Teaching homocapitalism with Rahul Rao's *out of time the queer politics of postcoloniality*: navigating against queer inclusivity as a way of shoring up capital

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Introduction

In an interview entitled, 'Rituals of Exclusion', Michel Foucault (1989) describes the University as a transformative societal ritual. At University, students are put out of society's circulation during which they are taught the values of society to prepare them for reabsorption and reintegration. In this liminal phase, university educators I contend have a responsibility to be inspired by the sense of community, diversity and care with which our students arrive, while imparting upon them the skills and knowledge to address the pressures of the adult world. Jack Halberstam offers an account of the creativity and sense of community with which our students may enter University. 'Children are not coupled, they are not romantic, they do not have a religious mentality, they are not afraid of death or failure, they are collective creatures*[and]* they are in a constant state of rebellion against their parents,' (Halberstam 2011, 47). (Rao 2020) text *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality* offers a meticulous and compelling guide to help our students navigate the potentially deceptive strategies of the adult world, which redirect youthful queer desires for radically different futures, fixating them instead to the postcolonial syllogisms Byrd's epigraph alerts us to. 'In contexts where queerness is criminalised, homocapitalism offers a persuasive strategy for queer inclusion operative in a moment in which homonationalism has not (yet?) succeeded in drawing recalcitrant societies into its embrace or, worse, has aroused their antipathy,' (Rao 2020, 151). Through the concept of homocapitalism, Rao cautions against a politics of inclusion that co-opts queer cultures and queer activisms in order to preserve a racialised capitalist order. Rao encourages our students to be mindful of a non-redistributive recognition politics (Duggan cited in Rao 2020, 153), and shares a savviness against the potential instrumentalization of queer inclusion by financial institutions and political elites.

Global financial institutions (GFIs) such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) claim to be increasingly inclusive of LGBT rights agendas. Rao places these shifts within the context of the Global Financial Crisis and a longer history of using sex and gender to manage the crises of capital. The concept of homocapitalism provides students with a cautionary manual for what is at stake in the kinds of concessions inclusion through capitalism entails. LGBT activist networks in Uganda and India, where much of the research for this text is conducted, negotiate moves from the global development industry to pacify their struggles. This pacification means that rebellious parts of social identities are abandoned, and only those fungible parts of social identities are awarded a future (Agathangelou 2013), and inclusion through homocapitalism re-work queer

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As civil rights, queer rights, and other rights struggles have often cathected liberal democracy as the best possible avenue to redress the historical violences of exclusions from the state, scholars and activists committed to social justice have been left with impossible choices: to articulate freedom at the expense of another, to seek power and recognition in the hopes that we might avoid the syllogisms of democracy created through colonialism (Byrd 2011, xxiv).

activism to preserve capitalist structures. Rao explores how investments in neoliberal reason provide a diverted promise of futurity 'splitting off "productive" from "unproductive" queers with insidious implications for queer anti-capitalist struggle' (Rao 2020, 139).

Instrumentalisation of LGBT activism by GFIs

Homocapitalism traces a shift in the development industry, and particularly the World Bank's view on sexuality, following the saliency of these issues in domestic politics, the impact of the HIV-pandemic and the influence of LGBT staff within the World Bank. In the place of the industry's self-congratulatory rhetoric, however, Rao focuses on the instrumentalization of gender as a response to crisis, and more specifically how gender and sexuality are brought into the GFI agenda in order to respond to a crisis in capital and support neoliberal responses of the post-Washington Consensus (Rao 2020, 141). One of these responses includes GFI queer costing, which identifies the economic cost of homophobia and transphobia legislation in terms of a percentage of GDP. The Bank's homophobic and transphobic domestic legislation through economic costings puts the question of economic growth ahead of human rights.

The Bank and the IMF rely on what Rao calls Gay Conditionality as a way to manage donor funds based on the recipient countries' LGBT rights regimes. These practices claim to promote LGBT rights, while GFIs impose structural conditions that harm these same communities and reinforce heteronormative structures. The Bank hailed the participation of queer adivasis, the indigenous peoples of the Indian subcontinent, in various development projects in a way that Padini Nirmal says conflates queer freedoms with economic growth. These projects in Attappady, Kerala, for example, may promote economic development but have transformed adivasi queer gender relations through the imposition of gender differences in practices of spirituality, labour and communality (Padini Nirmal cited Rao 2020, 147). 'This conflation might account for the Bank's inability to imagine queers as (wanting to be) anything other than upwardly mobile capitalist subjects,' (Rao 2020, 147).

Gay Conditionality imposed by GFIs responds to crises in the capital through racially deflecting 'queer saving' to the Global South, with implications for local activism. In Tanzania, Uganda and Ghana activists identify how 'the refusal of Western aid on sexual rights grounds would reinforce perceptions of the Westernness of homosexuality, scapegoat queers for reduced aid flows, and entrench power disparities between donor and recipient countries' (Rao 2020, 111). GFI development policies have structural impacts on sexual diversity, promoting those queer livelihoods and gender differences that can reproduce consumerism. These practices further reinforce a dominant belief within the Bank and the IMF that poor countries are more homophobic than rich ones.

