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On the Historiographical Politics of Queer Sexuality: Thinking across the Post-Colonial and LGBTQ² Subjects of History

Introduction

Opening up the ‘archive’ of the historiography of sexuality, one immediately confronts a striking paradox: if so many historians nowadays acknowledge the ‘social constructionist’ nature of (homo)sexuality, why does a body of literature called ‘gay and lesbian history’ or ‘queer history’ still exist?³ Alternatively put, if sexuality is indeed widely recognized as ‘socially constructed’ across time and place, why are historians still assuming a core set of essential qualities that unite all those historical scholarships categorised under ‘gay and lesbian history’ or ‘queer history’, or even the ‘history of sexuality’? One might recall here David Halperin’s remark: ‘Once upon a time, the very phrase “the history of sexuality” sounded like a contradiction in terms: how, after all, could sexuality have a history? Nowadays, by contrast, we are so accustomed to the notion that sexuality does indeed have a history that we do not often ask ourselves what kind of history sexuality has’.⁴

In this paper, I wish to first and foremost respond to this important question by turning to the subaltern studies project and post-colonial historiography. My discussion begins with applying subaltern and post-colonial theory to my concerns about the essentialising tendencies of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) historiography. I

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² Aware of the potential theoretical distinctions between ‘LGBT’ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgendered) and ‘queer’ history, I nonetheless group them together under the more inclusive rubric ‘LGBTQ’ throughout this article only for the purpose of convenience.

³ For an illuminating discussion on the methodological role of the archive in the history of sexuality, see Anjali Arondekar, ‘Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14 (2005), pp. 10-27.

⁴ David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 105.

should mention at the outset that I do not attempt to engage with the essentialism-versus-social constructionism debate regarding the nature of sexuality, at least not in fully explicit terms.⁵ Rather, my goal is to conceptualise the queer historical subject in terms of ‘historiographical politics’, or the modality of epistemic governance in which systems of power relations get interrogated by using the historical project as an intellectual tool that challenges the discursive constructions of objects of knowledge through different historiographies (e.g., Marxism, nationalism, regionalism, post-colonialism, modernism, etc.). In this sense, the concrete political status of the objects of knowledge is ‘problematized’ as a result of effecting and disrupting these various historiographic approaches.

Following this brief appropriation of post-colonial studies, my discussion moves on to providing a much lengthier analysis of the history of modern US LGBTQ history. In my survey of the field, I hope to show that, in adopting a ‘social constructionist’ position, the majority of the existing national and local narratives of LGBTQ history have daunted to demonstrate how sexual practices and meanings differ across time and region; taken together, they have nonetheless concerned themselves primarily with providing ‘successful’ and ‘coherent’ recuperative accounts of LGBTQ people and experience in the past. In other words, my analysis in this section of the paper tracks an existing tendency among historians of sexuality to reproduce an essentialist understanding of sexuality while claiming to provide a social constructivist perspective in their work. By drawing on the potential lessons from the debates in post-colonial theory and historiography, I end with a productive note that emphasises my central thesis concerning the development of the historiographical politics of queer sexuality. Specifically, I argue that rather than characterizing the often disenfranchised historical subjects—such as that of the subaltern group, of the queer community, or of the third world—as subjects whose ‘invisible’ voices of the past need to be recuperated, it is more useful to think of them as comprising shifting historical positions under which their historiographic significations thus function as emerging sites of contest and possibility. Ultimately, my aim for positing this analytic methodology is to provide a refreshing way for scholars to think across the post-colonial and LGBTQ subjects of history.

⁵ For an early defence of the social constructionism position, which illuminates the entire essentialism-versus-social constructionism debate remarkably well, see David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 41-53.

Post-Colonial Lessons

Let me begin with Gayatri Spivak's defence of a deconstructionist reading of the Subaltern Studies project in her important essay 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography'. Refusing to describe the primary agenda of the Subaltern Studies collective as merely granting a unitary voice to the subaltern historical figure in order to combat elitist historiography, Spivak argues that it would be more appropriate to view the role of the subaltern historian as documenting and providing examples of various 'discursive displacements' that challenge not only the dominant Colonial discourse—the grand narrative of the West—but also the inherently problematic homogeneity of the historical status of the de-privileged subaltern group.⁶ Moreover, these 'discursive displacements' would simultaneously effect discontinuities between the privileged and subordinated subject-positions, rendering a consistent and stable conceptualization of their relationship untenable.

According to Spivak, when 'we look at the varieties of activity treated by [the Subaltern Studies collective], subaltern, insurgent, nationalist, colonialist, historiographic, it is a general field of failures that we see. In fact the work of the collective is making the distinction between success and failure indeterminate'.⁷ On the next page, Spivak succinctly concludes that the 'group's own practice can then be graphed on this grid of "failures"'.⁸ In this sense, Spivak brings the Subaltern Studies project on to a terrain of historical and historiographical interventions beyond the simple task of recuperating the subaltern past. Through the recognition and participation of a grid of 'failures' in various histories and historiographies—of modernism, Marxism, nationalism, colonialism, feminism, among others—representations of the subaltern, as both the object and the subject of historical interpretation, 'undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and "situate" the effect of the subject as subaltern' in varying historical investigations, thus demonstrating that 'the essentializing moment, the object of their criticism, is irreducible'.⁹

Similarly, Gyan Prakash considers the task of writing histories of the third world as a critical engagement, producing a form of historical writing that is not founded in some

⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, ed. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 197.

