lesbian and gay communities do emerge, membership in them does not necessarily imply a one-sided, unchanging sexual orientation. Many people who consider themselves bisexual live partly in and partly out of lesbian/gay communities. Others continue to identify as lesbian or gay and take part in lesbian/gay communities even while having long-term—even primary—heterosexual relationships, a choice accepted by some and viewed suspiciously by others in their communities.

One could imagine Third World lesbian/gay communities and movements continuing to emerge and thrive, even while sharing much of the Afro-Caribbean conception of selfhood that Wekker describes: 'multiple, malleable, dynamic, and possessing male and female elements'. [3] LGBT communities could be defined by identities that are allowed to be fluid rather than required to be fixed. Lesbian/gay movements could be defined as embracing everyone who wants to fight for greater sexual freedom, rather than as proclaiming and defending ghettos. Existing same-sex identities could be treated neither by repudiating them—as queer theorists sometimes seem to do—or fetishizing them, but by respecting them and building on them, as stepping stones towards liberation.

This dialectical approach to identity would have different dynamics in the Third World than in the First, and different dynamics in different parts of the Third World. The dynamics would be different where transgender identities are deeply rooted from where lesbian and gay identities have gained ground, and different again in cultures where same-sex eroticism is more or less tolerated without necessarily implying distinctive identities. But the key to the dialectics of identity everywhere would be accepting that change and variability are inevitable and legitimate.

The possibility of communities that are not ghettos and liberation that does not imply segregation come up in several articles in this book. It often goes together with the idea of a lesbian/gay community that discards much of the economic and cultural baggage of consumer capitalism which often accompanies lesbian/gay life in advanced capitalist countries. Gevisser speaks of 'the tantalizing possibility that South Africa, with its fusion of individualist Western rights-politics and

African communal consciousness, might show the world a far smoother way of integrating gay people into society, even if this is at the cost of the kind of robust gay subculture that dominates cities like New York and San Francisco'. In Margaret Randall's interview, Ana V., a Costa Rican living in Nicaragua, contrasts the society that Nicaraguan LGBTs want with the kind of gay ghetto they see emerging in Costa Rica: 'we've wanted to push society, so it will make a place for us, not carve a place out which is only for lesbians and gay men'. Also in this book, John Mburu speaks of an 'agenda including though not exclusively focused on gay rights'.

A vision of liberation without ghettoization can go together with different choices in people's personal lives. It is not always clear to LGBTs in the Third World that 'coming out' as lesbian or gay is a key moment in winning their liberation, as many people in the US seem to believe. In some cases they have never been 'in the closet': the Afro-Surinamese women in sexual relationships with women whom Wekker describes 'are not singled out or stigmatized in a working-class environment nor do they feel the necessity to fight for their liberation or to "come out"'. [4] In other cases LGBTs feel that discretion is a reasonable way of sustaining a way of life in which same-sex relationships are only one part, and not necessarily the most important part. The Chinese woman Ning interviewed by Chou Wah-shan says, 'It would give me a lot of trouble if I came out as a "lesbian", a Westernized category that challenges the basic family-kinship structure and my cultural identity as a Chinese. What benefits could coming out in public bring me?' In either case people can be understandably skeptical of the notion that coming out in itself decreases prejudice. After all, women, blacks and Jews have almost always been 'out', and it is questionable whether this has limited prejudice against them.

In the Netherlands, interestingly, LGBT immigrants from the Islamic world have spoken of a 'powerful double life', a life in which they can be open about and celebrate their sexualities at some times and places while remaining discrete in their original families and ethnic communities so as to preserve those important ties. [5] This idea of a double life may make it possible to respect the tactical decisions people make without glossing over the oppression that often contributes to their choices. The Afro-Surinamese women Wekker describes may not be stigmatized as women loving women, for example, but their choice to continue to have sex with men, who are sometimes abusive, seems in some cases to be largely determined by their poverty and economic dependency as women. Ning says that being open about her sexuality would make her 'a devil in people's minds' and be seen as 'failing in my obligation and responsibility as a wife, daughter and mother', suggesting that the 'harmonious family order' she seeks to preserve is based in part on her own sacrifices.

