Introduction

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What does it mean to be queer and Asian? What sort of position-
alities, identities, lives, experiences, and issues are subsumed
under the conjoining of these two terms and how do we make
sense of them? This volume investigates some of the assemblages
that take place in bringing 'queer' and 'Asian' identities and lives
together, exploring social movements, literature, art, film and
new media, and theoretical and methodological challenges fac-
ing queer Asian subjects and topics. This book emerges from
the three annual 'Queer' Asia conferences and two film festivals
that were organised by students and early career researchers
based at SOAS, University of London, in June 2016, 2017, and
2018.[1] In its earliest iteration in 2016, the conference emerged
out of a sense of frustration on working on queer themes in Asia.
These frustrations were in part a result of a sense of audience
disengagement at queer conferences and alienation at area stud-
ies conferences. Such an experience was not a novel encounter:
it is situated as the cause behind the organisation of another
group of scholars called the AsiaPacifiQueer (APQ) network,
which 'developed out of [a] shared sense of disciplinary exclu-
sion and professional alienation within the academy' (Martin
et al., 2008: 2). Like the APQ network, which co-organised
the 2005 'Sexualities, Genders, and Rights in Asia: The First
International Conference of Asian Queer Studies' in Bangkok,
the 2016 iteration of 'Queer' Asia was a response to the sense of

academic alienation, and saw the convergence of a wide range of specialists at the first 'Queer' Asia conference held at SOAS, University of London. While the 2016 conference was attended by over 500 people, it was never conceived of nor logistically planned for as a large-scale event. It was meant to be no more than a graduate conference bringing together a few students and early career researchers in an inclusive and encouraging space to share, learn, and collectively understand the possibilities emerging at the intersections of queer and Asia. Most importantly, it was conceived of as a means to counter the sense of isolation felt in the pursuit of research at these intersections. The success of the conference lay in bringing together academics who recognised or felt the same sense of isolation, and resulted in calls for subsequent similar conferences. Over three years of annual activities, 'Queer' Asia has involved participants from an extensive range of 'Asian' countries, including Thailand, Bangladesh, South Korea, Singapore, Kuwait, India, Azerbaijan, Syria, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, China, Japan, Mongolia, Lebanon, and Palestine, as well as diaspora groups in Europe, the UK, and the US. It has covered themes and topics from gender performance, identity politics, and embodied experience, to literature, social and new media, and film, and to the law, postcolonial encounters, and state governance, in divergent forms, including plays, art, artistic performance, film, posters, and academic and non-academic presentations and talks.[2]

The twin goals of engaging with queer issues within the geopolitical framework of Asia, and doing so in an accepting, inclusive, passionate, and understanding environment friendly to students and early career researchers, underwrote the first and subsequent conferences, film festivals, and events. 'Queer' Asia as a network only emerged after assessing the impact and outcome of the first conference. The overwhelming numbers in attendance and the positive feedback following the first conference

attested to the urgency for both the cross-pollination of thought and a non-threatening space within which to conduct these discussions. These two ideals laid the initial grounding framework for the 'Queer' Asia network that sought to create an inclusive space within which not only could interregional conversations proliferate, but also create a nurturing space that is encouraging rather than daunting. Keeping these ideals in mind, and drawing from the earlier experiences of attending conferences that have been dismissive, condescending, or uninterested in topics perceived as relating to queer Asian themes, especially for younger academics, the 'Queer' Asia network has focused on producing and curating events that nurture such a space. To achieve this, 'Queer' Asia followed three crucial strategies. First, there has been a focus on developing dialogue and debate between queer and Asian topics, encouraging interregional focus and dispensing with traditional academic hierarchies. Comparative assessment is fostered through the organisation of events and panels formed of participants addressing different regions but on the same discipline, and where the level and rank of scholars remains external to the discussions being encouraged.[3] Second, 'Queer' Asia has built towards an engaged audience composed of a diverse cross section of society rather than one made up solely of academic professionals, forgoing traditional professional and disciplinary silos. This has been particularly urgent as 'Queer' Asia's aims are vested in broadening critical academic knowledge by putting it into conversation with different fields engaging with the same or similar complexities. Thereby, it not only forces academia to respond to critical work in other fields, but also enriches other fields with the insights crucially afforded by academic rigour. Third, 'Queer' Asia has eschewed monetisation, now rampant in many large-scale conferences in the neo-liberal university and evinced in the exorbitant fees graduate students continually shell out, especially international ones, to further the possibilities of

