

BOOK REVIEW

Queering Urban Justice: Queer of Colour Formations in Toronto

Jin Haritaworn, Ghaida Moussa, and Syrus Marcus Ware (editors),
with Río Rodríguez Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018
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Queering Urban Justice: Queer of Colour Formations in Toronto is a painstaking and generative collection that situates the spatial and temporal legacies and continuing work of queer and trans people of color (QTPOC) in Toronto, with particular emphasis on Black and Indigenous queer and trans activists. It's a collection with multiple methodologies that blend activist praxis with both academic theory and theory from grassroots-activist knowledge-building. Although queer theory and critical theory are cited consistently throughout the chapters of the book, they are tools used in service to activist praxis, rather than the other way around. Relatedly, the strength of this book lies in its collaborative praxis of putting it together, which Jin Haritaworn, Ghaida Moussa, Syrus Ware, and Río Rodríguez address in the acknowledgments and introduction. From here on I will refer to them as “the Collective,” to highlight the collaboration as well as the specificity that not all four are editors and all have significantly contributed to shaping the book through decision-making about the collection as well as their own respective contributions. They write, “It takes a collective to collect work that is collective” (viii) and emphasize the commitment to collaboration throughout the chapters themselves. The range of approaches reflects this as well, with an interview, a roundtable, and several co-authored chapters. Indeed, less than half of the collected chapters are single-authored.

This book will be crucial for college courses in gender studies, queer and trans studies, ethnic studies, Black studies, and Asian American and API studies. *Queering Urban Justice* is important reading for scholars and researchers in these areas of inquiry as well. It's useful also for activists transnationally; many cities struggle under globalized white supremacy and US-based, “one-size-fits-all” models, whereas all of the contributors to the book are highly specific in their analyses, so what resonates in different locales can be helpful. The Collective doesn't note this explicitly, so I want to highlight the important choice regarding which, among the eleven chapters, are the final two. The second-to-last chapter (10) critiques coming out as a required script of visibility and legibility that doesn't work for a lot of QTPOC and includes interviews with local and diasporic queers of color. The final chapter is on Indigeneity: where the movement has grown in its commitments and where it needs to further embed Indigenous perspectives in activism. “Coming out”—even the critique of coming out as a white, settler-

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colonial, spatial, and temporal step after which come the other steps of supposed gay happiness—comes second to last in the book, with only one chapter coming after so that the book can end with Indigeneity, with the persistent presence of Native and Indigenous activists and their work.

This collection is necessary and timely, especially for its interventions into the white-settler queer and homonational stories of QTPOC activism coming (out) later than white queer work, and the concomitant appropriation of QTPOC movements and strategies of resistance that occurs *even in*, and in some ways especially in, the city of Toronto, known for being a queer of color capital of the world. From my own US queer, trans, and activist vantage point, I've known Toronto Pride to be a destination of sorts for antiracist and Black, Indigenous, and POC queers transnationally. At the same time, this sense of Toronto and Toronto Pride's transnational importance can also be tied to what Rebeka Tabobondung (Anishnaabe Ojibway, Wasauksing First Nation) calls "the lies about Canada" (204) that are told by the white-settler Canadian state and perpetuated by whites elsewhere, especially left-minded white people in the US. Likewise, queer white-settler Canadians will point to anti-Black racism and police violence in the US to excuse Canada's own anti-Blackness as "not that bad." Citing this logic and roundly refusing it, Janaya Khan says in the Black Lives Matter Toronto Teach-in transcribed in chapter 7, "When did our standards become so low we can justify real violence by saying we're not as bad as the US? Because we don't have Black people dying every twenty-eight hours like they do? When did that become the standard of justice for Black people? We are legitimately in a state of emergency in Canada. We already were" (142). I take the risk here of pointing back to the US because of *Hypatia's* audience, while recognizing the irony of highlighting a reference back to the US in a collection about Toronto.

Chapter 1, "Our Study is Sabotage?: Queering Urban Justice, from Toronto to New York," a roundtable by Haritaworn, with Che Gossett, Rodríguez, and Ware, connects the two cities by naming gentrification as a major process of displacement of BIPOC in both places. Ware cites the moving of Don Jail and the replacement of the physical space with Bridgepoint Health—a mental health facility. The prison industrial complex and the medical industrial complex converge in these spaces. Rodríguez refers to the Allied Media Conference, specifically the "creative place-making" track, which facilitated such creative place-making as resistance to gentrification (32), and Ware addresses Octavia Butler's work and how it situates climate change. In the age of COVID-19 this reference really resonated; Ware envisions bunkers in this moment, yet his sentiment couldn't be more relevant to the current global pandemic protocols of social distancing and relative physical isolation depending on one's own immunohhealth and the consideration of others': "we're going to . . . have to be able to be together in a really different way" (31).