⁷ Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies', p. 200.

⁸ Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies', p. 201.

⁹ Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies', p. 205.

identity: individual, class, or structure. In line with Spivak, who discusses the 'strategic use of positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest', Prakash insists that to treat the third world as a viable category of historical study does not necessarily invoke an irreducible, fixed object.¹⁰ Rather, a strategic use of the analytic category of the third world:

requires the rejection of those modes of thinking which configure the third world in such irreducible essences as religiosity, underdevelopment, poverty, nationhood, non-Westernness ... This disruption makes it possible to treat the third world as a variety of shifting positions which have been discursively articulated in history. Viewed in this manner, the Orientalist, nationalist, Marxist and other historiographies become visible as discursive attempts to constitute their objects of knowledge, that is, the third world.¹¹

In other words, far from being compartmentalized in a concealed geographical space, the third world as figured in and formed through the historical project declares critical affiliations and undeniable relationships with the first world. Correspondingly, the third world's 'third-worldness', which comprises historiographical fragmentations and ruptures, penetrates and reworks the first world's comfortable imagination and subordination of the third world. Even though third world members, such as the Orientalist and the subaltern, can never 'speak'—because the moment they 'speak' they reify the very discursive framework of Colonial discourse and Western domination that initially produced their epistemological grounding—the third world, according to Prakash's analysis, emerges as a series of historical processes that cuts across specific identities, relying on their contingent (re)constructions and (re)articulations.¹² Indeed, writing histories of the third world in this way arguably moves scholars beyond the essentialism-versus-social-constructionism debate over identity categories, because it forces us to think in terms of larger historiographical politics and, accordingly, find benefits from the debate itself in constructing alternative visions of the relationship between the past, the present, and the future.

¹⁰ Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies', p. 205 (emphasis original).

¹¹ Gyan Prakash, 'Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography', in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. by Vinayak Chaturvedi (New York: Verso, 2000), pp. 163-4.

¹² See, for example, Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313. Spivak's goal in this seminal piece, other than demonstrating that the subaltern 'cannot speak', is to show that even the works of influential post-structuralist thinkers, such as Michel Foucault, are marked by obvious 'blind spots', most notably those that overlook notions of imperial domination.

Reproducing Essentialism

Similar to the task of writing third world histories, the rapid growth of US LGBTQ histories since the 1980s has furnished an unprecedented and complicated set of historiographical politics around the tension between 'national' frameworks and the subsequent 'local' narratives they prompted. Historian Marc Stein, for instance, has commented on this making of American queer historiography in a review essay: 'Since 1983 U.S. LGBT historical scholarship ... has developed into multiple directions, but much of it has taken the form of local studies that respond to [John] D'Emilio's national narrative'.¹³ At the same time, Stein observes that the emergence of queer historiography based on local analyses 'ha[s] led to hyperbolic claims about which were the queerest places and which the most challenging for queers (and, by extension, queer researchers). Moreover, professional pressures to demonstrate national significance have encouraged premature pronouncements about the typical, atypical, or prototypical aspects of local phenomena'.¹⁴

Most scholars working in the field of LGBTQ history today consider themselves as part of the social constructionist camp.¹⁵ In fact, many of them are likely to consider the essentialism-versus-social constructionism debate somewhat dated, a thing of the past. Already in the 1980s, anthropologist Carol Vance observed that 'the word "essentialist", to some ears, sounds increasingly pejorative—a dirty word, a contemptuous put-down, a characterization of being hopelessly out of date'.¹⁶ However, as I hope to demonstrate below, the tendency for historians of sexuality to assume from the outset a social constructionist position in their work actually reinforces essentialist notions of sexuality in significant ways. The growing historiographic tension between national narratives and local studies in modern US LGBTQ historical scholarship is a stellar example of this essentialism-reinforcing process. Almost an intellectual replacement of the essentialism-versus-social constructionism debate, the task of reorienting modern US LGBTQ historiography in terms of geographical sophistication squarely conveys an essentialist

¹³ Marc Stein, 'Theoretical Politics, Local Communities: The Making of U.S. LGBT Historiography', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 11 (2005), p. 607.

¹⁴ Stein, 'Theoretical Politics', p. 608. One could argue that Marc Stein's generalizations are more applicable to studies in gay and lesbian history than the history of bisexuality and transsexuality. Consider, for example, Steven Angelides, *A History of Bisexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁵ Lisa Duggan, 'From Instincts to Politics: Writing the History of Sexuality in the U.S.', *Journal of Sex Research*, 27 (1990), pp. 95-109.

