

## **Book Review**

**Pullen, Christopher, *LGBT Transnational Identity and the Media*,**

**Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012.**

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Throughout this book, Christopher Pullen examines the struggle of the LGBT community and explores feelings towards them and how they are perceived within society. This is particularly conveyed by the metaphorical, cultural, literal and political borders that impose constraints based on citizenship expectations. LGBT transnational identity 'potentially reveals diverse notions of political intent and subjectivity in the production of...forms of sexual diversity'(27). Yet the world still prioritizes heteronormativity; leaving the LGBT and queer individuals isolated and marginalised. This could be considered in correlation to our theme 'Peripheral Voices' as Pullen analyses the hardships that minority groups face through exclusion based on sexuality and gender preferences, linking to what we intend to portray and stress the importance of in this special issue. The book identifies the distinctions between western, non-western and afro-asian acceptance of homosexuality and the dismissal of minority groups within society and the media.

Until recently, 'even human rights organizations traditionally excluded LGBT issues'; they were 'neglected or muted in the activism of major human rights organizations'<sup>2</sup> which is particularly expressed in Pullen's book whereby he draws upon the example of how non-Western men are perceived in society. According to Robert Aldrich, 'the colonies provided many possibilities for homoeroticism' and 'homosexuality', however there was an 'imbalance wherein non-Western men often were perceived as objects of desire'(26). Here Pullen outlines colonialist inequality exemplified in the media as illustrated in Michael Renov's book, *The Subject of Documentary*. Renov suggests 'minorities have increasingly found opportunity to represent themselves within varying documentary forms', in the hope that they eliminate subjectivity, 'shift[ing] away from the imagination of objectivity'(30), and thus create a non-biased platform for the LGBT community to be fairly represented. Renov believes that homosexuality, however, is seen as a 'western ideal' and is nothing to do with identity at all. Here Pullen reflects one perception of homosexuality and highlights cultural and national expectations of sexuality and gender that are overlooked in the media and wider society. From this dismissal arises the 'issue of emotion and belonging'(28) as noted by Sara Ahmed, as LGBT identity is subsequently disregarded.

Contextual evidence in 2012, the year of publication, may have influenced Pullen's writing, particularly regarding tensions from across cultural borders. An example of this was the three Muslim men convicted over gay hate leaflets

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<sup>2</sup> Bonny Ibhawoh, 'Human Rights for Some: Universal Human Rights, Sexual Minorities, and the Exclusionary Impulse', *International Journal*, 69.4, (2014), 612-622 (p. 620).

in 2012 whereby they called 'for gay people to be killed' as they believed that 'the death sentence is the only way this immoral crime can be erased from corrupting society'.<sup>6</sup> Legislation has helped LGBT rights globally yet only began to have an impact as of 2013, a year after Pullen's publication of *LGBT: Transnational Identity and the Media*. For example, the Human Rights Watch organization claims 'there's been enormous progress globally and locally' noting that they hope to increase the 'shaping' of 'public perception and reinforce the social changes'.<sup>7</sup> This could potentially have had an influence on Pullen's writing as he focuses on more negative aspects of the media's representation of LGBT rather than pivotal moments of history that occurred after the publication of the book.

Pullen strongly emphasises the lack of acknowledgement for homosexuality from a cultural and political standpoint as he conveys the exile appointed to queerness, evident through anti-gay laws in African countries and Iran. However, I believe the book is not cohesive as Pullen wrongly asserts that the penalty for gay sex in India was punishable by execution at the time of the book's publication; yet the punishment for the act of gay sex was imprisonment for up to ten years proving that Pullen provided false factual evidence. Critic Dane S. Claussen conveys that 'Pullen cheekily asserts that the book's diversity is what makes it cohesive'<sup>8</sup> in an attempt to avoid criticism. The majority of the book provides the reader with elaborate theories and conclusions yet lacks sufficient evidence. Pullen's argument is clearly structured; however, it lacks empirical evidence and dramatizes the media's impacts on the LGBT community therefore needed further evidence which would have strengthened the books assertions.

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<sup>6</sup> Esther Addley, 'Three Muslim men convicted over gay hate leaflets', *The Guardian*, 20 January 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Roth, *LGBT: Moving Towards Equality* (2015) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/01/23/lgbt-moving-towards-equality> [accessed 4 January 2019].

<sup>8</sup> Dane S. Claussen, 'Book Review: *LGBT Transnational Identity in the Media*, Edited by Christopher Pullen', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91.1, (2014), 185-186 (p. 185).