

Intersectional feminist and queer geographies: A view from ‘down-under’

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Abstract

Despite rapid growth of geographies of genders and sexualities over the past decade, there is still a great deal of homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism within academic knowledges. A queer and feminist intersectional approach is one way to highlight gendered absences, institutionalized homophobia and transphobia. To understand the diversity of genders and sexualities, feminist and queer geographers must continue to talk about, for example, genders (beyond binaries), sex, sexualities, bodies, ethnicities, indigeneity, race, power, spaces and places. It is vitally important to understand the way that genders and sexualities intermingle in community group spaces, rural spaces, and within indigenous spaces in order to push the boundaries of what feminist and queer geographers understand to be relevant sites of queer intersectionality. Reflecting on the production of queer and feminist geographical knowledges ‘down-under’ may prompt others to consider the way place matters to intersectional feminist and queer geographies.

Keywords: feminist; genders; indigeneity; intersectionality; queer; sexualities

Introduction

For many years I have been heavily involved in organising queer events for my region’s - Hamilton in Aotearoa New Zealand - rainbow communities. This means working with and for communities with diverse genders, sexualities, and ethnicities. Most significant, however, was (and still is) the imperative of this work to acknowledge the indigenous politics of Māori sovereignty, or tino rangatiratanga of indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. Doing queer political action and research in a postcolonial settler society means that gender and sexual subjectivities are always entangled with race, ethnicity and postcoloniality. I am Pākehā (a Māori term for settler society white people) and I seek to unsettle my settler positionality. One way to do this is to recognise that concepts of sexuality, queerness, gender, and transgender do not translate easily into, or for, Māori. In Aotearoa New Zealand the

Māori term 'takatāpui' – which first appearing in the 1871 *Dictionary of the Māori Language* (third edition) - means 'intimate companion of the same sex' (Williams 1971, 147). Elizabeth Kerekere (2017, 81) explains further:

As Māori we claim our identity through whakapapa [genealogy] over countless generations of ancestors. Whakapapa places us within a whanau [family], hapū [sub-tribe] and iwi [tribe] which in turn connects us to marae [meeting house] and 82 specific tribal areas on Papatūānuku, our earth mother. Because of this, whakapapa is central to takatāpui [gender and sexually diverse Māori] identity and spiritual connection to tūpuna takatāpui [gender and sexual diverse ancestors]. It is clear that fluid sexual intimacy and gender expression existed among Māori in pre-colonial and post-contact times and has continued ever since. It was accepted without punishment and in spite of repressive English measures.

This intersectional space is the context from which I work as a Pākehā queer geographer, down-under, and my starting point for this 'intervention'. Feminist and queer geographers have been considering the role of space, place and intersectionality for some time arguing that gendered and sexed bodies and spaces are mutually constitutive (see Brown 2011 for a review). Much of this scholarship originates from the U. S. and the U. K. To rehearse the obvious geographical argument, place matters to the production of knowledge (Monk 1994). Here I consider the way in which place matters to the intersectional production of feminist and queer geography. Despite many commonalities in our international communities, national differences exist to the extent to which gender, sexuality, place and space research has developed intersectionally, and in its approaches and emphases. Research, activism and teaching feminist and queer geographies 'down-under' in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, for example, explores issues that are pertinent to Australasian society and spaces. Importantly, some of this work seeks to decolonise feminist and queer geographies.

In what follows I first outline the geographical research that brings together gender, sexuality and other axis of difference. I evaluate where and the ways in which gender,

sexuality and space scholarship emerged in Anglo-American geographical contexts. Next, particular attention is given to research that utilises an embodied approach to understand the difference that being ‘down-under’ makes to feminist and queer geographies. This ‘down-under’ embodied difference has meant that gender **and** sexuality has been the focus of many feminist **and** queer geographers. Furthermore, working in Australasia, postcolonial nations, means that ‘race’ and indigeneity informs much of this scholarship on gendered and sexed bodies and spaces.