¹⁶ Carol Vance, 'Social Construction Theory: Problems in the History of Sexuality', in *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality?*, ed. by A. van Kooten Nierkerk and T. Van Der Meer (London: GMP, 1989), p. 14.

assumption about a core set of qualities that unify various historical analyses, whether offering a national story or illuminating a local picture of LGBTQ history.

In this section, I explore the larger historiographical politics of queer sexuality by treating Stein's eloquent overview of twentieth century US LGBTQ historiography as my main analytic point of departure. Stein's main assertion is that the 'national' framework developed by D'Emilio in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* has functioned as the primary working framework for the subsequent 'localized' studies of LGBTQ communities.¹⁷ But Stein makes this historiographical claim by drawing on only seven monographs, including D'Emilio's book and his own work on Philadelphia. His analysis misses, for example, the ways in which D'Emilio has critically relied on the writings of a previous generation of historians, including Jonathan Ned Katz and Toby Marotta.¹⁸ In many crucial ways, Katz and Marotta's narratives (as significant as D'Emilio's) remain the field's major frames of reference. Equally overlooked, the trend in making national claims within US LGBTQ historiography never disappeared entirely when local narratives emerged, and, in fact, it became popular once again as early as the mid-1990s. While all of these national and local analyses have claimed to demonstrate how sexual practices and meanings differ across time and region, taken together, they have primarily focused on providing 'successful' and 'coherent' accounts of the LGBTQ past. When viewed from a broader perspective of historiographical politics, despite (or because of) their geographical sophistication, these accounts actually represent an intellectual move that reproduces, rather than repudiates, essentialism by connecting subjects of history in an unifying recuperative ethos of what scholars call 'LGBTQ historiography'.

The fact that D'Emilio's book is not the first scholarly effort that takes gay and lesbian American history seriously is in and of itself a significant challenge to Stein's over-appreciation of the impact of D'Emilio's work. As early as 1976, the same year in which the first volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* first appeared in French, Jonathan Ned Katz published one of the landmark books that 'excavated' the field of gay and lesbian history in the United States: *Gay American History: Lesbian and Gay Men in the*

¹⁷ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority, 1940-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1983]).

¹⁸ Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*, rev. ed. (New York: Meridian, 1992 [1976]); Toby Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality: How Lesbians and Gay Men Have Made Themselves a Political Social Force in Modern America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981).

USA.¹⁹ No less than D'Emilio's study, Katz's research has provided the main working framework to which many recent scholars of American LGBTQ history have responded. One of Katz's introductory remarks already anticipated the leading preoccupation of subsequent historians working on LGBTQ issues in America:

The focus here is on the homosexual experience in the United States, a national emphasis intended to bring this history home with the most impact and to avoid the overly general, diffuse, and amorphous quality of previous international sexual-historical surveys. This American focus is also intended to suggest the possibilities of detailed, in-depth research and to emphasize the influence of a particular national setting on the historical forms of homosexuality found within it.²⁰

Indeed, many of the writings on this topic in the context of modern America after the publication of *Gay American History*, including D'Emilio's work, have critically relied on and frequently cited the documents collected in Katz's anthology.

Besides Katz's earliest excavating effort, Toby Marotta was also already investigating some of the political dimensions of gay and lesbian history in his *The Politics of Homosexuality* (1981).²¹ In this landmark piece of scholarship, Marotta situates the politics of homosexuality within the second half of twentieth century American history. Marotta traces three distinct but conceptually related (at least according to Marotta) political movements that promoted greater tolerance and social acceptance of homosexuality in American society: the homophile movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the gay liberation movement that followed the 1969 Stonewall riot, and the lesbian feminist movement that grew out of the collaboration between lesbian activists and women's liberationists in the summer of 1970. Therefore, D'Emilio's national narrative, which documents the emergence of what he calls a modern homosexual 'class', can simply be seen as a more detailed study of the first part of Marotta's project.²² It is quite evident that an empirical impetus for documenting homosexual experience in American history had already emerged with the appearance of *Gay American History* and *The Politics of Homosexuality*, and that this impetus resembled less a social constructionist position per se, but more an intellectual tendency to essentialise an object of historical investigation via a historiographic framework of (homo)sexuality within a national setting.

¹⁹ Katz, *Gay American History*.

²⁰ Katz, *Gay American History*, p. 3.

²¹ Marotta, *Politics of Homosexuality*.

²² D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, p. 11.

In fact, the most original aspect of D'Emilio's contribution has probably less to do with his setting up of a foundational national framework for the field, and more to do with his nuanced analysis of the tensions and uneasy relationships among the different generations of the early homophile activists. The level of care and sensitivity in D'Emilio's examination of the internal dynamics of early homophile organizations, such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, speaks to the growing sophistication of the field of the history of sexuality in general by the 1980s. In 1988, with Estelle Freedman, D'Emilio offers a sweeping synthesis of the history of sexuality in the United States in *Intimate Matters*, starting with the colonial period and concluding with the contemporary sexual politics of the 1980s.²³ Joining other historians, such as Carl N. Degler, Peter Gay, Ellen K. Rothman, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and Judith Walkowitz, D'Emilio and Freedman's national story participates in a larger revisionist effort during the 1980s that challenged the then popular repressed view of Victorian sexuality.²⁴ The intellectual trajectory of these historians was undoubtedly influenced by Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, in which he explicitly rejects what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis' as the organizing principle for the historical inquiry of Western sexuality since the seventeenth century.²⁵ Similar to the works of Katz and Marotta, it can be argued that this body of scholarship essentialises 'sexuality'—the object of their historical study—by offering coherent (national) narratives that achieve the same goal of displacing the 'repressive hypothesis'.