Altman even says that the tradition of married men's having 'discrete homosexual liaisons on the side seems as oppressive to the young [Asian] radicals of ProGay or Pink Triangle as it did to French or Canadian gay liberationists of the 1970s'. None of this means that the choice to announce or emphasize different identities in different spheres of life is wrong, just that this choice is the product of circumstances that are sometimes oppressive and always subject to change.

In general in the Third World, where there are fewer possibilities for living entirely apart from existing family structures, LGBTs are challenged more to find ways to cope with them and change them without surrendering their own needs and identities. In the absence of welfare states, family is more important in the Third World for simple survival. Marriage and children are the only form of old-age or health insurance in many poor countries. This has meant that even when extramarital sexuality is tacitly tolerated it is important that it not be mentioned, so as not to put parenthood and family order in question. [6]

Sometimes refraining from blurting out awkward facts can help make surprisingly flexible solutions possible. Chou gives the example of Chinese parents who have invited their son's male lover to eat with the family and eventually even move in. I have run across similar stories of lovers moving in

with the family in South African black townships and Brazilian favelas. Arguably arrangements like these can do more to change the society's sexual culture than moving away to some other city with a lover would, even if that were an option. There may well be tensions and constraints in such a situation. As Indonesian gay leader Dédé Oetomo has said, it may be necessary for LGBT people to have 'a safe space for people to gather' so as to make up for 'what is lacking in the heterosexual family'. [7] Openly naming what is happening and discussing it with the family and the whole neighbourhood would be still another step towards liberation. But where is it laid down that the naming has to happen first?

Perhaps the disproportionate influence of US gay culture on the rest of the world has helped foster a model of coming out that in some ways is quite US-specific. The idea of picking up and moving on to another town is after all a commonplace of US culture. So is coming home to the folks years later, visibly changed by experiences on the frontier. Not all of this imagery is easily transferable even to Western Europe. In a smaller European country like the Netherlands, a lesbian or gay child who comes out will have a hard time moving very far from the parental home, since no place in the country is more than three or four hours away. This seems to imply, at least for Dutch lesbian/gay people whose parents do not belong to the fundamentalist Christian minority, that a gay lifestyle involving great emotional distance from existing families is less common, and forms of integration into existing families more common, than in the US. Perhaps most LGBT people in the world live somewhere in the middle of a continuum between the man who comes out and moves to a big city far away, on the one hand, and the woman who lives with her husband and children and his parents and has a secret female lover, on the other.

As Altman says, 'we are speaking here of gradations, not absolute differences, and the growing affluence of many "developing" countries means possibilities for more people to live away from their families'. But the economic crisis since 1997 puts a limit on these possibilities for the great majority in Asia, as Altman himself acknowledges at the end of his article. The levels of prosperity in East and Southeast Asia until 1997 were exceptional by Third World standards anyway. The objective difficulties of separating from family and community will thus probably continue to make it necessary for most LGBT people in the Third World to develop identities that are multiple and nuanced rather than categorical and all-embracing.

Getting radical about sex

Multiplied and nuanced LGBT identities have consequences for lesbian/gay movements. In the introduction I suggested some reasons why 'queer' rhetoric and politics have not caught on much in the Third World: queer theorists' one-sided emphasis on cultural issues, their lack of attention to economics and basic survival issues, and a diffuse conception of power that is not necessarily convincing to women, poor people and others on the bottom rungs of Third World societies. But the queer rejection of a homogenized, assimilationist lesbian/gay sexuality may well be convincing to many Third World LGBTs. Third World LGBT communities are unlikely to become homogenous, and there are too many diverse subcultures to marginalize them all.