having careers in an increasingly marketised university space. Relatedly, the platform (conference and film festival run by the 'Queer' Asia network) has offered funding, as far as possible, to participants, artists, film-makers, and professionals to facilitate their participation at an event that garners international viewership. These funds are raised creatively (through crowdfunding) and by tapping into unspent institutional resources. Additionally, 'Queer' Asia's events have remained entirely free to attend and in accessible venues. Towards these strategies, dedicated members of the committees carry out this work entirely voluntarily, contributing their time and effort, and undertaking intellectual and physical work for the platform. The emotional and affective labour underwriting these events, including the 2017 and 2018 conferences and film festivals, remains a crucial driving force and motivation in continuing to enable such a space. These efforts are also enabled and encouraged by faculty at SOAS and other participating institutions who recognise and are highly invested in the struggles of politically aware and active student bodies.

These goals were supplemented by a growing realisation of the necessity to engage with different forms of mediations of queer issues. 'Queer' Asia has been invested in complementing academic discussion with cinematic and artistic expressions. These mediations through film and art were programmed in alignment with, but as crucial juxtapositions to, academia and activism at both the 2017 and 2018 conferences. Thus, for instance, the conferences are programmed in a way that audiences could attend both a talk by the founder of Al Qaws, Haneen Maikey, on the intersectional struggles in claiming a feminist, queer, and national identity alongside a film engaging with the question of identity, sexuality, and gender in Palestine. Or they could attend a play by playwright and academic Danish Sheikh based on the Indian Supreme Court's 2014 judgement re-criminalising same-sex

sexuality (which undid the 2009 Delhi High Court ruling), alongside a featured event on the deteriorating situation in Indonesia (in the province of Aceh), where despite homosexuality being legal, gay men are caned in public, in parallel with Indonesian human rights lawyer Yasmine Purba discussing LGBTQ+ issues in Indonesia in conversation with other activists working on, with, or in resistance to governments by highlighting strategies and efforts towards decriminalising homosexuality, including Paul Dillane (Kaleidoscope Trust), Arvind Narrain (ARC International), and Li Maizi (of the Feminist Five). Similarly, the Korean performance artist Nayoung Jeong's performance piece 'Tracing Body' and interactive installation 'Direction' relating to the 2018 theme 'Bodies X Borders' worked side by side with the 2018 keynote panel as audience members attempted to find seats among the installation. The installation was composed of 20 clay feet in the shape of heels constructed out of casts of aroused nipples, with the nipples facing inward, creating physical discomfort for the wearer. The installation was intended to be worn, touched by, and engaged with by the audiences. Encouraging this engagement facilitated a sensory experience of the discomfort of wearing and occupying gender as the nipples left the wearer's feet to sit highly uneasily in the heels. Additionally, these feet took up space within one of the main venues for talks and panels, being knocked over, or causing discomfort by being accidentally leant on. Such engagement disrupted the processes of consumption of academia with the presencing of art: demanding, eliciting, and evoking engagement. Other art at the exhibition, such as Ryudai Takano's 91 paper planes made of Article 175 of the Japanese Penal Code codifying obscenity and 'Mutant Salon: Exorcises', a new media installation by Young Joon Kwak and Ali Miller, among others, encouraged a multi-scalar engagement at 'Queer' Asia 2018. Crucially, in unpacking 'Bodies X Borders', Jeong's installation and performance piece also interrogated the

uneasiness that accompanies Asian bodies negotiating culture as they travel westward. 'Tracing Body' performs this as Jeong, in a homage to Mona Hatoum's work, drags two solid clay feet – representing her identity embedded in its cultural values and being displaced by globalised pulls – tied to her ankles across a white board as she journeys across it, leaving only traces and residue. Similar examples abound through the art exhibition, the film festival, and the conference that encouraged audiences to sign protest letters to the UK Home Office for denying visas to participants deemed risky by the UK Border Agency, including those who were fully sponsored by 'Queer' Asia donors. Thus, both the 2017 and 2018 film festivals, the 2018 'Bodies X Borders' art exhibition, and the dramatic readings and performance by poets and novelists in 2017, as well as the two plays from India and Pakistan in 2018, meant that the programming for 'Queer' Asia offered a diverse range of events with which attendees could engage with the vast complexity of how queerness is experienced in relation to Asia, Asian identities, and the sociocultural conglomerations within which Asia can be conceptualised. The 'Queer' Asia conferences and film festivals therefore consistently attempt to put not just regions into conversation, but to develop and enrich theoretical mediums (film, art, theatre, activism, academia), areas, and disciplines. It is within these three overarching ideals that the 'Queer' Asia conferences and film festivals create a space that interacts, in some part, with what the APQ network calls 'the emergence of a vibrant new academic field: queer studies of Asian contexts conducted by researchers working in Asia' (Martin et al., 2008: 1).