Moreover, D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* is not the only significant national narrative that appeared before the bourgeoning of localized studies in American LGBTQ history. Alan Bérubé's *Coming Out Under Fire* (1990), for example, tells a story about the complicated historical relationship between the military institutions of the Second World War and the rise of a modern gay 'consciousness', a historical relationship that D'Emilio

²³ John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

²⁴ Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud*, vol. 1: *Education of the Senses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Ellen Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985); Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

has accounted for briefly in an early chapter of his book.²⁶ Bérubé's study carefully probes the ways in which the massive mobilization for the Second World War loosened the social and cultural constraints of peacetime that prevented gay men and women from being aware of themselves and each other. If the massive mobilization for the Second World War had 'brought out' many young men and women with homosexual desires, according to Bérubé, the conflicts between three groups of personnel in the military's management of homosexuals—administrators, psychiatrists, and GIs—reflected the larger 'dynamic power relationship developed between gay citizens and their government' during the Second World War.²⁷

Published one year after Bérubé, Lillian Faderman in *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (1991) provides a comprehensive analysis of the changing social meanings and cultural significance of love between women in America over the course of the twentieth century.²⁸ Paying close attention to class difference and the shifting political contexts, Faderman is particularly critical of the social organization of female same-sex relations during the first half of the twentieth century in the United States. Perhaps the main contribution of her national study lies in the overall historicisation of the meaning of 'lesbianism' itself:

which has been transformed from a state from which most women who loved women disassociated themselves, to a secret and often lonely acknowledgement that one fell into that 'category', to groups of women who formed a subculture around the concept, to a sociopolitical statement and civil rights movement that claimed its own minority status and even formed its own ghettos.²⁹

Although both Faderman's book and especially Bérubé's study complement D'Emilio's work rather nicely, each national narrative contributes to modern US queer historiography in its own unique way: Faderman through the optic of female intimate experience; Bérubé through the lens of wartime involvement; and D'Emilio from the viewpoint of political organization and mobilization.³⁰ Therefore, learning from post-colonial studies, it is rather appropriate for the subjects of LGBTQ history in these national narratives to be

²⁶ Alan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

²⁷ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, p. 7.

²⁸ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

²⁹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp. 303-4.

³⁰ Another notable national narrative is Neil Miller, *In Search of a Gay America: Women and Men in a Time of Change* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989).

treated as occupying divergent rather than convergent, varying rather than unifying, and shifting rather than stable historical positions. In this respect, the historiography of queer sexuality comes to resemble less a series of 'successful' attempts, and, instead, how post-colonial scholars such as Spivak have characterized the Subaltern Studies project—as a grid of 'failures' in which the queer subject of history is 'situated' multiplicatively as 'queer'.

Still, there is certainly some validity to Marc Stein's astute observation that starting in the early 1990s, a second generation of historians of sexuality have responded to D'Emilio's national study by focusing on local gay and lesbian communities. In *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993), for instance, Elizabeth L. Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis both accept and challenge D'Emilio's national paradigm.³¹ Concentrating on working-class lesbians from the late 1930s to the early 1960s, Kennedy and Davis elaborate on the ways in which D'Emilio has uncovered a gay and lesbian past before 1969, debunking the myth that certain members of this community were 'low-life societal discards and pathetic imitators of heterosexuality'.³² But they also point out that D'Emilio's analysis gives insufficient attention to the lesbian bar subculture, the empirical focus of their study. Tracing the development of a working-class lesbian community in Buffalo, New York, Kennedy and Davis present a rich account of how the lives of African American, European American, and Native American lesbians overlapped, interacted, and negotiated with one another, both spatially and temporally, during an era of social oppression and violence around the mid-twentieth century. In exploring how the effort of these lesbians, much like the effort of the homophile activists in D'Emilio's study, laid the groundwork for the modern gay liberation movement to emerge in the late-1960s, Kennedy and Davis' story also highlights what is distinctly missing from Toby Marotta's analysis of the 'politics of homosexuality': the historical significance of working-class lesbian resistance in twentieth-century queer life and politics. At the same time, their study on Buffalo lesbians also complicates Faderman's sweeping chronology which aims to cover the entire twentieth century and implicitly claims to be geographically representative. In this sense, Kennedy and Davis' *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* is a reaction to the national frameworks set up by Marotta and Faderman as much as to D'Emilio's narrative.

³¹ Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

³² Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather*, p. 2.