Queerness as such is being increasingly represented as only hospitable for the elite. In July 2013, the United Nations Human Rights Office launched a global public education campaign for LGBT equality called 'Free & Equal' in India that predominately shows LGBT lives through elite representation. Access to capital and elite avenues of power shape the representation of gay culture in Indian cinema, whereby consumption is represented as a route into citizenship. Through Wendy Brown, Rao presents how the conflation of growth and rights means that those who do not contribute to growth can be sacrificed.

> On the one hand, queer consumption and visual representations thereof give queers an opportunity to navigate and occupy public space, particularly in contexts in which queerness is stigmatised. At the same time, the representations through which the market hails queers constitute and consolidate queer subjectivities in what are often deeply elitist ways, rendering other expressions of queerness unintelligible (Rao 2020, 149-150).

Crisis in capital and moral panics around sexuality

Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall amongst others and extensive empirical work on the growth of the Pentecostal congregation in Uganda, Rao maps out the saliency of moral panics under certain material and economic conditions. 'Neoliberal capitalism nurtures the very phobias against which it also inveighs' (Rao 2020, 151), whereby structural adjustment policies embolden certain institutions with specific implications for sexual health programmesand create a fertile ground for moral panics around sexuality:

> Moral panics thrive in the fertile soil of these anxieties, fastening on a range of marginal figures including queers, sex workers, 'witches', women who wear short skirts, and others who appear to disrupt normative kinship, as evidence of the supposed impossibility of managing the tension between money making and morality (Rao 2020, 162).

This research provides our students with an astuteness of how economic shifts impact on how and why different political and social bodies can shape moral panics at different points in time. Rao addresses the importance of the rise of Pentecostal Christianity Churches in Uganda, as members of society have greater trust in religious institutions during the economic hardships following the structural adjustment programs. Local LGBT activists must therefore manoeuvre around the emboldened role of religious groups in Uganda as well as the continuing role of GFI and the development industry. Competing narratives explain the decline in HIV rates in the mid-to-late 1990s, between, for example, faith-based groups defending abstinence, the NGO sector defending the distribution of condoms, and the preferred explanation of the importance of grassroots community-based care that encourage frank conversations about AIDS (Rao 2020, 158). While Pentecostalism provided a way for Ugandans to envision a future following war, neoliberalism and HIV/AIDS of the 1980s, this future is mapped through questions of sexuality (Rao 2020, 155).

The Pentecostal Church favoured ideas of growth and wealth, and the stigmatisation of poverty as something of the past, from which believers can be delivered, with implications for the Kuchu community. 'In Uganda, the term "kuchu", meaning "same" in Swahili, has emerged as an umbrella signifier for sex and gender nonconformity' (Rao 2020, 29), and while some disassociate from the label, it is the preferred label for sexual minorities there. Kuchus have been scapegoated for failing to perform the values of growth and production associated with the family, which threatens networks of exchange. Neoliberalism meant that poor Ugandans were often pushed into illicit activities and felt they could not live up to professed standards, and they started to feel panic around moral degeneration and decay. 'In this context, kuchus – not unlike urban women in an earlier historical moment – provide a visible and vulnerable focal point around which anxieties about the breakdown of moral norms governing kinship and sexuality have coalesced' (Rao 2020, 161). Homophobic images present the Kuchus as scapegoats for wider economic downturns in Uganda, and as backed by Western funders and as dismantling local kin networks. GFIs and 'donor pronouncements on LGBT rights fail to register the relationship between neoliberalism and homophobia' (Rao 2020, 23). Rao rectifies this insidious elision and highlights the implications the promise of inclusion and futurity awarded by homocapitalism has on queer activism and social justice more broadly. Inclusion for queers is conditioned through the promise of production and a useful contribution to economic growth and stability.

Conclusion

As students travel and transition through the liminal phase of university education and engage in activism, they face pressures for economic inclusion and the implications this has for queer rebellion. In building transnational solidarities, our students can learn from activists in the Global South, who confront empires' long history of moving the 'responsibility' for 'managing' crises in the capital to the Global South. Activist groups and anticolonial movements have had to navigate the impositions of GFI and NGOs to pacify their struggles in the service of the capital

(Hanafi and Tabar 2011). 'In a shockingly brief span of time, queer subjects – once imagined as a quasi-proletariat – have come to be envisaged as human capital in the now ubiquitous business case for LGBT rights' (Rao 2020, 165). This inclusion, which Rao explores through the concept of homocapitalism has consequences for queer expression and communities. In Uganda, for example, 'communicative and financial imperatives of working with a transnational "non-profit industrial complex" have steered local Kuchu organisations away from community-based work towards an increasingly narrow agenda focused on the courts, media, and fundraising' (Rodriguez cited in Rao 2020, 166). Rao's text encourages students to explore global politics through the experiences of activists on the ground and in the Global South and contributes to queer activists' refusal to create hierarchies between different struggles (Allouche 2019; Ritchie 2010) and to place the question of sexual liberation before poverty alleviation or national liberation and other decolonial struggles.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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