Anglo-American intersectional spaces and places

Back in 1994, in the first issue of *Gender, Place and Culture*, David Bell, Jon Binnie, Julia Cream, and Gill Valentine’s (1994, 31) wrote ‘All hyped up and no place to go’. Here the authors consider the intersection of embodied genders, sexualities, and places. They draw on Judith Butler’s notion of performing gendered and sexed identities to think through two dissident sexual identities – the hypermasculine ‘gay skinhead’ at pro-sex demonstrations on London, and the ‘hyperfeminine lipstick lesbian’ in clubs. The article is provocative and encourages a rethinking of power relations beyond gendered and sexed spatial normativities (see Kirby 1995; Knopp 1995; Probyn 1995; Walker 1995). Crucially, this article provided an important starting point for Anglo-American geographers to address whiteness, genders and sexualities.

The first volume of *GPC* also included Peter Jackson’s (1994) ‘Black male’ article in which he applies an intersectionality approach to understand bodies, genders, sexualities and ‘race’ in spaces of media, sport and consumption. Jackson argues that during the 1980s men’s bodies appeared more frequently in television, film, and advertising. These media spaces, however, were filled with images of young, white, able-bodied and hyper heterosexual men.

Jackson analysis of the sports drink Lucozade's advertisements highlights the co-construction of black male bodies, sporting and sexual prowess.

It is useful to remember that much of the research on 'queer geographies' has been at the intersection of space, place, genders and sexualities, not because of the concept of intersectionality, per se, but because scholars have been motivated by the political potentials of queer theories. The concepts 'queer' and 'intersectionality' are complementary as Michael Brown (2011, 451) notes, 'there is a steadfast consensus that for geographies of sexuality to be truly queer they cannot focus exclusively on sexuality per se, but must also consider its connections with other dimensions of identity.' Places and spaces are a vital part of intersectional dynamics (Valentine 2007).

One of the most researched intersections is sex, gender, and place (Brown 2011; Johnston and Longhurst 2010; Taylor et al 2010). A number of geographers group together lesbians and gays as single populations (Browne 2007; Cooper 2006; Gorman-Murray 2007; Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009; Oswin 2010; Waitt 2005). Increasingly this scholarship speaks to the significance of spatial scale and considers the mutual constructions of lesbians and gay men from bodies, homes, communities and nations. Often critiqued for its narrow focus, this intersectional approach does little to decolonise Anglo-American approaches to sex, gender and place (Kulpa and Silva 2016).

Transgender subjectivities may further queer the intersectional scholarship on geographies of genders and sexualities (Halberstam 2005). Transphobia and sexism experienced by transgender people in homonormative gay and lesbian spaces, for example, prompt some geographers to suggest alternative places where support and security can be found (Rooke 2010). This scholarship challenges any notions that gender, place and space as separate entities and, at the same time, illustrates the power dynamics associated with the 'tyranny' of gendered spaces (Doan 2010). Also guided by queer theories, there are now

publications concerned with the intersection of genders and heterosexual identities (Dando 2009; Hubbard et al. 2008; Johnston 2006; Morrison 2012; Walsh 2007).

Queer intersectional geographical scholarship may also highlight the ways homonormative spaces can privilege whiteness and, as a consequence, are deeply racist. There have been compelling accounts on American homonormativities after 9/11 (Puar 2007). Other researchers have shown how homophobic discourses are put into operation in order to seek ethnic and national purity by, for example, reproducing narratives of Irishness (and attempting to exclude LGBTI performances) at St Patrick's Day parades in New York City and in forming a national closet (Mulligan 2008). Further, thinking through the intersectionality lens shows the prevailing whiteness of queer scholarship.

Class and sexuality is another fruitful intersection that is receiving more attention in queer geographies. Privilege and oppression are highlighted when thinking through the intersections of class positions, gender, and sexed identities. Some scholars delve deeply into class divisions of lesbian identity and spaces (Taylor 2007). The consideration of classed identities fractures the notion of collective lesbian identities, both emotionally and materially. The confluence of poor, working class, and heterosexual has also been considered in Vancouver (Boyd 2010), Butte, Montana (Dando 2009), and Nepal (Richardson et al 2009).

Work on sexuality, space, and age is another intersection that is gaining prominence. For example, some studies seek to understand the way in which heteronormative patriarchal discourses in Vietnam work to control young women (Rydstrom 2006). Bringing together sexuality, race, age, and education, another study considers a high school campus for Latina, Armenian, Filipina, African American, and Anglo girls. Here the girls use the 'everyone just wants to get along' discourse, while also performing racism and creating spatial segregation (Thomas 2011).

