

Queer Anti-Racist Activism and Strategies of Critique: A Roundtable Discussion

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Published online: 30 July 2011
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This roundtable discussion brings together queer anti-racist activists (some of whom are also academics) working in different geographical locations to discuss some of the local as well as transnational issues that they face in organising work. More specifically, the editors asked participants to share their varied experiences and strategies used to resist the silencing of queer/trans anti-racist critique. The conversation took place on June 29, 2010 in London, England through a combination of in-person and video-conference participation. The conversation was then transcribed and edited for continuity and clarity.

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The Participants

Tamsila Tauqir is co-founder and voluntary Director of the *Safra Project*, a resource project working on issues relating to lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender women who identify as Muslim religiously and/or culturally.¹ She is also a trustee for the charity *Interfaith Alliance UK* and an activist in other voluntary posts. Her current professional work involves developing policy for partnerships working between the statutory sector and the voluntary and community sector.

Jennifer Petzen teaches Gender and Queer Studies at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences in Berlin. Having completed her dissertation on the racialisation of Muslim sexualities in Europe, Jennifer is currently researching the ways in which self-organised migrant and other anti-racist groups are reshaping emancipatory social movements.

Jin Haritaworn works intellectually, politically and creatively at the nexus of anti-racism, queer of colour and trans liberation. Topics they have spent time with include Thai and queer diaspora, mixed race, polyamory, transphobia, sex work migration, the parameters of queer and trans of colour sexual liberation, and the prison industrial complex. At the moment, they are thinking a lot about the relationship between gentrification, revanchist policing and gay, queer and trans spaces, as well as the travels of neoliberal, criminalizing and pathologizing paradigms across Western Europe and North America. Jin's writings and the collections they have co/edited can be found in journals such as *Darkmatter*, *Social Justice*, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, and *Sexualities*, as well as books such as *Out of Place*, *Decolonising European Sociology*, *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte*, *Trans-Migrations*, and finally a collection called *Queer Necropolitics*, assembled with Adi Kuntsman and Silvia Posocco.

Sokari Ekiné is of Nigerian British heritage and grew up in Lagos, Nigeria. She is a community organiser and social justice activist with an interdisciplinary background in education, technology, gender and queer studies. She is founder and principle author of Black Looks blog, in which she writes critically on Africa and the African Diaspora focusing on intersecting forms of oppressions, marginalisations and discriminations, such as racism, LGBTI rights, neo-colonialism, land rights, and militarism. She has published and spoken on a wide range of issues including intersecting forms of violence against women in the Niger Delta; mobile phone activism in Africa; community organising amongst grassroots women in Haiti and is presently co-editing a *Queer African Reader* to be published in 2011.

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Sarah Bracke is Assistant Professor of Sociology of Religion and Culture at the K. U. Leuven. She holds a PhD in Women's Studies from Utrecht University. Her work explores questions of modernity, religion and secularism, in relation to questions of subjectivity, agency and gender. She co-authored *Een leeuw in een kooi. Grenzen van de multiculturele verbeelding in Vlaanderen* (2009, Meulenhof Manteau), a critical assessment of 20 years of 'multicultural debate' in a Flemish context, and directed the video-essay *Pink Camouflage* exploring the usage of the language of gay rights in a time of 'clash on civilizations' and 'war on terror'.

The roundtable was facilitated by the Editors of this Special Issue: Stacy Douglas, Suhraiya Jivraj, and Sarah Lambie.²

The discussion

Editors To begin, let's talk about some of the recurring problems that contribute to the silencing or censure of queer anti-racist voices. What key factors, risks and pressures work to suppress, silence or circumvent queer or colour critiques, especially for activists, academics and publishers? We are thinking not only of the kinds of backlash, silencing or dismissals that occur *after* something has been said, but also the factors which prohibit some critiques from even being articulated in the first place.

Jin Haritaworn We've seen with the forcible disappearance of *Out of Place*³ how 'censorship'—although I'm increasingly unsure we want to repeat this liberal discourse at all—happens both formally through the threat of law, but also in very informal ways. Malini Schueller and Ashley Dawson in their introduction to the *Social Text* special issue on academic freedom (Vol 25, Spring 2007) mention three kinds of attack on radical academic critique. The first is 'ad hominem attacks'. These are concerted campaigns mobilised through media and political networks, which are cliquy and oligarchical, and are used to soil the reputation of people who do radical or unpopular work, get them sacked, lose them speaking engagements etc. This happened to a number of people right after

² Stacy Douglas is a PhD student at Kent Law School (UK), a Steering Committee member for the Kent Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality and part of the Organising Committee of the Postgraduate and Early Careers Scholars Network (PECANS). Stacy is also a member of *Communities of Resistance* (CoRe), a London-based organisation fighting to stop prison expansion in Britain.

Suhraiya Jivraj is co-founder and former co-ordinator of the *Safra Project* and a Lecturer in Law at Oxford Brookes University. She is also a member of the *Decolonize Queer* working group, which is an academic-activist transnational network working on issues of sexuality/gender from a post-colonial perspective.

Sarah Lambie is a lecturer in Law at Birkbeck College, University London and a member of the *Bent Bars Project*, which coordinates a letter writing program for queer, trans and gender nonconforming prisoners in Britain.

³ This event is discussed at length in the Introduction to this Special Issue and is also mentioned in Sara Ahmed's contribution, 'Problematic Proximities: Or Why Critiques of Gay Imperialism Matter'.