Similarly, George Chauncey's groundbreaking study, *Gay New York* (1994), also belongs to this early cluster of localized histories that responds to both D'Emilio and other previous historians.³³ Whereas Kennedy and Davis have focused on working-class lesbians, Chauncey primarily concentrates on working-class gay men, although he devotes an entire chapter to the emergence of the heterosexual/homosexual binary in middle-class culture.³⁴ Arguing that this binary sexual regime now so hegemonic in American culture is a 'stunning recent creation' that really consolidated only by the mid-twentieth century, Chauncey reconstructs a vibrant and colorful gay male world in New York City prior to 1940.³⁵ His narrative moves between 'public' locales, such as on the streets, bars, cafeterias, and gay neighborhood enclaves (e.g., Greenwich Village and Harlem), and 'private' places like YMCA rooming houses, bathhouses, and other less visible locations of gay experience. In addition, the book opens with a careful exploration of non-heterosexual practices and identities, and closes with a few chapters on the politics of gay culture in the early twentieth century.

In many ways, then, Chauncey's rigorous historical insights rework many of the national frameworks developed by the earlier generation of historians. *Gay New York* supplements D'Emilio's study with a solid picture of what came before the 1950s homophile organizations; it sophisticates Katz's recuperative effort by documenting a highly visible, historically contingent 'gay world' (and not a 'gay closet') in the pre-war years; and it pushes Marotta's 'politics of homosexuality' to an earlier period so that 'the history of gay resistance must be understood to extend beyond formal political organizing to include the strategies of everyday resistance that men devised in order to claim space for themselves in the midst of a hostile society'.³⁶ Much like Kennedy and Davis' work, Chauncey's groundbreaking volume makes clear a 'historiographical politics' of queer sexuality instantiated by the tensions between national versus local studies, in which the queer historical figure can be seen more productively as an emerging site of contestation and possibility, and as a non-heteronormative index of the operation of power, the articulation of resistance, and the function of agency.

³³ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

³⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, pp. 99-127.

³⁵ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, p. 13.

³⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, pp. 5, 7.

This historiographical politics of queer sexuality became increasingly conspicuous from the late 1990s onward, when new community histories were written and began to reorient modern American queer historiography in a number of interesting ways, even as they still predominantly responded to the works of D'Emilio, Marotta, and Katz. Marc Stein's *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Love* (2000) and Karen Krauhlik's *Provincetown* (2005), for example, do so by substantiating the existing historiographical emphasis on gay and lesbian communities on the East Coast.³⁷ Stein's study is particularly refreshing, because it successfully builds on many existing historiographical trends. Unlike the first-wave monographs on various regions of New York state, which have paid particular attention to the different spatial organizations and social experiences of gay men (Chauncey) and lesbians (Kennedy and Davis),³⁸ Stein attempts to move beyond such a historiographical differentiation and argues for 'the history of heterosocial relationships between lesbians and gay men'.³⁹ Stein begins his story in 1945, because he finds compelling how D'Emilio and Bérubé's national expositions of the ways in which the conclusion of the Second World War gave birth to a distinctly new era in lesbian and gay history.⁴⁰ At the same time, Stein's book weaves together different dimensions of gay and lesbian political history, with calibrated emphases on political movement organizations (which was central to D'Emilio and Marotta's national frameworks), everyday forms of resistance (which defined the way Chauncey and Kennedy and Davis conceptualized 'politics' in their respective localized studies), and the public print culture (a fairly original methodological contribution of Stein's work). By looking at the convergences and divergences of gay men and lesbians' post-war social, cultural, and political histories in the urban context of Philadelphia, Stein moves local LGBTQ historiography swiftly into the opening decade of the twenty-first century by bringing to it new and exciting possibilities.

Meanwhile, the publication of other regional studies pushed modern US queer historiography in novel directions in terms of geographical focus. If other local studies have primarily looked at the urbanized Northeast regions of the United States like New York City and Philadelphia, John Howard's *Men Like That* (1999), which focuses on Mississippi, brings into better visibility the history of rural queer desire, life, and

³⁷ Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Karen Krauhlik, *Provincetown: From Pilgrim Landing to Gay Resort* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

³⁸ The notable exception is Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town* (Boston: Beacon, 1993).

³⁹ Stein, *City*, p. 3 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Stein, *City*, p. 9.

experience in the American South.⁴¹ Following the works of Will Fellows and James Sears,⁴² Howard articulates a sharp critique of Marotta and D'Emilio's urban identity-based paradigm that revolves around progressive gay politics, but his analysis supports Katz's broad aim to document 'particular historical forms of homosexuality' since all 'homosexuality is situational, influenced and given meaning and character by its location in time and social space'.⁴³ In 2003, Nan Boyd published her in-depth study of the San Francisco queer community up to 1965, *Wide-Open Town*, and Peter Boag published his study of two inter-related male same-sex sexual subcultures in the Pacific Northwest, *Same-Sex Affairs*.⁴⁴ Both monographs unearth and contextualize the queer past in West Coast cities, a historiographical preoccupation most recently taken up by Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons in their study of Los Angeles from the late nineteenth century to the present, *Gay L.A.* (2006).⁴⁵ Perhaps responding more directly to Chauncey's *Gay New York*, this cluster of local narratives, much like the earlier works, challenges the popular notion of queer historical silence prior to the 1969 Stonewall turning point in gay and lesbian history, pursuing, once again, the initial framework put forth by Jonathan Ned Katz in 1976.⁴⁶