Issues of transgendered people and sex workers in particular are important in the Third World. The great diversity of identities gives substance to the idea of an alliance of all the sexually oppressed, rather than a movement around a single lesbian/gay sexual identity. To the extent broad communities do come to identify as lesbian and gay, the words tend in the Third World to be defined politically rather than in terms of a sexual model. As Chou says, the extent of diversity does not allow for a single strategy or 'a single monolithic discourse'.

Lesbian/gay communities in Europe and North America are sexually diverse as well, of course. There has been a proliferation of sub-subcultures in the 1980s and '90s. Transgendered people remain one of those sub-subcultures. But there has been a strong tendency to emphasize the most 'normal' images and keep the more 'extreme' ones under wraps as lesbian/gay organizations have pushed their way into the mainstream in advanced capitalist countries. Undermining gender differences, one of the original goals of lesbian/gay liberation in the 1970s and promoted by forms of 'gender fuck' in the 1980s, has been increasingly neglected as a goal by LGB movements. Third World movements can re-raise this dimension, and are in fact doing so, sometimes in the face of resistance from moderate leaderships and disproportionately middle class gays who prefer to mimic European and North American imagery. Challenging gender roles may help in the future to preserve Third World movements from a reformist, assimilationist politics, which always seems to leave transgendered people behind.

Transgender organizing has a long history in the Third World, as well as a growing presence today. Pakistani transgendered *hijras* organized successfully in the early 1960s against a ban on their activities by the Pakistani government. Indonesian *waria* were also organized in the 1960s, before there was any attempt to organize a gay movement as such, in fact before there was much gay organizing in Europe or North America. [8] Although *hijra* organizing seems rare today either within or outside South Asian lesbian/gay movements, one hijra ran for office in Pakistan in 1990, while another was even elected to the city council in the northern Indian city of Hissar in 1995. One of the most prominent leaders of the lesbian/gay movement in Turkey, Demet Demir, is a transsexual who has also played an important role in sex workers' organizing, the feminist movement, and HIV/AIDS advocacy; in 1991 Demir was the first person in history recognized as an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience due to persecution on account of sexual orientation. Since 1993 Brazilian transvestites have both organized themselves and forced the lesbian/gay movement to open up to them. [9]

Transgendered people put forward specific demands when they mobilize. The lists of demands that have come out of transgender organizing in Argentina have been particularly comprehensive; some of the demands have been won. In 1998, for example, the city of Buenos Aires adopted a measure against police harassment of transvestites and sex workers. Other demands have been to reduce the number of documents and occasions when people are classified as male or female, since such classifications often serve no particular purpose, and to fund sex change operations by public health services.

The growth of organizing by transgendered people does not mean that they are monopolizing same-sex politics. 'Masculine' gay men and 'feminine' lesbians are organizing in increasing numbers as well. In the right political circumstances, transgendered people can even become politically active along with their non-transgendered, 'non-gay' partners. The transgendered *skesanas* 'non-gay' *injongas* partners who led the 1992 Johannesburg Pride parade, whom I mentioned in the introduction, are a striking example. *Injongas* are exceptional in having a distinctive identity and a traditional word they use to refer to themselves; Latin American men who have sex with locas have neither, for example. But perhaps macho men or femme women who have sex with transgendered people in Latin America or Asia could one day play a visible role in lesbian/gay organizing, if and when lesbian/gay movements become strong and popular enough. [10]

Transgendered people's sexual partners, who sometimes have heterosexual relationships at the same time, can be seen in some ways as a Third World equivalent of First World bisexuals, who have also been organizing and demanding more recognition in recent years. But the dynamics of their organizing, and their special role in some Third World lesbian/gay movements, are in other ways quite different from those of First World bisexuals; in many ways they are unique. It is bound to be an enormous step for men and women in the Third World who are married and have families to

acknowledge openly their own same-sex relationships. Until that step is taken, the potential base for LGBT organizing is divided and weakened by suspicions, tensions and sometimes even contempt between transgendered people and the non-transgendered people who have sex with them—all the more when class differences are at work. Replacing these suspicions with respect and solidarity is a crucial step towards liberation. [11]

The implications of a broad alliance of varied same-sex identities go beyond adjustments of terminology or this or that subgroup's specific demands. For lesbians, Mogrovejo says, it can mean 're-evaluating the masculine figure—seen no longer solely as an opponent, but rather as a potential ally: gay men, transvestites, transsexuals and the transgendered'. It can also mean a redefinition of the lesbian/gay movements' goals.