9/11, most prominently Ward Churchill and Sunera Thobani, who made the ‘mistake’ of putting the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre in their context of US imperialism. With *Out of Place*, we saw this with the close collusion between Peter Tatchell, our publisher Raw Nerve, and the gay media. So already there’s this institutionalised white alliance which gatekeeps who gets a voice, what you can say, and what happens to you when you say it—in this case, whether or not the book will see a second edition or not. We’ve also seen the use of the gay media and the blogosphere in conducting a concerted campaign against the authors and anyone who had a problem with the removal of this first academic collection on queerness and raciality in Britain. Besides helping Tatchell paint himself as the injured innocent victim of ‘powerful academics’ (I was in fact the only academic among the authors, and barely institutionalised), this also involved inciting people to write to my bosses and to student representatives in order to question how a ‘respectable’ institution like the LSE could employ such a ‘quack academic’. There were also a string of very personal attacks on dissenters against the censorship, which often ironically took the form of homophobic, sexist and transphobic bullying. Those with non-European names were targeted on the grounds of their ethnicity. I am interested in the citationality and connectivity of these ad hominem attacks. Both rounds were conducted in an identical rhythm: First, the publisher writes an informal email to the editors (contrary to claims that they encouraged us to make changes they did not directly contact us as the authors), which casually includes a formal-sounding statement which soon after appears on the Raw Nerve website. This is immediately followed by Peter Tatchell’s press release, which cites the Raw Nerve statement. Then come the articles in the gay press, citing both press release and publisher’s statement. Finally, the hate bloggers come in who, no holds barred, go as far below the belt as they can.⁴

The second mechanism which Schueller and Dawson identify is the law. British libel law is known to be one of the most draconian in the world, and the mere threat of a libel suit terrifies people because it’s going to be very expensive. It was very hard for us to find a libel lawyer who would give us legal advice because again the progressive lawyers are in the same network and many of them have worked with Peter Tatchell in the past. The advice we eventually got was that losing the case would cost at least £40,000

⁴ In an unpublished paper, Johanna Rothe analyses the hate blogs, many of which were subsequently taken down. Among other epithets, the authors and dissenters were described as ‘fascists,’ ‘jihadists,’ ‘lunatics,’ ‘fanatics,’ ‘wankers’ and ‘loser academics’ with obscure, ‘computer-generated’ names, who ‘infect our public halls’ and should be ‘hoover(ed) up’, together with the book and the other ‘tongue twisting gobbledeygook’.

in damages alone, excluding the lawyer and court costs. So the mere threat of using the law, which was there both indirectly via the legalistic tone of the circulated documents and the publisher's insinuations towards the editors, and directly in an email by Peter Tatchell which I received on 9 September 2009,⁵ worked to intimidate the authors, the editors (as well as probably the publisher). We were virtually excluded from the debate, as anything any of us said could have been used against us in court. A small publishing house has a lot to lose, but even for bigger multi-national publishers, a libel threat can result in a scenario where individual writers are dropped from a volume. Capitalist publishers are obviously governed by profit principles, and if they face the prospect of having to pay libel lawyers it might be easier to 'lose' a chapter, particularly if its author, in the context of larger academic structures—which are very white and very straight—does not have a lot of power, and is not going to be missed.⁶

The third kind of attack affects whole disciplinary formations, which are defined as subversive. Schueller and Dawson illustrate this with the targeting of Middle Eastern studies in the U.S.—we have now also witnessed the abolition of ethnic studies in Arizona, preceded by the state's legalisation of racist policing in Senate Bill 1070.⁷ Schueller and Dawson further place these attacks on minoritarian scholarship in their neoliberal landscape. The commodification of academic work, combined with a wider context of de-politicisation, which encourages us to labour for our CV rather than against injustice, is a big factor influencing what risks people are willing to take as writers, colleagues, editors, or conference organisers. Thus, for a university which sees itself primarily as a business catering to student consumers and sponsors, a censorship scandal is bad publicity, and it may be

⁵ The email contained two direct references to the law: 'The sustained series of untrue allegations against me in this book constitute, in the opinion of my lawyer, 'grave malicious libels of the most serious kind because they appear deliberately calculated to defame and discredit.'... I would be very grateful if you could get in touch with me so that we can discuss how this matter can be resolved without recourse to the courts.'

⁶ That this kind of bullying can be effective with bigger publishers and more powerful authors is illustrated by the fate of Scott Long, who published an article in a Routledge journal, which was critical of the Iran campaigns by Peter Tatchell, Doug Ireland and other western activists. Long's critique resulted in a similar witch-hunt and may have contributed to his resignation from his position as LGBT coordinator at Human Rights Watch.

⁷ In April 2010, Arizona passed Senate Bill 1070, which introduced the 'Support our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighbourhoods Act', and gives police broad power to check immigration status of anyone suspected of being an 'illegal' immigrant. The act also created new crimes and tougher penalties related to immigration law enforcement. While the constitutionality of the Act is currently before US courts, several other states have introduced similar legislation. See: National Conference of State Legislators, 'Arizona's Immigration Enforcement Laws' available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=20263>.

- easier to let someone go or not renew their contract. Another illustration of this de-politicized context is Dissident Citizenship, a recent ‘queer postcolonial’ conference at Sussex. Colleagues and I also had a panel on Queer Necropolitics accepted, which we had to withdraw when we found out the organisers, during our months of email contact, had never once bothered to tell us that they had scheduled a big panel about *Out of Place* (i.e., our work), right at the centre of the conference programme.
- Editors Yes, one of us attended that conference and the panel played out as a pro-and-con-style debate amongst senior academics. The problem with this kind of format is that, although its aim is to present a ‘neutral’ or objective debate about the issues, it instead masks the power differentials between those involved. This was apparent from the start as the panel was called ‘Lies, Smears and Apologies’ (an unreferenced nod to the title of one of Tatchell’s press releases). This naming, dwelling on the events as ‘lies’ and ‘smears’, whether intentionally or not, instantiated the authors as already at fault and thereby missed the opportunity to engage in the underlying theme of the conference, namely queer postcolonial critique.
- Jin Haritaworn Yes, it felt like a violation because the organisers had never once bothered to tell us about the panel, during our months of email contact. So the institutional structures of racism and careerism can shape the kind of collegiality we can expect, and the epistemic communities we can or can’t be part of. While the conference gave rise to much amazing networking between queers of colour and allies, our absence from it was barely noted. So this is another way of killing off anti-racist queer critique that goes too far, goes beyond the decorative and palatable.
- Sarah Bracke I would like to add an observation regarding a related problem, which is the impact of funding. I am thinking in particular about the landscape of social movements, political associations and non-governmental organisations, and the ways in which funding opportunities structure that landscape. In Belgium we can observe that everything under the umbrella of ‘equal opportunities policies’ is reshuffled in line with a discourse about ‘the end of multiculturalism’. The logic goes something like this: we ‘did’ multiculturalism for many years now, and while some aims were achieved and hence the need for further funding is obsolete, most of it failed and contributed to ‘the multicultural disaster’. So in any case it is time to move on and recognize we live in a post-multicultural society. In other contexts a similar discourse is articulated around ‘race’ and the ‘post-race society’, but in Belgium, not unlike in France, ‘race’ is a charged term that is difficult to use in public speech. Note that this discourse is not a