In fact, the trend in making national claims about US LGBTQ history has never disappeared completely as these local narratives emerged quickly. Leisa Meyer's *Creating GI Jane* (1996), for instance, analyzes 'the impact of World War II on gender and sexual ideology ... in American society', extending the historiographical thread initiated by Bérubé (and to some extent D'Emilio).⁴⁷ 'Because the military is a critical bastion of state power and service within it a determinant of the rights of citizens', Meyer anchors her national discussion on the creation of the Women's Army Corps during the Second

⁴¹ John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁴² Will Fellows, *Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); James T. Sears, *Lonely Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948-1968* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997). See also Betty Beemyn, ed., *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁴³ Katz, *Gay American History*, p. 7 (emphasis added).

⁴⁴ Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁴⁵ Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

⁴⁶ The most definitive texts on the Stonewall riot are Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1993); David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004).

⁴⁷ Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 2.

World War.⁴⁸ Seven years later, Margot Canaday published two chapters from her dissertation, 'The Straight State: Sexuality and American Citizenship, 1900-1969', which she completed in 2004.⁴⁹ In both of her articles - the first on the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (also known as the McCarran-Walter Act) and the second on the 1944 GI Bill of Rights - Canaday looks at the national consolidation of sexual identities around the mid-twentieth century from the perspective of law and public policy.⁵⁰ Therefore, from Bérubé (1990) to Meyer (1996) to Canaday (2003), national stories about the historical relationship between the military institution, the state, and gay and lesbian citizenship had never faded away entirely.

In 2000, the publication of Lisa Duggan's *Sapphic Slashers* secured a subtle turn in modern US queer historiography from competing (if not exclusive) national versus regional investigations to local studies that simultaneously make larger national arguments.⁵¹ In her book, Duggan draws broad insights from her sophisticated reading of a local incident:

During the 1890s, the lesbian love murder story developed through the mass circulation press, following upon a sensational crime in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1892—the murder of Freda Ward by her “girl lover”, Alice Mitchell. *Sapphic Slashers* argues that this influential cultural narrative, portraying romance between women as dangerous, insane, and violent, worked to depoliticize, trivialize, and marginalize the aspirations of women for political equality, economic autonomy, and alternative domesticities. The narrative, as it developed from 1892 to the publication of Radclyffe Hall's transformative *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928, rendered such public goals as private matters of character, morality, and mental health—matters entirely disassociated from central, significant national political concerns.⁵²

Juxtaposing the lesbian love murder story against the backdrop of the lynching narrative, Duggan's book broaches the centrality of race, sex, and violence to American modernity.

This is not to say that earlier studies, such as Chancey's *Gay New York* or Kennedy and Davis' *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, did not make generalizations about twentieth century American history based on their more narrowed regional explorations. But the

⁴⁸ Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Margot Canaday, 'The Straight State: Sexuality and American Citizenship, 1900-1969' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Minnesota, 2004).

⁵⁰ Margot Canaday, "'Who Is a Homosexual?': The Consolidation of Sexual Identities in Mid-Twentieth Century American Immigration Law", *Law & Social Inquiry*, 28 (2002), pp. 351-86; Margot Canaday, 'Building a Straight State: Sexuality and Social Citizenship under the 1944 G. I. Bill', *Journal of American History*, 90 (2003), pp. 935-57.

⁵¹ Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁵² Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers*, p. 2.

titles of this new wave of scholarship on modern American queer history squarely convey the increasing professional pressure on young historians of sexuality to strike a difficult balance between narrow, focused studies and attractive, sweeping narratives. In part, this pressure undoubtedly stems from the marketing aims of those publishing companies that would turn young historians' dissertations into monograph publications. For example, the new title that Martin Meeker gave to his dissertation project when he turned it into his first book reflects this trend quite strikingly: the more narrowly-focused dissertation 'Come Out West: Communication and the Gay and Lesbian Migration to San Francisco, 1940s-1960s' (2000) became the more comprehensive *Contact Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communities and Community, 1940s-1970s* (2006).⁵³ Similarly, David K. Johnson's *The Lavender Scare* (2004), a local study of the federal government's persecution of homosexuals in Washington, D.C., during the 1950s and 1960s, also exemplifies this pattern remarkably well.⁵⁴ In addition to Margot Canaday's 'The Straight State: Sexuality and American Citizenship, 1900-1969', other dissertations produced by historians of this generation include Ian Lekus' 'Queer and Present Dangers: Homosexuality and Antiwar Activism during the Vietnam War' (2003), Craig Loftin's 'Passionate Anxieties: McCarthyism and Homosexual Identities in the United States, 1945-1965' (2006), and David Eisenbach's 'Gay Power: An American Revolution' (2006), which was immediately published as a book with the exact same title.⁵⁵