As a juxtaposition to the creation of 'academic fields' or disciplines, 'Queer' Asia offers a critical departure and a refusal to follow in the same footsteps even as it shares some of these goals. That is, 'Queer' Asia runs parallel to an academic field, easily absorbed into the framework of the neo-liberal university,

to create even as it continually struggles to demand, per-
haps idealistically, spaces where intersections of queer Asian
research, experiences, and artistic expression do not simply
become an object of study, but are (also) continually vested in
embodied interaction. Here, 'Queer' Asia shares some of APQ's
early goals of 'interven[ing] strategically to confront multiple
exclusions [by bringing together academics/research students]
to inscribe queer studies within Asian studies [and vis-à-vis]'
(Martin et al., 2008: 2), but exceeds this by seeking to expand
the terrain on which exclusion is being perceived. Where the
APQ network, their edited collection, and the establishment
of a 'self-confident field of Asian queer studies' foreground the
importance of 'intraregional conversations among diverse loca-
tions in Asia' (Martin et al., 2008: 2), 'Queer' Asia differs on
two important grounds. The first difference arises from 'Queer'
Asia's problematic but contextually relevant location in the
UK (see 'Positionality' below). The second difference emerges
from the impetus, crucial by the 2017 conference, to attempt to
decolonise not just the disciplinary demarcations, the impe-
rialism inherent in post-Cold War area studies mappings, the
framework of globalised sexual and gender categories travelling
eastward, but also the shape and form of the neo-liberal univer-
sity within which research and publication is now constrained.
This second difference, emphasised through a crucial dialogue
with other mediums negotiating queer Asian intersectionalities,
is a critical departure from the conception of an 'academic field',
and in this sense is an important engagement with decolonising
the forms through which certain forms of knowledges circulate
and are celebrated. These two differences are the point from
which this edited volume is conceived, as an acknowledgment
of 'Queer' Asia's positionality and simultaneously as part of
the impetus to decolonise epistemological frameworks on both
queerness and Asian identities.

Positionality

The aims of the APQ network are highly laudable, and the creation of a field catering to the exclusions felt by queer researchers or researchers working on queer issues in Asia is a much-needed political position with which the 'Queer' Asia network also identifies.[4] Their work, coexisting with other similar enterprises, such as the ILGA Asia Regional Conference first established in 2002, the Asia Pacific Trans Network in 2009, and the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus formed in 2011, are the founding blocks of critical intraregional networks. These also depend on earlier forms of intra-regional networks and collaboration, such as in Japan, Taiwan (Welker and Kam, 2006), or the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Project begun under the Birmingham School. However, with the emphasised and necessary Asian location of several of these projects, a regrettable consequence is the uneven access researchers working on Asia and queerness have to such spaces (when they are created). Within Western universities the experiences of alienation work both through the disciplinary biases already noted but also the sociocultural dislocation experienced as a result of a global market-driven academic system that privileges Western institutions, encouraging a reverse flow of students aspiring to move westward even as theory flows east.

Within such a context, 'Queer' Asia's location and functioning in London is a consequence of addressing the two-way global flow within which not only does theory travel eastward (Altman, 1996; Hawley, 2001; Sullivan and Jackson, 2001; Binnie, 2004), but also students and professionals aspire to and aim to travel westward. Thereby, our positionality is responding as much as it is emerging from the second flow through which Western academic institutions continue to profit from, even as they participate in the policing of, international students. However, in responding to this positionality, the members of 'Queer' Asia are aware of the

politics of location and pursue multiple strategies to deter lack of access caused by the highly restrictive UK border. These include working with technology and social media to make 'Queer' Asia's events freely accessible online (the 2017 conference is fully available on 'Queer' Asia's YouTube channel and the 2018 conference is forthcoming), in addition to working voluntarily towards fundraising for participants to attend the conference, film festival, and events alongside providing visibility to queer Asian artists, performers, film-makers, and academics. Similarly, the network works with multiple local and international community partners to curate different blog series hosted on various university sites and on the 'Queer' Asia website in order to build towards an easily accessible archive that acts as a freely available starting point for research, information, and knowledge, as well as engaging with multiple mediums, and within an interregional and interdisciplinary framework.