- right-wing one; right-wing political forces in Belgium have not flirted with ‘multiculturalism’ as they might have done in other national contexts, but effectively attacked it from its inception. Rather, it’s the left-wing and the so-called progressive forces who have been the driving forces of the ‘end of multiculturalism’ discourse. One place where the implications of this discourse become very material, is funding. And the result of both a general cut in funding related to the economic crisis and the re-framing of what should be prioritized in this ‘post-multicultural context’, is the elimination of funding for self-organized associations of ethnic minorities. Instead, part of the money that used to go to self-organised groups gets allocated to the mainstream umbrella organisations, which are white and middle-class, for them to do some ‘diversity work’. We see this ‘mainstreaming of gender and diversity’ happening both with LGBT and women’s organisations. Yes, the pressure to suppress or silence queer of colour voices in North America and western Europe is occurring in the context of the post-racial paradigm and the disappearing of race. It’s extremely difficult to express any kind of anti-racist critique without a host of surreal arguments coming back at you. In the German context, for example, the concept of biological race was discredited after the Nazi period. So now there is the discourse, “Well, we know that there isn’t biological race so we don’t have racism.” The social process of racialisation as the means by which race is constructed is not even on the map. In addition, the stigma associated with the term racism, which people understand as being based on a biological understanding of race (i.e., something the Nazis did) is very, very difficult to work through. And finally, there is resentment: “We paid for that, we paid for our racism with the guilt Auschwitz caused so let’s move on.” There is a lot going on—blaming the victim, we’ve worked through this already, utter denial that racism could even exist after the Holocaust. I just want to point out that it is extremely difficult to counter these discourses. This post-raciality is also present in the US but of course under very different conditions. “We have a black president so what’s the problem? We have defeated racism.”
- Jen Petzen
- Editors Sarah, you talked about the impact of funding. Can you say more about how funding effects the risks and possibilities of articulating queer of colour critique?
- Sarah Bracke The organizing conditions for queer people of colour are already difficult in many respects. We don’t have many queer people of colour associations here in Belgium. We have *Merhaba*, which is a self-organized group of people, with a Magrebi, Middle-Eastern or Turkish background, who are attracted to people of the same

sex. *Merhaba* receives some equal opportunities funding which allows the association to have one paid co-ordinator, although currently the financial stability of that one paid position is under threat. The association also has a small office space in the Rainbow House in Brussels. Such financial and spatial arrangements already set up the relationship between a small self-organization like *Merhaba* and the bigger umbrella LGBT organisations in a materially uneven and dependent manner, before we even talk about political differences and other kinds of conflicts. In relation to the reshuffling of the funding for instance, *Merhaba* and the majoritarian LGBT organisations are clearly not positioned as allies, since part of the money that self-organised groups risk losing, might be allocated to the umbrella organisations for ‘diversity work.’

One of the questions these structural conditions raises is whether it’s better not to rely on funding at all, and self-organize in less ‘NGO-ized’ and more militant ways. This reflection joins the critique of what has been called the ‘non-profit industrial complex’.⁸ But of course, this critique raises a whole set of other questions, such as questions of representation and ‘whom do you speak for’? Given the specificities of the current neo-liberal hegemony and as well as the new (and old) forms of (institutionalised) racism, there’s an urgent need to revisit the question of inventing new ways of organizing.

Sokari Ekine

Yes, if I could just add that African activists are also very much reliant on funders, and the funders are organisations like *ILGA*,⁹ Gay Games, *HIVOS*,¹⁰ and so on. How do we critique those organisations that are funding us? It was mentioned that only the large mainstream LGBT organisations in Europe were getting funding, but those groups are actually funding grassroots organisations in Africa. So while they’re not funding the grassroots groups in Europe, they are funding the ones in Africa.

Jen Petzen

I’m so glad you brought that up actually because I have some contact with activists in Turkey who are dealing with this issue. There is a big extension of the homonationalism trend in regions adjacent to Europe; sort of like a homoimperialism. The Netherlands is very into saving the brown queers from their culture, and one can see this in the kinds of support the government provide for groups in Southern and Eastern Europe (The Dutch Embassy in Turkey helps fund the Pride events in

⁸ See for example: Incite! Women of Color against Violence (2007).

⁹ *ILGA* refers to the international lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex association. <http://www.ilga.org>. Accessed 27 April 2011.

¹⁰ *HIVOS* is a humanist institute for development cooperation based in the Netherlands. <http://www.hivos.nl>. Accessed 27 April 2011.

- Istanbul every year). In Germany, there is a new foundation supported by the largest gay lobbying group. Their focus is working outside of Europe and their first big media project was to showcase a group of activists from Africa. They had a press conference and also convinced the local LGBT city magazine to profile the activists. I think that it's very important to interrogate the politics of why these European organisations are working like this. Basically, I interpret it as a failure of contemporary mainstream lesbian and gay politics. By holding on to single-issue, neo-liberal politics that benefits white middle-class, gender-conforming gay men and lesbians at the expense of queer and trans people of colour and poor queers, they have no emancipatory currency left in local European politics. That is why they have to move on and find 'others' to emancipate.
- Editors Sarah and Sokari both mentioned the relationship between funding and representation. How do questions of authority and representation also come into play?
- Tamsila Tauqir The issue around authority of voice I think is really important. Whose voice are you hearing? Whose voice don't you hear? And why is that? It's about authority: who has authority, who is given authority, and that depends obviously upon context. If you look at the majority of contexts, people talking about queer anti-racist critiques aren't being heard because they don't have the authority or the majority viewpoint, and that needs to be addressed.
- Sokari Ekine Yes, I thought about this from more of a personal experience. Being a lone voice and not attached to an organisation or an institution raises questions about whether your voice is authentic or if it is valid. This leaves you open to being discredited or ridiculed because you're not perceived as an authentic voice or you're only speaking for yourself. It also increases your vulnerability to attack and criticism without the accompanying support of colleagues and comrades.
- But for me one of the most glaring problems is how do I speak about what is happening across Africa, and at the same time challenge these racist voices in a way that doesn't actually feed them? So for example the other day I put something on Twitter. There's an anti-homosexuality motion being tabled by Egypt at the African Union, which I put on Twitter because I thought it was really important. I got a response from someone which was to the effect 'oh yes, this is proof that we in Africa, and the Arabs in particular, were homophobic'. It was very difficult to respond to that comment within a Twitter space because you only have a few words. I don't really know how to deal with that. I think we have to be very careful about language and so on. That's really one of the things that bothers me. I feel silenced before rather than after