A queer intersectional approach to geography brings with it some methodological challenges particularly if one is attentive to embodied differences. Hayes-Conroy's (2010) concept of 'imagined bodily empathies', and de Jong's (2015) 'visceral belonging' with Dykes on Bikes are exciting developments for an intersectional queer geography. The 'visceral' concept focuses the researcher on the power of participants' emotions, their affective intensities and unconscious bodily judgements. Research at the intersection of gender, sexuality, space and place cannot expect to fully know participants' visceral realities, yet through empathetic communication, it is possible to 'imagine' what an encounter feels like by 'being there with participants: thinking through where things were shared and listening to how things were shared' (de Jong 2015, 6).

The deployment of 'relief maps' in classrooms at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona is a useful teaching method. This prompts student reflection on the powerful intersectional relationship between sexualities, genders, places and lived experiences (Ferré and Zárate 2016). By producing visual representations, students confront their position in respect to others and activity trains 'young people to reflect on the experiences of others' (Ferré and Zárate 2016, 618).

In summary, a number of feminist and queer geographers over the past decade have begun to draw on a wide range of critical social theories in order to develop a queer intersectional understanding of the ways in which bodies and subjectivities shape, and are shaped by, place. Back in 2001, Nast (2001, 14025) writes 'sexuality geography research needs to be more theoretically and empirically attuned to differences produced through normative and oppositional constructions of race, gender, class, disability age, religious beliefs, and nation'. The above highlights the scholarship that begins to address queer intersectional understandings of people and place.

Down-Under intersectional spaces and places

I turn my attention to the difference that being ‘down-under’ makes to the development of intersectional feminist and queer geographies. Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are positioned as both part of the Anglo-American centre, and peripherally ‘down-under’ (Peace, Longhurst and Johnston 1997; Johnston and Longhurst 2008). Unique and localised intersectional knowledges inform international debates, so that geographies of the ‘United Kingdom and America are unmarked by limit – they constitute the field of geography ... By contrast, geographies of other people and places [such as ‘down-under’ geographies] become marked as Other – exotic, transgressive, extraordinary’ (Berg and Kearns 1998, 129). The beginnings of these ‘extraordinary’ Australasian feminist and queer geographies reflect a commitment to intersectionality based on unique localised knowledges that both inform by, and contribute to, international debates.

In 1987 the Australian geographer - Louise Johnson - arrived at the University of Waikato in Aotearoa to fill a feminist geography position. Louise developed feminist geography courses that critiqued the discipline. Her vision was clear:

For me the challenge is to create a feminist geography which has feminism at its centre; to formulate an alternative discourse which offers a fundamental and thorough critique of the discipline but which also moves beyond analysis to a reconstruction of the subject, pedagogy and politics of geography (Johnson 1990, 17).

Johnson developed courses that included gender and sexuality such as: ‘Women in Australasia: Gendering Space’ and a third year course ‘Feminist Geography: Critique and Construct’. In 1989 Johnson taught ‘Socialism, Feminism and Social Policy’. Research mirrored this intersectional approach to pedagogy, with Johnson insisting, back in 1989, that starting with the space of the body would challenge the masculinism and heteronormativity of geography. Johnson was a key appointment, and she was followed by Wendy Larner in 1991

who taught a graduate course of feminism and postmodernism. Robyn Longhurst arrived in 1992 and continued this focus on power, identity and social justice through an examination of the way in which bodies and spaces are not just gendered, but sexualised, raced, classed, (dis)abled and so on (Longhurst 1994, 1995).

To reiterate my point, over the years Australasian geographers have not just added sexuality to a line-up of other topics but have actually questioned the production of heterosexist and disembodied geographical knowledge. Insisting on the mutual construction of gendered and sexed bodies, place and space, these Australasian feminist geographers were – in the late 1980s and early 1990s - influenced by Australian feminist philosophers and poststructuralists such as Elizabeth Grosz (1989), Moria Gatens (1983), and Elspeth Probyn (1995) whose work on embodiment was ground breaking.

These feminist and queer geographers paved the way for me. In 1992 I wrote to the Waikato Geography Department inquiring about doing a Masters degree. I arrived at a time in the early 1990s when much work focused on how genders and sexualities are ‘lived’ and ‘embodied’ in particular Antipodean places and spaces. For example, it was in 1992 that Johnson turned her attention to the ways in which heteronormativity is built into the Australian family home (Johnson 1992). In 1993 I began a small research project on lesbians – their gendered and sexed identities - and homes in Aotearoa (Johnston and Valentine 1995) and inspired by a host of feminist, queer geographers, poststructuralists and other writers concerned with bodies, in 1994 I conducted research on the gendered and sexed bodies of women involved in body building (Johnston 1996).