More synthetic monographs on American gay and lesbian history intended to reach a wider readership—rather than just academic historians—also began to appear as early as the mid-1990s. These are often written by gay authors, who may or may not have formal disciplinary training in history, and who may or may not have been teaching in the higher education curriculum. Charles Kaiser's *The Gay Metropolis* (1997), for example, provides a kind of 'sequel' to Chauncey's *Gay New York* (especially in its emphasis on metropolitan sexuality), but it makes broader arguments about what happened to gay American life after the Second World War, responding somewhat indirectly to the narratives of Marotta,

⁵³ Martin Meeker, 'Come Out West: Communication and the Gay and Lesbian Migration to San Francisco, 1940s-1960s' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southern California, 2000); Martin Meeker, *Contact Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communities and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁵⁴ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁵⁵ Canaday, 'The Straight State'; Ian Lekus, 'Queer and Present Dangers: Homosexuality and Antiwar Activism during the Vietnam War' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Duke University, 2003); Craig Loftin, 'Passionate Anxieties: McCarthyism and Homosexual Identities in the United States, 1945-1965' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southern California, 2006); David Eisenbach, *Gay Power: An American Revolution* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2006).

D'Emilio, and Bérubé.⁵⁶ Other similar sweeping and very readable monographs continued to be published by both popular and academic presses throughout the late 1990s to the present, some more aware of the 'queer turn' in the historiography of sexuality than others.⁵⁷ They include John Loughery's *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), Jonathan Ned Katz's *Love Stories* (2002), Eric Marcus' *Making Gay History* (2002), Nicholas Edsall's *Toward Stonewall* (2003), the American edition of Graham Robb's *Strangers* (2003; 2004), the revised edition of Neil Miller's *Out of the Past* (1995; 2006), and James Sears' *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine* (2006).⁵⁸ Though they sometimes work against Katz's preference for an American focus, as he puts it in *Gay American History*, these national (and, in some instances, transnational) projects nevertheless demonstrate the lingering influence of Katz's insistence on a kind of historiographical coherence—that 'Gay American history must exist' and that 'knowledge of gay history helps restore a people to its past, to itself'.⁵⁹

From Jonathan Ned Katz's *Gay American History* (1976) to James Sears' *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine* (2006), historians of sexuality have written 'successful' and 'coherent' accounts of the LGBTQ past over a thirty-year period, whether in the scope of national narratives or community studies, making regional or nationwide claims. But while almost all of this literature claims to support the theoretical position of social constructionism (because they demonstrate the cultural malleability of sexuality across time and place), they have implicitly replaced the essentialism-versus-social constructionism debate with the historiographic tension between national versus local frameworks. According to this tacit geographic-historiographical displacement of the essentialism-versus-social

⁵⁶ Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis: The Landmark History of Gay Life in America since World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997).

⁵⁷ On the 'queer turn' in LGBT historiography, see Lisa Duggan, 'Making It Perfectly Queer', *Socialist Review*, 22 (1992), pp. 11-31; Henry Abelove, 'The Queering of Lesbian/Gay History', *Radical History Review*, 62 (1995), 44-57; Martha M. Umphrey, 'The Trouble with Harry Thaw,' *Radical History Review*, 62 (1995), pp. 8-23; Scott Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); William B. Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000); Marc Stein, 'The Queering of Lesbian/Gay Legal History', paper presented at the 2004 Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts, 25 March 2004; and Angelides.

⁵⁸ John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence: Men's Lives and Gay Identities: A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998); Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories: Sex between Men before Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002); Nicholas C. Edsall, *Toward Stonewall: Homosexuality and Society in the Modern Western World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004 [2003]); Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present*, rev. ed. (New York: Alyson, 2006 [1995]); James T. Sears, *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles and the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006).

⁵⁹ Katz, *Gay American History*, p. 8.

constructionism debate, the 'ending with social constructionism' becomes precisely the intellectual point of departure for modern US LGBTQ historiography. In so doing, these scholars have actually reified the essentialist position rather than challenging it, because they impose positive meanings to a core set of historical practices, experiences, lifestyles, and identities which they assume be 'uncoverable' in some coherent narratives, national or local, that together constitute a manageable body of scholarship under the title 'US LGBTQ history' more specifically or 'the history of sexuality' more broadly.

It is for this reason that I have encouraged scholars to learn from post-colonial historiography and to view the LGBTQ past less as an intrinsically coherent picture waiting to be filled in as time progresses and historians refine their scholarship. Rather, as I hope my review of the history of LGBTQ history has demonstrated, it is more convincing to understand 'LGBTQ' to be a 'problematized' epistemological anchor of historiography that comprises a series of historical processes cutting across specific identities and relying on their contingent (re)constructions and (re)articulations. In this regard, writing LGBTQ histories, like writing histories of the third world, forces us to approach the topic in terms of larger historiographical politics and, accordingly, find analytic advantages from the essentialism-versus-social constructionism debate by teasing out alternative visions of the relationship between the past, the present, and the future.