having spoken, so to speak. Every time I try to write something I've got that in the back of my mind, how it's going to come back at me.

Further, there's a trend towards moving the struggle for gay liberation in a white context to Africa in the same way that the religious right is taking their battleground to Africa. Within the continent you have tensions between the religious right on the one hand and the gay imperialist liberation movement, if you want to call them that, on the other. We as activists on the continent are then caught in between. And then within that, as Jin said, certain voices are chosen to give credibility to the gay liberation movement which is using Africa as its battleground. That becomes very problematic and then you find you have to challenge both of these forces who have now chosen to use Africa and other parts of the global south for their own struggles. I'm not quite sure how we go about addressing that particular problem.

Editors Further to the discussion of voice and authority, we also wanted to ask about the relationship between voice and silence. Is breaking silence always necessary for expressing critique or can silence also serve a strategic critical function? For example, do all critiques have to be articulated? What are the problems of assuming that 'articulation equals liberation'?

Jin Haritaworn You sent us a text by Wendy Brown to prepare for this question, which critiques the dominant activist fetish for breaking the silence.¹¹ I think discussions about women of colour, women in the global south, queer people of colour, and queer people in the global south in particular are often framed as 'now these people need to break their silences', and many others have problematized this before. What does that do in terms of representing these groups as impossible subjects that are stuck in a pre-modern developmental position, and need to catch up with, and become, modern homosexuals etc.?¹² So that when subalterns are invited into discussions, as Tamsila said, it is in order to repeat them as these subjects who cannot, and have apparently never tried to, speak for themselves, or whose voice can be reduced to pre-theoretical, pre-political experience, to hyperbolic suffering and testimonial, in a way which bolsters the very structures which exclude them, or others like them, from full humanity. We also discussed this in our article 'Gay Imperialism' with regard to the figure of the exceptional queer Muslim, who is granted a voice because they perform themselves as an exception to the rule that queer and Muslim is an oxymoron, and Islam is the most

¹¹ Wendy Brown (2005).

¹² See Gayatri Spivak (1988), Rinaldo Walcott (2009) and Carlos Decena (2011).

oppressive religion of all. So again, what voices are invited? And what structures of death do these invitations serve to euphemize or authenticate?

Tamsila Tauqir In terms of responding to challenges, and this is a personal style, I feel very strongly about not speaking, about being silent in some circumstances. Around the gay imperialist front scenario, I was very adamant that we not respond to quotes from Peter Tatchell, that we not respond to the publishers, that we just stay quiet because they feed off that, that is their lifeblood, and the less we add to that fire, to that publicity, the quicker that discussion can move on and we can start leading the agenda, and leading the discussion. Unfortunately it doesn't always work out that way. So I think the right not to speak, not to engage in discussions and rhetoric that is going to damage us or be turned against our communities in the long term, is important, because we live in these communities, we go home and we eat with them. For us to then criticise on that platform, the homo-nationalist wouldn't have done us any favours or helped our stakeholders or the people that we try and work with every day.

Jin Haritaworn I'd like to give an example from activism that also has implications for scholarship. It's what in Germany has become known as 'the Butler Scandal': Judith Butler's refusal to accept the Civil Courage Award at Pride 2010 in Berlin, because of the close overlaps between the Pride committee and the homonationalist organizations in Berlin.¹³ On the one hand, this event made it possible to talk about gay racism to a bigger public. For the first time, this topic got some kind of visibility and people were interested in it because a celebrity with political clout had named it explicitly. At the same time, there were all these erasures that happened almost immediately. Neither the queer of colour activists she had mentioned in her speech, nor gay racism itself, made it into the first media reports. Scholarly communities are already turning this into an event, often very ambivalently, pro- or con-Butler-as-celebrity. So something that is essentially a product of queer of colour labour and resistance is being turned into fodder, into something that scholars are writing about, but not in a way that addresses any queer anti-racist agenda. In the meantime, we are facing a backlash whose penalties will be paid very unevenly. The gay establishment is dealing with the charge of racism by targeting queer of colour individuals and organisations, who have been scape-goated for Butler's refusal.

¹³ For details of the events surrounding Butler's speech, see SUSPECT's press release from 21 June 2010, 'Judith Butler turns down Civil Courage Award from Berlin Pride: 'I must distance myself from this racist complicity'. <http://nohomonationalism.blogspot.com/2010/06/judith-butler-refuses-berlin-pride.html>. Accessed 19 Dec 2010.

