

CALL FOR PAPERS

Love, Sex, Desire & the (Post)Colonial

**Senate House, University of London
28 – 29 October 2011**

For the most part, postcolonial studies, quite understandably, has privileged the political. Historical and economic processes, forms of identification (race and, to lesser extent, gender) and categories of difference have been refracted through this particular lens. The affective, however, has received scant critical attention. Love, sex and desire are usually allegorized, often standing in as sites of political conflict. This mode of analysis was initiated by the critic who has most carefully attended to the dynamics of desire within colonial contact zones, Frantz Fanon. By contesting the universality of the psychoanalytic paradigm, his analysis of forms of colonial alienation is invariably circumscribed by the political. Alienation, desire, neuroses and psychosis are nothing other than indices of socio-political processes. Many postcolonial critics have followed his lead (e.g. Anne McClintock, Homi Bhabha, Robert Young, etc.).

However, there is an alternative tradition, such as represented in queer and feminist studies as well as recent work on 'affective communities' and performativity. Notably, Chicana, Asian, and Black feminists, queer theorists, and creative writers, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Hanif Kureishi, Mahesh Dattani, Audre Lorde, Reinaldo Arenas and Thomas Glave, have called attention to the power of the erotic, queer desire, and love. Specifically, these postcolonial authors and critics engage with forms of the affective that incorporate, exceed, threaten or destabilize the

political. Special issues of *WSQ* on “The Global and the Intimate” (2006) and *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* on “Thinking Sexuality Transnationally” (1999) transgress a narrowly political perspective. *Queer Diasporas* (2000) explores the mobility of sexuality. Leela Gandhi’s *Affective Communities* (2006), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2002), and Sara Ahmed’s work on affect explore new directions for love, sexuality and desire. This conference builds on such approaches and goes beyond the dominant analytical approach in postcolonial studies, which continues to place emphasis on love, sex and desire as a subset of the political.

The affective brings into play questions of sexuality and desire. Given the brutality, legal and extra-legal, directed against homosexuals in the postcolonial world, the issue of homosexuality needs urgent attention. Within postcolonial nationalist discourses, the figure of the homosexual, male or female, is often degraded and aligned with Western perversion in such a way as to secure the moral authority of the postcolonial state. At the same time, the queer often embodies alternatives to hegemonic and/or oppressive articulations of imagined communities and subjectivity. We are interested in papers which offer interventions to prevailing social and political discourses. These may include explorations of non-heteronormative forms of sexual expression within colonial and postcolonial contexts, discourses of desire, debates around the intersections between nationalist and rights-based discourses, the trope of the homosexual within literary texts, queer perspectives, reflections on alternative forms of citizenship, the dissident tradition, etc.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, ideological and religious polarization has been disturbingly charged with explicit overtones of sexuality and desire. The troubling photographs of Abu Ghraib, the purported sexual and social

oppression of Muslim women and girls, the projection of sexual desire onto political extremism, all testify to an older orientalism, which has been reconfigured, once again, to justify the West's hegemonic ambitions.

In this fraught polarized world, various theories (by Jacques Derrida, Anthony Appiah, Pheng Cheah, etc.) around the filiative, ethical responsibility to others the post-postmodern turn to reconstructed universals (such as love and beauty), and cosmopolitan commitment are particularly resonant. Love, friendship and ethics have become renewed sites of an engagement with the other. Ethics, in recent postcolonial studies, has come to represent a means of going beyond the political, for better or for worse. In the putative absence of alternative political visions, philosophy, it seems, trumps politics.

This interdisciplinary conference is the first of its kind to bring together into productive confrontation issues of love, sex, desire and the postcolonial. It aims to promote collaborative work between academics, activists, and the non-profit community. We invite panel proposals or single presentations from a range of disciplines (including but not restricted to anthropology, legal theory, history, sociology, geography, literary studies, cultural studies, media studies, drama, political science, development studies) on any topic pertaining to the above concerns. We particularly welcome participants from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia.

This conference is co-hosted by Royal Holloway, University of London and the Brunel Centre for Contemporary Writing at Brunel University as well as the Brunel Interdisciplinary Network on Gender and Sexuality, West London.

Please send single abstracts of 250-300 words or panel proposals of no more than 1000 words as well as brief biographies to the convenors, Mark Mathuray, Lucienne Loh,

and Wendy Knepper by May 1st, 2011. The time-limit for each paper is approx. 20 minutes.

Please email your proposals to Denise Odell at denise.odell@brunel.ac.uk. We hope to respond by June 1st 2011. For more details, visit the Institute of English Studies, University of London at <http://ies.sas.ac.uk>.