In contrast to my experience of conducting feminist and queer embodied and intersectional geography down-under, Anglo American geographies of sexuality began in the 70s and 80s, for the most part, mapping gay spaces (see Castells and Murphy 1982; Lauria and Knopp 1985; Weightman 1981). This was not something that happened in Australasia.

Another difference between Australasian and Anglo-American geographies of sexuality is, as I have already noted, that the work carried out in Australasia was inspired by a type of embodied and queered feminism (especially at Waikato University). Australia, in particular, has a strong tradition of cultural geography (Stratford 1999) and it is under this label that a great deal of space, place, and sexuality scholarship circulates.

My last point - what is interesting about much of this work that centres on Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region more generally - is that it does not just pay attention to sexuality but rather to the intersections between sexuality, postcoloniality, decoloniality, indigeneity, 'race' and racism. Binnie and Valentine wrote, back in 1999, 'There have been few studies explicitly concerned with sexuality and the geographies of 'race' and racism' (181-82). While this Anglo-American absence started to be addressed in the early 2000s (see, for example, Elder, Knopp and Nast 2003), it seems that quite a number of 'down-under' scholars produced work that focuses on the intersection between gender, sexuality and 'race'.

I began this article asserting the importance of always thinking about genders, sexualities and indigeneity in Aotearoa. Some publications are directly concerned with the intersections of genders, sexualities, and Māori (Hutchings and Aspen 2007). The importance of language is paramount, as illustrated in the publication called *Ko Ia He or She* produced by the Hau Ora Takatapu (Māori HIV Prevention Programme, New Zealand AIDS Foundation). The author Jordon Harris explains:

In the language of our ancestors there was no pronoun to distinguishing gender such as he or she, there was ia, which was used to distinguish that person regardless of their gender. So was there a Māori word for Transgender? Were our ancestors aware that for some, gender is not defined at birth? (Harris 2005, 3).

Alternative feminist and queer geographies that address the effects and affects of colonization can be found down-under. Some examples that incorporate feminist, queer and indigenous

perspectives include: Māori women's bodies and sacred spaces (August 2005); white bodies, beaches and the politics and pleasures of suntanning (Johnston 2005); indigenous sexualities (Hutchings and Aspin 2007); postcolonial and indigenous queer methodologies (Gorman-Murray, Johnston, and Waitt 2010); embodied feelings of pride and shame at Uluru (Waitt, Figueroa and McGee 2007); Māori transgender politicians (Johnston and Longhurst 2010); the politics of reproduction for Māori and birth practices (Longhurst 2008; Simmonds 2011, 2016); maternities in PNG (Underhill-Sem 2001); Māori diverse tourisms (Ringham, Simmonds and Johnston 2016); and, Māori food and visceral tourism geographies (Modlik and Johnston 2017). It is possible that in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand our colonial histories and postcolonial everyday spaces mean that matters of race brush against matters of sexuality and gender in all contexts.

Conclusion

Despite the rapid growth of geographies of genders and sexualities over the past decade, there is still a great deal of homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism within academic spaces.

The topic of genders, sex and sexualities cannot just be added to an unchanged geographical cannon. A queer and feminist intersectional approach is useful when challenging the academy and highlighting the absences, institutionalized homophobia and transphobia. To understand the diversity of genders and sexualities alongside other axis of difference, feminist and queer geographers must continue to talk about, for example, genders (beyond binaries), sex, sexualities, bodies, erotics, emotions, race, indigeneity, pleasures, power, spaces and places. It is vitally important, for example, to understand the way that genders and sexualities intermingle in community group spaces, rural spaces, and within Māori spaces in order to push the boundaries of feminist and queer intersectional geographical knowledges.

Reflecting on the production of queer and feminist geographical knowledges ‘down-under’ may prompt others to consider the way place matters to intersectional geographies. The longstanding ‘down-under’ focus on queer and embodied geographies has brought together feminist and queer geographical frameworks in order to understand the co-constructions of genders and sexualities. Further, living and working ‘down-under’ means there is a political imperative to acknowledge the confluence of gender, sex, race and indigeneity in our postcolonial nations.

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