- Jen Petzen Speaking of this kind of censorship and disciplinary measures, I also work with various NGOs and political groups in Berlin. Part of the backlash we saw was what Jin described: targeting queer of colour groups, who were basically given no support by the academic queer community and other supposed queer allies. They also used a divide and rule tactic and tried to play people of colour groups against each other. On the academic front, I watched as people got into this huge argument on a queer listserve, quite rightly, about the politics of Judith Butler as a white woman being given all the credit for the achievements of queers of colour organising, but then the whole discussion went on for a long time about Judith Butler instead of maybe being more productive, like: What were the reasons behind the action, how can we benefit from this moment, and what can we do to support queers of colour who are in Europe? In Berlin? And so then there were some interventions by some great allies who took some time to inform people on the list about what was going on. In the end, I think it kind of balanced out because now there is this amazing potential of these transnational alliances that emerged in response and it has provided a moment to put energy into those alliances and into groups, and that is a way to protect people.
- Tamsila One of the issues I have is that these things become very personal, and we've seen that with both the Judith Butler scenario and the 'Gay Imperialism' scenario. We talk about issues and then it comes down to personalities, and that has something to do with western culture, I believe. I'm not going to speak on behalf of the global south because I don't live there, but in terms of the west I do feel very much that arguments are made through personalities, on presentations and celebrity status, it's not just done on issues anymore. So we need to catch up to that very quickly, and take that on as a strategy.
- Editors Perhaps now would be a good time to talk about questions of strategy more broadly? For example, what kind of strategies have you taken up to resist and challenge these silencing patterns and practices?
- Jin Haritaworn I'd like to talk to the context of sexuality studies. There is a new turn to the intersection of race and sexuality, to a lesser extent race and gender (as in *transgender*), as well as a turn to the global south. This is paralleled in sexual and gender activism, where there is this new interest in the global south, in queer people of colour, which is something I believe many of us pushed for in the past. But this shift in attention is happening (a) at a moment where racist, neo-liberal, neo-colonial agendas are needing new legitimation and are being politically corrected through gay rights talk and a queering of these agendas, and (b) in the absence

of any conversation about how queer theory, how sexuality studies are already institutionalised. Namely, in ways that are very white, maybe include a few people of colour here and there, but more for decorative purposes. And I think this context where oppression, where racism and neo-colonialism are being queered, is one that is difficult to counter and steer into a progressive direction.

So I think we need a decolonisation of LBGT activism and a decolonisation of queer studies along the lines of the earlier anti-racist and decolonial contestations which have already been seen in feminism. I think this is something that needs to happen and is getting more urgent now that race and the global south are becoming sexy topics in queer theorising and activism. In this we can build on earlier critiques of queer globalization, queer migration and sexual racism and colonialism. The assumption that queer people of colour and queer people in the global south are going to catch up, that on the one hand you have the enlightened homosexual in the West and on the other those who just haven't got it yet, for example, has already been the subject of some really good critiques, but they have been largely ignored. I think the hysteric reactions to Joseph Massad's book *Desiring Arabs* (University of Chicago Press, 2007) illustrate this failure. The book was a polemic but what it does is not, in a way, that different to what earlier post-colonial feminist critiques have done; that is make the LGBT movement perceptible as something that is white, western-centric, and treating subaltern queers in certain ways. I don't want to glorify feminism here, obviously global and neo-colonial feminisms are hegemonic right now, but transnational, postcolonial, indigenous, migrant and other intersectional feminisms have also been able to win some spaces in a way that is largely missing from queer discourse.

Sokari Ekine

In terms of strategies obviously we have to build solidarity links and for me personally I'd like to see those go beyond Euroland and the US. That's an area that doesn't seem to come into the discussion that we're having, so I'm thinking about how do we take that to the global south? How do we involve activists in the global south, not just within the LGBTI movement but within other movements such as land rights. I'm reluctant to say the women's movement because I feel they are often very hostile towards us. Another point is that in building allies there has to be trust. In some cases there's going to be a great deal of risk for anyone/group becoming an ally to give support to voices outside of Europe. People have to know that if we speak or if we act that whatever the risks, people are going to come on board and give that support. I would say another challenge is African queer and

trans voices are being silenced; I mean they are omitted altogether and to some degree how are people in Europe and the US contributing to that silence? Now I wouldn't say colluding, but the question is how are those voices being omitted? This speaks again to the need for building solidarity and trust.

One of the things that has come out of the Judith Butler event, and this might have been there before but I was not aware of it, was what Suspect¹⁴ has done in creating the online ['nohomonationalism'¹⁵] space. I went to the site yesterday and saw that there were a number of solidarity pieces written in support of Suspect. The Judith Butler German Pride event has enabled us to begin a more visible discussion, a more inclusive discussion, and I think that if we can use our online spaces, we can build on that analysis, build on dialogue between us. But there's also the need to have other discussions such as this one because a lot of us feel very isolated as we're not with institutions or we're not in spaces where there's groups that we can talk with. Another strategy would be to have regular discussions on Skype. To build on websites like 'nohomonationalism' so those sites become a central depository of discussion and analysis and for those of us who have access to online spaces, to republish and republish, and to build the movement in that kind of way. But just going back again to emphasize what I think is important, which is to reach out to activists in the global south and to make the connections between what is happening in Europe, because if I was sitting in Nigeria, due to a lot of factors, very practical factors like access to the Internet, electricity and so on, just those basic obstacles, how do I get involved and how do I know what is happening in terms of what you're discussing? So we need to find a way of overcoming some of those barriers and to make the links between what is happening in Europe and what is happening in Africa.

Tamsila Tauqir Building that discussion with the global south is essential, and here I want to recognise that, both in the west and the global south, the organisations of the global south who do have voices are going to be funded by the western funders, and so they still have to toe the line to some extent. For example in Palestine you've got ASWAT the lesbian group based in Haifa, but most of their funders are based in America or Europe, so unfortunately they've got to still toe the line in terms of how much work they

¹⁴ SUSPECT is a non-funded grassroots organisation of queer and trans migrants, Black people, people of colour and allies, which was established in early 2009 with the aim to monitor the arrival and effects of hate crimes debates in Germany, and to counter the racist, punitive and neo-colonial turn in sexual and gender politics.

¹⁵ See: <http://nohomonationalism.blogspot.com>.

can do and how critical they can be, and they've still got to make alliances where they really don't want to make them. Building Safra's allies and networks in south Asia and southeast Asia means recognising that our partners there are funded by western funders, and so we understand their restrictions, but we try to build links and coalitions where we can and promote the agenda that they can't but nonetheless want to have voiced over here. But it has to be done on their terms so even though I may come from a south Asian background, I don't live in Pakistan so I still don't have a right to lead the agenda there, and I think groups in the west who may come from migrant diaspora communities need to recognise their power relationship with the groups in the global south. Recognising that although we have a presence in the west we can't really authentically voice what's happening there with organisations until we build the links with individuals as well as organisations and support their voice, their opinions, their issues, and that's shared with us as well as other organisations.

