Book Review

Intersecciones: cuerpos y sexualidades en la encrucijada (Intersections: bodies and sexualities at the crossroads) edited by Raquel (Lucas) Platero Méndez, Temas contemporáneos, 2012, ISBN–13: 978 84 7290 603 7

This book, edited by Raquel (Lucas) Platero, is an excellent opportunity to develop awareness of nonnormative sexualities, as it offers a deep reflection on the boundaries of “normality.” It gathers a wide range of research, reflections, and experiences from various disciplinary perspectives, and shows us some hidden realities which pose a threat to sociosexual order.

The first section presents us with a Spanish translation of two essential texts: “A Black Feminist Statement” and “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” both of which reflect on the “naturalization” of categories of analysis as an instrument of power.

“A Black Feminist Statement” is one of the most important texts about the contexts generated by experiences of sexual and racial oppression as the result of a dominant system of categories. It is precisely this experience of “abnormality,” of being outside acceptable parameters, where the authors find a potential instrument of strength. Ultimately, a proposal for breaking with categorization imposed as a means of control can be interpreted as a performative act in the subversion of naturalized categories of race, social class, and gender.

“Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” puts forward an epistemological reflection on the book’s title. This text conceptualizes the complex network that generates multiple forms of discrimination through public policy analysis of the case of black women’s shelters in Los Angeles, California, in the 1980s. Crenshaw shows how the institutionality of these interventions acts as a tool that reinforces power relations and builds intersectional contexts. Proposing a multiple and anti-essentialist identity, which can act as an element of strength and not of oppression, Crenshaw defines the concept of *intersections* as the recognition of differences and a negotiation of their expression in the creation of new realities.

Following this, the second part of the book presents a series of experiences and reflections on contexts created in the margins of the current Spanish scene. In the Platero and Guzmán’s chapter, they reflect on nonnormative sexualities of people with disabilities. The authors propose *crip theory* as a tool of empowerment, in which *cripple* is a useful catalyst in exploring performative acts, which are created in the context of diversity. Throughout this chapter, Platero and Guzmán show how scientific power defines the sexually diverse body as non reproductive, not beautiful and, therefore, unwanted sexually. This analysis of identity narratives in shaping bodies is the starting point of the next chapter, in which Romero Platero establishes a dialogue on the transit of bodies in the margins of normativity. From questioning the construction of the subject through the binomial lesbian *femme-but*ch, the conversation moves to the analysis of the colonization of dissenting, and, ultimately, threatening bodies.

Javier Sáenz reflects on unruly bodies in his chapter on *bear culture*. The *body-bear* emerges, he explains, not only as a rebellion against gay bodies produced by marketing (*chasers*), but also as an alternative to his second negative opposite, the body of the gay AIDS patient. Thus, against gay-urban sophistication, the rural body-bear ranks as “natural,” and it is this shift to masculinity as dissent where Saenz sees the danger of the emergence of sexist practices such as *barebacking*.

Continuing the analysis of dissenting bodies, Serna’s chapter brings us to the little known fact of the gypsy gays, an example of the intersection of ethnicity, social class, and sexuality. In this case, as opposed to the *macho* category, homosexuality is defined as a threat to the patriarchal traditions based on family and reproduction. However, two of the most disturbing texts in the collection both deal with nonnormative sexualities under the deprivation of liberty. The first one deals with the experiences of LGBT people in Centers of Internment for Foreigners in Spain, spaces in which individual identity is diluted in spatiotemporal limbo, where repression and sexual violence are institutionalized. In the same vein, Gerard Coll-Planas presents “Circus of Horrors,” the experience of a young intersexual immigrant, whose abstract-threatening body is punished to the point of exhaustion.

A third experience of sexualities deprived of liberty is a prison where transgender people articulate support groups for survival and in so doing, create identities of resistance. Finally, the last chapter describes an exciting and captivating experience in the unexplored world of Guinea during the colonial era. In this context a song and dance group composed exclusively of women transgressed the rules of control over their bodies and actions—an example of how transvestisism became an instrument of resistance and sexual liberation.

Intersections is, in short, a courageous and inspiring work that invites us to venture into the complexity of dissident sexual realities and encourages us to take political action against sexual “normalization.”

References

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Elena Burgaleta Pérez, PhD
 Universidad Complutense de Madrid
 E-mail: elenaburgaleta@gmail.com