"We Had to Take Space, We Had to Create Space': Locating Queer of Colour Politics in 1980s Toronto" (chapter 2), by John Paul Catungal, invokes Eugene McCann's "purposeful assemblages of parts here and elsewhere" (46) as inspiration for the chapter, which draws on academic sources and interviews with practitioners in ethno-specific AIDS Services Organizations (ASOs). The group Zami, co-founded in 1984 by Doug Stewart, Derych Gordon, Sylmadel Coke, Debbie Douglas, and Carol Allen, was created around Black queer "lived experiences of erasure," and is named as a precursor organization to the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (BCAP) and other important organizing (49). The chapter also traces the work of queer Asian organizations like Gay Asians Toronto and Asian Community AIDS Services. This is one of so many crucial

moments of locating BIPOC queer and trans collective resistance and meaning-making, and leads nicely into the next chapter.

In “Má-ka Juk Yuh: A Genealogy of Black Queer Liveability in Toronto” (chapter 3), Omisoore H. Dryden archives the 2016 Toronto Pride Month panel “Blackness and Queer Politics.” She begins by naming the “bifurcation of race from sexuality” (62). Junior Harrison emphasizes the group *Zami* being “unapologetic about our Black-only space . . . It didn’t need to be all together all the time” (70). Just as *Zami* is present throughout the book, *Blockorama* (Blocko), a twenty-years-running event, is mentioned several times across the chapters. Here it is discussed for its importance as a Black Pride gathering, and Courtney McFarlane points out the importance of the debate around the word “queer” for Black people in the Black Pride movement across the US and Canada. Dionne Falconer likewise cites elder Ruth Ellis, who at that time was ninety-six years old and was “known for being the oldest living out lesbian,” and in the 1990s had proclaimed, “‘Ain’t nothing queer about what I do!” (73). Harrison and McFarlane also have an important exchange calling out the organizers of Toronto Pride, who year after year didn’t recognize the Blocko organizers they had interacted with each year before, who wouldn’t fulfill their basic supplies requests until last minute or not at all, and would collude with the police presence. Carol Thames, addressing these genealogies of Black queer and trans resistance and community-building, situates #BlackLivesMatterTO as taking “the history of what Black people have been doing for the past 400 years to survive” (79).

In chapter 4, “Diasporic Intimacies: Queer Filipinos/as and Canadian Imaginaries,” Robert Diaz, Melissa Largo, and Fritz Luthor Pino analyze the programming of the same name, a convergence of a full month of art exhibits and community and artist conversations, as well as a day-long conference and a film screening. The events were a foregrounding of queer Filipinos’/as’ crucial roles in art and activism, and made possible “critiques of the fallacies of the Canadian multiculturalism and settler colonialism, which often delineate difference through disciplinary mechanisms of inclusion and cultural citizenship” (85). This chapter’s understanding of the interdisciplinary, artistic, and intellectual contributions of “Diasporic Intimacies” could be taught or written about alongside Jian Neo Chen’s recent book *Trans Exploits: Trans of Color Cultures and Technologies in Movement* (Chen 2019). The authors specifically address Jo SiMalaya Alcampo’s video *SIYA: Beneath the Barong* and its playful use of the word *siya*, pronounced “Shah,” for its fluidity as a genderless pronoun in Filipino, the uses of which alternate between “he,” “she,” and “they” (94).

Chapter 5, “On ‘Gaymousness’ and ‘Calling Out’: Affect, Violence, and Humanity in Queer of Colour Politics,” by Matthew Chin, is the final chapter of Part I: Mapping Community. This chapter critiques broader callout culture and is focused on its presence in QTPOC activist spaces. Chin’s central concern is that callouts induce shame, and shame is not a useful feeling for change and contributes to dehumanization. Chin’s analysis is important, and at the same time, the specific racial identities or backgrounds fell out of the analysis and examples later on in the chapter, so that it was difficult to answer the question: was the callout coming from Black queer and trans activists when those being called out were non-Black POC? This would have helped clarify the power dynamics even further, given the pervasiveness of anti-Blackness in its particularity.

Chapter 6, “Calling a Shrimp a Shrimp: A Black Queer Intervention in Disability Studies,” by Nwadiogo Ejiogu and Cyrus Marcus Ware, contributes to ongoing critiques of the whiteness of disability studies and recenters BIPOC. Ejiogu and Ware emphasize

the importance of their process of collaborative writing because of both their shared and different experiences. They discuss the only class to date in disability studies at their university. Reflecting on their experience as students in the class, they use the example of other students—white students—bifurcating (white) disability from race by emphasizing how many courses were already offered on race, with only one on disability, and insisting that one class can't address everything. This is a particularly useful example of defensiveness that conflates “doing everything” with doing something—anything?—or more specifically the actual thing that is being asked. (I suspect it will be a familiar conflation for feminist philosophers who encounter this kind of defeatism in all corners of whitestream philosophy, wherein engagement with intersectionality is “too broad and abstract” for analytic philosophers, and “too specific and overdetermining” for continental philosophers.)