Jen Petzen

When Sokari talked about forming allies and building up trust and educating people about the risks involved in anti-racist work, I think that's a really crucial point. I wanted to share my observations of migrant organising over the past decade in Berlin. It's really been amazing the work they've done in terms networking with migrant organisations which have not traditionally had queer agendas. Now there are established networks of queer and allied migrant groups who are really there for each other and who also actively work together. They have created more powerful intersectional agendas, which of course have always been a part of migrant organising but are now part of the public face of important organisations. Now one of the umbrella organisations of migrant associations in Berlin is going to dedicate their next newsletter to homonationalism. There is really interesting stuff happening there, and I have to stress that the building of this trust among groups is crucial, and people have to figure out what that means in their own particular contexts. Kimberle Crenshaw calls it 'anticipatory networks' that will be able to actively support the group in question. We might as well just realise the censorship and backlash is going to happen and get ready for it now.

Jin Haritaworn

I think Jen it would be interesting to talk about the conversation that happens between queers of colour in Berlin and queer organisers from Turkey in terms of how to deal with funders and those kinds of conversations.

Jen Petzen

Groups in Turkey were very interested in what was going on here with Judith Butler—she met with groups there before coming to Berlin—and I think they are beginning to become more interested in some of the issues that shape the political agendas of

minoritarian queers in Germany (and other places in northern Europe). Traditionally, the agendas have been pretty divergent due to different histories and power structures. While queer organising in Turkey has been dominated by middle-class, secular, gender-conforming majoritarian queers (i.e. ethnic Turks) who have largely taken on rights-based models of LGBT politics,¹⁶ the queer minoritarian organising in Germany has had to deal with the limitations—and punitive effects—of single-issue politics in a neo-liberal context. And I think in response to the ‘Gay Imperialism’ censorship there is some very fantastic spontaneous strategising and networking going on—this roundtable included—and the good thing is that those networks are still in place, and people are still talking to each other, and now we see that, in terms of the commentaries to the Suspect blog, there’s this amazing outpouring of support, and I think that’s really amazing. And I think that it’s not just an accident. A lot of that has been due to Jin’s incredible energy.

Sarah Bracke
Jen Petzen

Super amazing.

Like going to a different country, meeting all these fantastic people and making people more aware of specific situations and making ties to different contexts. And then when something happens, boom, I mean within just a week [of the Butler/Civil Pride Award Scandal] there were these amazing letters of support. I want to thank those people who were involved. I was very excited about at how fruitful that networking was.

I also wanted to speak about something Sarah and Sokari talked about, these difficult binds of how to respond to this dominant discourse. Another thing that I learned from the activist groups is that not everything merits a response, even if it is egregious, because if we respond every time they open their mouths and say something stupid we wouldn’t have time to do anything else. People work very hard putting their time into these networks and creating another kind of discourse instead of just acting defensively. We’re talking about the hard and sometimes boring work of going to network meetings once a month or whatever it takes, but then when something comes up they work together very well. They try to be proactive and create. They organize workshops, put out publications, move into networks that aren’t exactly obvious perhaps, or some that are asylum networks, anti-discrimination networks, legal networks, and get people on board that way. Then they have enough people to say, ‘okay, let’s have an event, let’s have a conference’, and then they organise the event on

¹⁶ There are of course other groupings who are organizing outside this model: trans and queer groups, including Kurdish ones, are creating their own political spaces.

racism and homophobia. And perhaps what happens next is a little particular to Berlin and a very urban context, and the strong history of migrant organising in Berlin, but then the people actually who are giving out the money begin to listen a little bit. The money for some problematic organisations has been going down, even though they still get big contracts for anti-racist organising.

Tamsila Tauqir

I do think that part of so-called challenging silencing, by challenging we're then reactive, we're responding, and we're always on the defensive rather than on the proactive side of the argument; we're not setting the agenda, we have an agenda set by others. I think one of our strategies is to gather—as we are now—wider networks that we've built so far and develop them, to build teams of political strategies, of activist strategies, of intellectual strategies. So you're looking at activists, you're looking at academics, you're looking at legal people, you're looking at people who understand politics and policy within our own circles, because this is what they're doing and they're a lot more organised. When I say 'they' I'm talking about the majority queer, the homo-nationalists; they're very well organised, whether they've done that purposefully or they've done that by accident, they're in that place. And again I'm trying not to fall into a place of being reactive but I do think we do have to some extent play on the same field in terms of addressing these issues, but do it in our own style, and lead the agenda, and lead the discussions. For example, I think that one way of doing this, as a strategy, is just to inundate the newspapers constantly with our articles, with our points, be succinct, be clear and that's about PR. It's about how we present ourselves, how we present the arguments, and the mainstream gay media is very good at presenting themselves in very positive media friendly ways, very fashionable ways that appeal to the majority, and that's why they get news coverage and we don't. I think that's part of the strategy that we need to work on. I think that's very important. I'm not saying I've got the answer of how we do that, but I do think by building our own teams around policy, around politics, around academics, around activism is very important.

Sarah Bracke

In the Belgian context, some of our friends and political allies have a bit of media access, as journalists, columnists or essayists. And while this is exciting in many ways, we're also confronted time and time again with the ways in which the critical voices somehow continue to be enclosed by the larger problematic frame, and do not manage to interrupt it, not because they are not critical enough, but because the framework is so hegemonic. The weight of this hegemony can be felt in how the critical pieces stand on their own, without for instance changing the editorial

lines of the journal or newspaper, or how they are often not understood or already dismissed even before an effort of understanding takes place. And then there's the disaster of on-line comment forums, and the space it gives to elaborate and license rampant racism. At the same time, however, in a liberal understanding of 'freedom of expression' all seems well: different perspectives are presented, comments and on-line forums are supposedly 'democratic', and so on. If one finds certain speech problematic, in this model one is invited to counter it with more speech—a 'balanced' debate between a vision pro and contra. This liberal model, however, does not take into account the fact that the landscape of speech (and silences) is a complicated one, fraught with structural power relations.