Ending with the Beginning

It is by now evident that if one were to locate the 'social constructionist' nature of the history of sexuality, it would not necessarily lie within the historical narratives of LGBTQ people and their experiences, but the tensions and conflicts among them. These historiographical tensions and conflicts suggest that LGBTQ subjects of history should not simply be seen as people of the past occupying the same position in a grand historical narrative that need to be recovered with a series of 'successful' attempts. Instead, much like the de-privileged subaltern and the (previously) colonized third world, queer identities are generated from, constructed through, mapped with, and documented in shifting historical positions—a grid of 'failures'—that function as potential locales of historiographical interrogation, both internally, as I have demonstrated for the case of the US nation-state, and externally, on which I will conclude with a brief transnational example.

Afsaneh Najmabadi's recent important contribution that moves beyond US LGBTQ history, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, reminds us that even within the last two centuries, non-Western parts of the world have undergone changes in the social and cultural patterns of gender and sexual normativities in ways significantly different from the West.⁶⁰ Najmabadi shows that in early Qajar Iran (1785-1925), standards of beauty were not gender-specific: male youths (amrads) as well as women were both deemed beautiful and sexually desirable by adult men, who were distinguished from the amrads by the marker of a full beard. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, love and erotic attraction became heterosexualized: beauty was now associated only with female femininity, while acceptable notions of male beauty and male same-sex love gradually disappeared. According to Najmabadi's post-colonialist critique, the modernist effort to erase the amrad—the male object of desire—from the recent Iranian past in part could be attributed to the increasingly intensified interactions between Iranian and European men in the nineteenth century.

Tightly connected to the project of modernity, the formation of the Iranian nation-state illustrates another dimension of how gender ideology was deeply intertwined with the cultural machinery of hetero-normative sexuality. The abjection of the amrad enters the picture again as a critical anchor of modern Iranian nation-building. 'In the public modernist discourse', writes Najmabadi, 'older man-younger man sexual liaisons had become a source of national shame'.⁶¹ In this process of abjecting the amrad figure and making it a national shame, Iranian modernists constructed their nationalism based on European standards of modernity, which repudiates homosexuality and portrays civilized men as beardless.⁶² Moreover, not only do male homosexuality and beardlessness encode Iranian 'backwardness', but so does the women's veil—the marker of female homosocialization: 'If women had to be unveiled and men had to shave their beards to become modern citizens, they could not look like each other and, more urgently, could not resemble that other figure which was to be forgotten, the amrad'.⁶³ Therefore, in throwing the role of the amrad into the country's amnesia, Iranian nationalism is fundamentally characterized by what Najmabadi has called the 'gender and sexual anxiety

⁶⁰ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁶¹ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, p. 149.

⁶² Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, pp. 149-51.

⁶³ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, p. 151.

of Iranian modernity'.⁶⁴ Iranian nationalist discourse precisely exemplifies how the normative regulation of gender (the practice of unveiling for women and Europeanized beardlessness for men) is always part of the operation of sexuality (the national repudiation and dismissal of 'premodern' homosexual behaviour), while the normative arrangement of sexuality (the modernist heteronormalization of culture and love) is always part of the 'cultural labour' of gender (the consolidation of a men/women binary through the forgetting and abjection of the amrad figure).

That the historicity of sexuality in modern Middle East does not correspond so neatly to the well-documented historical grand narrative of sexuality in the West, according to which a psychologised notion of (homo)sexual subjectivity distinctly emerged from the late nineteenth-century medical discourse, reveals the different genealogical forces that were at work to render queer historical subjects queer toward the closing decades of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ Whereas European culture had directly reoriented the social meanings of non-Western people's gender and erotic orientation, historical actors of the West did not experience the same kind of 'cultural imperialism', so to speak. These different visions of queerness and its diverging modes of conceptual foundation and social realization in the relationship between the past, the present, and even the future enable us to conceive of the object of historical investigation as inherently representing multiple sites of contest and possibility, the excavation of which could be done through various ways of history writing framed in different historiographical themes. In carrying its internal and external incoherencies, sedimenting its indexical and lexical contours, and mirroring its post-colonial counterpart, the unstable queer historical subject in this sense thus operates with unfixed visibilities and contingent meanings in the discursive history of its own history.

Although there are a small number of scholarly volumes that explore the intersections between post-colonial theory and queer theory, relatively little attention has been paid to the advantages of demonstrating the conceptual overlaps between post-colonial

⁶⁴ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, subtitle (emphasis added).

⁶⁵ See, for example, Foucault, *History of Sexuality*; Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Howard H. Chiang, 'Historicizing the Emergence of Sexual Freedom: The Medical Knowledge of Psychiatry and the Scientific Power of Sexology, 1880-1920', *Journal of the North Carolina Association of Historians*, 16 (2008), pp. 35-76.

historiography and queer historiography.⁶⁶ I hope to have taken the first step in doing so by showing that the troubling issue with queer historiography has less to do with its tendency to essentialise its object of investigation per se, but more to do with those existing empirical attempts to impose an epistemological restaging of the essentialist comfort in the ordering and substantiation of a historiographical politics of queer sexuality.

⁶⁶ On the intersections between post-colonial theory and queer theory, see, for example, *Postcolonial and Queer Theories: Intersections and Essays*, ed. by John C. Hawley (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001); and *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, ed. by Hawley (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).

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