In addition to responding to the sense of isolation emerging from disciplinary neglect, 'Queer' Asia has tapped into and responded to the sociocultural dislocation felt by different communities of the Asian diaspora, particularly in the UK. Therefore, for instance, after the 2016 'Queer' Asia conference, individuals and groups of the South Asian diaspora in the UK formed a collective called 'Gaysians' to address the alienation and disavowal experienced within diasporic communities. Similarly, following the third 'Queer' Asia conference in 2018, and the recognition of the importance of Pinkdot in Singapore and Hong Kong, individuals belonging to the Singaporean diaspora have embarked on exploring holding Pinkdot in London. 'Queer' Asia has worked with partners not only in academia, but through and with groups and collectives organised by other civil society actors and international and local students, whether focused on particular issues or vulnerable populations, such as refugees, migrants, and detainees. This sort of collaboration has led to addressing issues that emerge

from but also reflect the inadequacy and gaps in the circulation of different kinds of knowledges.

Decolonise

One of the areas for focus of the 'Queer' Asia conferences is fostering interregional dialogue with an aim to decolonise epistemological frameworks and forms of knowledge. 'Queer' Asia encourages such dialogue through the composition of diverse panels at conferences and events, bringing multiple regions and topics into conversation with one another to draw out similarities and differences and encourage awareness of contextual specificities. Here, the refusal to perpetuate 'area ghettos' (Jackson et al., 2005) has been a fundamental organising principle from the outset. Similarly, the effort to queer area studies and to decentre Western queer theory in the understanding of non-normative sexuality within Asian contexts is similar to the aims of the APQ network. However, the decolonial project extends beyond disciplinary parameters into the motivation in continuing the effort to organise the 'Queer' Asia conference and film festival. Where APQ sought to provide and create avenues for 'Asia based queer studies academics to publish their work for an international readership' (Jackson et al., 2005: 300), 'Queer' Asia is focused on creating resources unfettered by paywalls or daunting publishing houses (both heavily reliant on high academic prose and expensive hardbound copies). Furthermore, in creating accessible resources, 'Queer' Asia also works through social media to curate and collate LGBTQ+ related news, web content, art, and films to give them both greater visibility and to encourage reflection on parallels and divergences within non-normative communities within Asia and Asian diasporas.

In primarily focusing on generating visibility and creating accessible resources not just within or for academic circles, but in wider spheres of public culture (viz. Breckenridge and

Appadurai, 1995; see also Appadurai, 1996, 2013), both in the diaspora and within communities located in Asia, 'Queer' Asia's aim is to build legibility around Asian cultural production that mediates, cross-pollinates, supplements, and negotiates the sexual and gender variance within Asia and its diasporas. Such positions have been reflected in academic articulations as hybridity, in-betweenness, and interstitial spaces (Bhabha, 2004). A significant proportion of the audience that attends 'Queer' Asia is made up of non-academic participants who are keen to engage with the theoretical formulations and negotiations around questions of identity and sexual and gender variance. These highly engaged and critical non-academic audiences reflect Breckenridge and Appadurai's critical reformulation of public culture not as a depoliticised public sphere, but as an investment in 'the tensions and contradictions between national sites and transnational cultural processes' (Breckenridge and Appadurai, 1995: 5). 'Queer' Asia facilitates such engagement in the footsteps of academic exploration of the confluence of area studies and queer theory, but with the crucial difference of negotiating these complexities within a critical and politically involved broader public sphere.

Here, the work of decolonising academia is crucial as not only does 'Queer' Asia attempt to bridge paywalls, but also performs the crucial task of putting academia in conversation with critically engaged non-academic public spheres. 'Queer' Asia here responds to the much lamented 'been there, done that' attitude of the pace of academic research that sees the confluence of area studies and queer theory as passé (see Arondekar and Patel, 2016: 151). Such confluences of area studies and queer studies, despite attempts to negotiate the implicit geopolitics, has not trickled into mainstream humanities and social sciences research (let alone non-academic spheres), which remain vested in either/ or fields despite crucial work that emphasises a greater need for interregional linkages and dialogues. Within cultural studies,

such interlinkages are reflected in the work of the *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* project and journal (Chen, 2017; Henriques et al., 2017) or the much-needed calls for revisiting modernity and cultural studies within the impetus of globalisation (Breckenridge and Appadurai, 1995; Appadurai, 1996, 2001, 2013). In the intersection of queer and Asia, these dialogues have proliferated since the early 2000s (see Patton and Sánchez-Eppler, 2000; Hawley, 2001; Sullivan and Jackson, 2001; Cruz and Manalansan, 2002; Robertson, 2005; Browne et al., 2007), and include the 2003 International Convention of Asian Scholars in Singapore, the 2004 'Queer Matters' conference in London, the 'Sexualities Genders and Rights' Conference in Bangkok in 2005, the papers from which were published in *Intersections* in 2006, and the 2008 Anthology *AsiaPacifiQueer*, which notes the significance of the earlier 2005 conference. Yet despite the proliferation of these much-needed academic endeavours, even as late as 2016, a *GLQ* special issue responds to the urgency of addressing this lacunae (Arondekar and Patel, 2016). Yet the crucial question that has not been asked or mediated is whether these critical academic negotiations are also simultaneously vested in building a larger public sphere around its burgeoning discursive practice. Simply put: Where is the praxis, and how accessible or neo-liberal are its dynamics?[5]