All of this brings us back to the question of finding new languages, as too often, so it seems to me, critiquing the existing speech is necessary to articulate our politics, but is not enough to interrupt hegemonic discourses. And in a sense critique keeps us entangled with those dominant discourses, to the extent that it is talking back to another discourse and therefore also investing energy in it. Clearly there's no option of not doing it, but there is a yearning and need of moving beyond and generating our own speech from other points of departure.

Tamsila Tauqir

We need to be more effective about drawing different strands together in terms of how we work, what we're saying, what we're doing, who we're getting involved; it needs to be far more intelligent than it has been done so far. I think we're getting there now, I think the Judith Butler scenario/situation is a good example where it was done very intelligently and we've had a fantastic response to that, and I think we need to maintain that momentum. Sustainability is another issue, it's about sustaining these momentums and having some sense of, 'where do we go next?' not simply leaving it down to chaos theory where 'it'll go wherever it'll go'; it needs to actually be collaboratively thought through to some extent. I'm not saying we can control everything, but I'm saying that there are elements that we can control, that we can manoeuvre and work in our favour, and we need to start looking at that collectively and as working groups even.

One more issue around strategies—we need to be able to engage with the masses, if I can say that word, in terms of if we're looking at building alliances, building links, most people in some way or another have an identity, and that identity for the majority of people, even in the west, isn't going to be white middle class; for most people in the west they're going to be at least working class, and white, well, that's another whole discussion as to what is white anyway, but we also need to recognise that class is a huge issue.

- Sokari Ekine I have a brief response to that which probably comes under 'otherwise', and that is taking care of ourselves, which I think is something that we don't always do. I know I'm personally guilty of that and I think it's quite common, so just dealing with our personal health, our bodies, our minds, when sometimes you just get sick from the silencing, from the attacks; it's very difficult to admit to ourselves the physical and emotional impact this kind of work has on us as individuals and collectively as well, and the tendency is for us just to keep going on, because otherwise the pressure of guilt falls upon you. And if we live in very hostile spaces again that impacts on us physically and mentally; how do we deal with that kind of hurt? So those are lots of questions, I don't know what the answers are.
- Jin Haritaworn I think in this process of silencing and bullying, we, and I can certainly say this about myself, experienced all kinds of things emotionally, and received all kinds of support as well. It is easy to lose sight of the bigger picture, especially in this kind of culture that Tamsila talked about earlier: the privatised, neoliberal culture where we are taught that certain things are really important, like having a job, 'functioning', being successful, being respectable ...etc. So sometimes keeping the bigger picture in mind helps, because obviously change is going to hurt and obviously some people are going to pay for it more than others. At the same time having been part of building a movement where we try to be aware of the stakes and risks involved for different people, and try to engage in collective care this way, has also been really healing. In Berlin, questions like 'Is this a kind of critique this particular organisation can make, because they have to survive in the non-profit industrial sector?' have been basic to our coalitions. Or: 'Is this a kind of critique that I as a junior non-tenured trans of colour academic can make, who is already targeted as the evil academic that is after the innocent activists? Is this a critique that a queer person of colour or a queer Muslim would pay for much more than a white person or a non-Muslim person, and if so, who would be in a better place to make it?' So I think that this has been a really important and wonderful lesson.
- Jen Petzen At certain moments it might be more advantageous to act as a member of one particular group than another. People are shifting roles and are able to be flexible. I think this is also a strategy that shares risk and allows people to take time out if they need it. It is part of the taking care of people. I think people forget and I think this is much more true of white activists who just sort of assume they can set the agenda, 'Yeah, let's go do this thing', instead of listening and asking, 'How can I support you in this? How ready are you to do this? What's your energy? What do you feel

- comfortable with?’ instead of just assuming everyone has the same positionality and then being part of the machinery that fosters guilt or not being productive enough.
- Tamsila Tauqir It’s not just about how do we horizon scan what’s happening next i.e., what are the next issues? It’s how, if in a year’s time we’re going to be this exhausted, are we going to replenish ourselves and how can we do that collectively?
- Sarah Bracke I think Sokari raised a crucial point, the question of care is indeed crucial for our conversation. The various ‘liabilities of critique’ which we discussed here, and which have affected, in different ways and degrees, our political and intellectual work as well as our everyday lives, are all characterized by a structurally uneven bearing of the consequences of certain critical actions or speech. Very concretely this means that people taking these risks and paying the price, are at some point in need of care. Care for individuals who are targeted or all of a sudden find themselves in the spotlight of aggressive attacks, and care for communities. It is crucial to see these practices of care that emerged not merely as attending to some urgent individual or particular needs, but to put them at the centre of our thinking of what it means to live in a neoliberal imperialist racist sexist heteronormative conditions—how to survive in collective ways, how to re-create bonds and communities. One thread throughout our discussion is the ways in which we confronted the limits of a neoliberal framework in which we are pushed to operate even partially. Thus, we rely on understandings of ‘freedom of speech’ and ‘against censorship’ in the face of blatant censorship, or on ‘identity’ in the face of violent universalism, even if the problems with these notions are clear. Care seems to belong to a different register. This is not to say that stands outside of the violent systems of oppression we are confronted with, it clearly doesn’t. Care is increasingly commodified and subject to neo-liberal managerialism. And feminist, anti-racist and postcolonial struggles and critique have made it clear enough that care is equally the site of the reproduction of existing power relations and oppressions. Yet practices of care also generate new possibilities and communities, new (political) subjects and ways of relating to each other.
- Editors Yes, the question of how we relate to each other and care for each other in ways that will generate and sustain new political possibilities is an important question to end on, particularly in thinking about how we do that transnationally and in our own local contexts. This is certainly a challenge when engaging in queer anti-racist critique. At the same time, as all of you have discussed, these challenges are already being taken up in positive and creative ways, particularly in terms of the new collective links

that are being forged and the strategic transnational interventions that are being made. So thanks again Jin, Jen, Sokari, Sarah and Tamsila for participating in this roundtable discussion and for sharing your insights and knowledge. We know that the discussion needs to continue and we look forward to future conversations.

Editors' Postscript

In the year since this roundtable conversation took place, several incidents and developments, some involving contributors to this special issue, have further highlighted the necessity of sustained joint academic and activist queer anti-racist work.