Chapter 7, “Black Lives Matter Toronto Teach-In,” by Janaya Khan and Leroi Newbold, transcribes said teach-in, first contextualizing it as “in direct genealogy with” the Black queer resistance movements of Toronto discussed by the group of panelists in Dryden's (chapter 3) contribution to the book (139). This chapter's conversation about Black youth is particularly important and is summarized by Leroi Newbold's assertion that “Black communities have power right now, so we don't need to just be lobbying the government, and we don't need to simply encourage our young people to reach those places of power before they can have a voice or can make change” (139).

In chapter 8, “Black Picket Signs/White Picket Fences: Racism, Space, and Solidarity,” Tara Atluri sets its tone with her clever repetition of “picket” and the damning critique of white queer space-making in the forms of settler colonialism, gentrification, and homonormative, “innocent” domesticity. Part of her chapter focuses on white lesbian Premier Kathleen Wynne's willingness to trade on this “fear” of white women's potential victimhood when BLM-TO staged a demonstration outside of her and her partner's home. Even from her position of power, she mobilized this notion of victimhood, and Atluri's analysis is useful for many other instances like it in white settler states. She emphasizes the rhetoric of media and politicians who use terms like *hijacked* and *hostage* to talk about the actions of protestors taking up public space, and powerful, white, lesbian politicians feeling scared locked inside their large homes, respectively.

Chapter 9, “Becoming through Others: Western Queer Self-Fashioning and Solidarity with Queer Palestine,” by Nayrouz Abu Hatoum and Ghaida Moussa, uses affect theory to intervene in the instrumentality of so-called radical politics with regard to queer Palestine. Hatoum and Moussa are clear in their position: it's not that white people can't be in solidarity, but that solidarity doesn't escape important power dynamics. Their analysis invokes the difference that usually white saviors set the agendas of their saving whereas even when Palestinians are the ones organizing Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) and related campaigns, white saviors still center themselves. In many instances neither the enthusiasm for, nor the terms of, the critique of settler colonialism seem to point back to the white settler making the critique from somewhere on Turtle Island.

“The Sacred Uprising: Indigenous Creative Activisms” (chapter 11) is an interview with Rebeka Tabobondung by Syrus Marcus Ware. The title refers to Tabobondung's film *The Original Summit: Journey to the Sacred Uprising*, which followed the bus ride of queer, BIPOC, and trans activists “to the Free Trade Area of the Americas Summit in Quebec City in 2001” (202). Ware describes the ride as emerging from those “frustrated by the open calls for ‘all activists’ to head to Quebec to fight without any consideration of the different kinds of risk we would each experience on the front

lines” (205). The coordinated ride was to have a group that would keep everyone safe, and Ware notes the importance of Tabobondung’s chance to meet with Indigenous activists in Quebec. In response, she names Rodney Bobiwash (Anishnaabe), who was instrumental in connecting northern and southern Indigenous activists. Tabobondung is also known for her work on *Muskrat* magazine, which she discusses in this chapter as inspired by the animal’s role in her community’s *re-creation* story, specifically as the weakest water animal, yet it was muskrat who saved the day. She relates this re-creation story to the magazine’s importance as an archive of storytelling and art.

Tabobondung also addresses what might be one of the earliest movements to change a Women’s Center/Centre name in the US or Canada, and it can’t be overemphasized that the leaders of this movement at the University of Toronto were POC, trans, and Indigenous. Ware’s follow-up questions about this name-change invoke the lack of decolonization in university spaces, and Tabobondung relates this to the importance of her own learning about two-spirited identity and connecting with others around it, making important contributions to the ongoing conversation about two-spirit experiences, reclamations, and activism in Native studies and beyond.

Overall, *Queering Urban Justice* is a powerful collection that centers collaboration and activist knowledges. The Collective has organized the chapters into a meaningful whole that doesn’t lose the specific foci of QTBIPOC activism, Toronto, and collaborative scholarship, even when making broader connections among and across transnational contexts. Globalization, gentrification, anti-Blackness, and settler colonialism are all thoroughly explained or exemplified in each chapter. The book contains an impressive range of styles and relationships, with over half of the chapters co-authored and ranging in format from roundtable transcription to interview to essay.

Reference

Chen, Jian Neo. 2019. *Trans exploits: Trans of color cultures and technologies in movement*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

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