European lesbian/gay movements seem increasingly to demand a recognition of same-sex love enshrined ultimately in the right to marry. The ideal of romantic love has a specific European history, from medieval chivalry to Protestant ideals of domesticity to nineteenth-century romantic novels; and European ideals of marriage are one product of that history. These ideals have been spread by global media, and they influence LGBTs as well, including in the Third World. But in the Third World as elsewhere, many sexual relationships have at least as much to do with satisfying desire or holding together family and community as with romantic love. As they formulate their demands, Third World lesbian/gay movements do not have to privilege relationships based on romantic love as the universal prism through which all struggles must be refracted.

Altman suggests that whatever country we look at, 'whether Indonesia or the United States, Thailand or Italy, the *range* of constructions of homosexuality is growing', and that this broad range will be characteristic of an emerging 'global community'. If so, the Third World may be playing a pioneering role in defining this global community now, as the US played a pioneering role in the first decades after Stonewall. The Third World can pioneer the return of lesbian/gay movements to a broad vision of sexual and cultural transformation. It can raise again the objective of universal sexual liberation, including as Chou says that of the 'so-called straight world', which 'is itself never immune to the seduction of homoerotic desire'.

Notes

1. Barry Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak & André Krouwel, 'Gay and lesbian movements beyond borders?: national imprints of a worldwide movement', in Adam, Duyvendak & Krouwel eds., *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*, Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1999, p. 356.
2. Gloria Wekker, "'What's identity got to do with it?': rethinking identity in light of the mati work in Suriname', in Evelyn Blackwood & Saskia E. Wieringa eds., *Female Desires: Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices across Cultures*, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999, p. 132.
3. Wekker, "'What's identity got to do with it?'"', p. 132.
4. Wekker, "'What's identity got to do with it?'"', p. 131.
5. 'Een krachtig dubbelleven', *Grenzeloos* (Amsterdam) no. 18 (16 June 1994).
6. Marc Epprecht, 'Outing the gay debate', *Southern Africa Report* (July 1996), p. 15.
7. Dédé Oetomo (interviewed by Jill Hickson), 'The struggle for lesbian and gay rights', *Green Left Weekly* no. 351 (3 Mar. 1999).

8. Nauman Naqvi & Hasan Mujtaba, 'Two Baluchi buggas, a Sindhi zenana, and the status of hijras in contemporary Pakistan', in Stephen Murray & Will Roscoe eds., *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature*, New York, New York Univ. Press, 1997, p. 265; Dédé Oetomo & Bruce Emond, *Homosexuality in Indonesia*, [n.p., 1992], p. 23.
9. James N. Green, "'More love and more desire": the building of a Brazilian movement', in Adam et al., *Global Emergence*, p. 104.
10. Neil Garcia is skeptical, arguing that 'gay organizing in the urban centers of the Philippines will most likely always gravitate around inversion', while masculine gays 'will persist in their actively pursued silence: closetedness' (*Philippine Gay Culture: The Last Thirty Years*, Diliman: Univ. of the Philippines Press, 1996, pp. 214). Adam, Duyvendak and Krouwel argue along similar lines that 'activo men, in a gender-defined system of homosexuality,... are not likely to feel a commonality with pasivos, thereby inhibiting solidarity and political organization' ('Gay and lesbian movements beyond borders?', p. 351).
11. The workshop on Algeria and Morocco at the 1999 Euromediterranean Summer University on Homosexualities in Luminy, France, helped me get more of a sense of these dynamics.