One example from the UK (also mentioned in the editorial) is the recent attempt to organise an 'East End Gay Pride' march in the Tower Hamlets borough of London. The march was organised as a response to a perceived threat by Muslims to gay people after the posting of stickers claiming the area to be a 'gay free zone'.¹⁷ The march, which intended to 'reclaim' the area and mark it out as a 'safe place' for gay people to live, reinforced notions that homophobia is particularly associated with Islam and Muslims.¹⁸ The march was eventually discredited and cancelled when it was exposed that particular members of the East End Gay Pride organising committee had links with the English Defence League.¹⁹ These links were revealed by Imaan, a queer Muslim organisation based in the UK, as well as by other local queer anti-racist groups.²⁰ In the run up to the eventual cancellation, various queer anti-racist organisers and groups, including the Safra Project, highlighted how the march was not a helpful response to the posting of the stickers, particularly as it was unclear who was responsible for their posting. Instead, the discourse unleashed by march organisers and its supporters undermined the important work of those working on social justice issues in London's east end.²¹

There are numerous other recent examples of queers of colour having to engage in and highlight the continued problems of gay racism. These have occurred across various localities and in different contexts, including academic settings. One

¹⁷ Jessica Geen 'Stickers declare 'gay-free zone' in east London (14 February 2011). <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2011/02/14/stickers-declare-gay-free-zone-in-east-london/>. Accessed 27 April 2011

¹⁸ This point is made by Pav Akhtar in his statement 'The EDL and Islamophobia should have no place in the LGBT community' (27 April 2011). <http://liberalconspiracy.org/2011/04/27/the-edl-and-islamophobia-should-have-no-place-in-the-lgbt-community/>. Accessed 27 April 2011.

¹⁹ As mentioned in the editorial of this special issue, the English Defense League (EDL) is an anti-Muslim nationalist organisation in the UK.

²⁰ Imaan press release (15 April 2011). <http://www.imaan.org.uk/>. Accessed 27 April 2011.

²¹ 'Safra Project statement on East End Gay Pride' (13 March 2011). http://safraproject.org/news_views.htm. Accessed 27 April 2011. See also Decolonize Queer statement 'From gay pride to white pride? Why marching on East London is racist' (15 March 2011). <http://www.decolonizequeer.org>. Accessed 27 April 2011; and Bent Bars statement 'Why Bent Bars will not be marching at the East End Gay Pride' (14 March 2011). <http://www.co-re.org/joomla/index.php/bent-bars-news>. Accessed 27 April 2011.

example is the Sexual Nationalisms conference at the University of Amsterdam in January 2011 (discussed in Jivraj and de Jong's article in this special issue). Another example is the 'Fundamentalism and Gender' conference at Humboldt University in Berlin where Jasbir Puar presented a paper on Israeli pinkwashing (reproduced in this issue). Outside of the academy, grassroots organisations such as Lesbiennes of Colour have been working against the virulent racism against Muslims in France. Their recent efforts have intervened in debates surrounding the banning of the headscarf and burkha, as well as the use of nationalist symbols in the official Paris gay pride poster that reproduced representations also used by the French National Front.²² In Germany too, queer anti-racists have recently challenged Israeli presence at a gay tourism fair—a move they see as part of the larger 'Brand Israel' campaign aimed at marketing Israel as a gay friendly and therefore, modern state.²³

In another related example from Malawi, Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga were charged with 'gross indecency' and 'unnatural acts' and sentenced to fourteen years imprisonment. Following a media outcry in the West and an intervention from the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, the couple were pardoned by the Malawian President. This decision was a positive one; however, as Sokari Ekine points out, it raises a number of concerns about who has the power to influence the political and legal agenda on issues of sexuality in African countries.²⁴ For example, since the release of Monjeza and Chimbalanga, Malawi has been at the forefront of European interventionist policies, including threats to withdraw aid, and even possibly have sanctions imposed if decriminalisation of homosexuality does not take place.²⁵ Activists in Africa have been working to highlight how such confrontational strategies can often make the situation much more difficult for local activists as they often set in motion a hierarchy or pitting of needs such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality against the health care and educational needs of children and women.²⁶

The formation of a transnational network of academics and activists has helped to sustain these efforts to expose and challenge local instances of homonationalism, gay racism and other forms of oppression affecting queers of colour. The recently formed Decolonize Queer network brings together people working on issues of gender and sexuality from a postcolonial and decolonizing perspective in order to share experiences and strategies from different contexts. The network's working

²² Lesbians of colour 'BASTA, le racisme et la xénophobie au nom de la lutte contre l'homophobie!' (12 April 2011). <http://www.espace-locs.fr/>. Accessed 27 April 2011.

²³ Palestinian Queers for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions statement 'ITB, Take Apartheid and Pinkwashing Out of Your Fair' (10 March 2011). <http://pqbds.wordpress.com/>. Accessed 27 April 2011. See also Puar in this issue.

²⁴ Sokari Ekine, 'Laws that criminalise same sex intimacy are making a mockery of our democracies'. (31 May 2010). <http://www.blacklooks.org/2010/05/laws-that-criminalise-same-sex-intimacy-are-making-a-mockery-of-our-democracies/>. Accessed 27 April 2011.

²⁵ Paul Canning. 'Malawi government threatens pro-LGBT groups, activists over foreign aid withdrawals.' (22 April 2011). LGBT Asylum News. <http://www.sdgln.com/news/2011/04/22/malawi-government-threatens-pro-lgbt-groups-activists>. Accessed 3 May 2011. See also Thom Chiumia 'Bamusi blasts NGOs, donors on gay promotion'. (6 April 2011). <http://www.nyasatimes.com/national/bamusi-blasts-ngos-donors-on-gay-promotion.html>. Accessed 3 May 2011.

²⁶ Informal discussions between Sokari Ekine and local activists.

group held its first seminar ‘Mapping Homonationalisms’ in Berlin in December 2010 and plans are being made for a follow up workshop to take place in July 2012. The network is a crucial tool for the building and strengthening of transnational solidarities and collaborative work. Thus, whilst instances requiring a queer anti-racist critique and response may be on the rise, collaboration and solidarity is also growing and strengthening.

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