It is alongside the earlier identified lacunae (Arondekar and Patel, 2016: 151) that 'Queer' Asia is a decolonial project that attempts to wrestle theory away from high academia into negotiation with public culture built through mediations with art, film, literature, performance, and activism. Here, the call for decolonisation is not the use of a buzzword, but stems from closely following the decolonial effort and politics taking place on the ground at the SOAS Students Union. The 'decolonise the curriculum' movement at SOAS coincided with planning for the first 'Queer' Asia conference in 2016. The latter followed negotiations with

attempts to mediate Western queer theory with non-normativity in Asian cultural formations, but was also rooted within larger student protests and movements the world over to decolonise the university (Sabaratnam, 2017; Bhambra et al., 2018), with the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaigns in Cape Town and subsequently the University of Oxford (see Rhodes Must Fall Movement, 2018; see also Rao, 2016). The SOAS Students Union society called the 'Decolonising Our Minds Society' states its objective as the need to:

> challenge the political, intellectual and structural legacies of colonialism and racism both within and outside the university, by promoting an awareness of global intellectual traditions, tackling structural inequalities within the institution, and engaging with ethnic minority and working-class communities around London … to re-imagine the university and its role. ('Decolonising Our Minds Society, SOAS SU', n.d.)

In a similar vein, 'Queer' Asia has asked these questions of queer theory in its negotiations with Asia ('Call for Papers', 'Queer' Asia, 2016) and later moved to an active 'celebration of the drive towards decolonisation at SOAS' to focus on 'desire and its intersections with decolonisation and decriminalisation' ('Call for Papers', 'Queer' Asia, 2017). Thus, the papers reflected in this collection of essays from talks or panels, the majority of which were submitted to 'Queer' Asia 2017: Desire, Decolonisation and Decriminalisation, are tied up within the ideals underwriting the platform.

'Queer' and Asia

Crucial within the decolonial project that underwrites 'Queer' Asia is querying the use of the term 'queer' as an organising principle. As students and researchers working within Western

academic institutions, a compulsory starting point is the Western origins and use of the term 'queer' from the activist movements of ACT UP (see Berlant and Freeman, 1992; Hall, 2003) to the academic usage as a critical deconstructionist tool (see de Lauretis, 1991; Warner, 1993; Halperin, 1997). However, in order to negotiate the complexity of drawing on Western theory and terminology to engage with varying postcolonial contexts (see Ferguson and Allen, 1990; Bustos-Aguilar, 1995; Cheah, 1997; Boellstorff, 2005; Gupta, 2005; Tellis, 2012; Tellis and Bala, 2015), we foreground the need to problematise the usage of queer at 'Queer' Asia. This also reflects, crucially, an important critique of the rapid trajectory of queer theory within the global frame travelling eastward. Instances of this critique were central in discussions such as at the 2017 film festival, where one of the very few out gay film-makers in Bollywood, Apurva Asrani, argued that the word itself is not translatable outside of elite circles who are conversant with Western academic knowledge. Nuanced academic discussion also touching on this argument was made at the keynote in 2017. Here, Nikita Dhawan argued against being distracted by the circulation of the terms and instead engage critically with the 'statephobia' within much queer theory that neglects sexual minorities from disenfranchised class, racial, caste, or gendered groups who cannot turn their backs on the state (see Dhawan, 2016). Such a position critically emerges from rooted geopolitical critique of travelling queerness that Nour Abou-Assab and Ben Murtagh also emphasised in their negotiations with activist and film circles in Palestine and Indonesia, respectively. Such positions are not uncritical of the varied forms of homonationalism (Israeli settler-colonialism offering a crucial point of debate on the keynote) deployed by states, but are clarion calls for the need to evolve tools and more conceptual frameworks within queer theory to negotiate with the bias of access inherent in the usage of post-structuralism, even as the tools therein are composed of

powerful guiding work. What such problematisation reiterates is a twofold critique of queer theory. The first engages with the need to constantly foreground geopolitical questions within discussion of queer and Asia as a necessary starting point. The second highlights the privilege of access that underscores the usage of the term and the terrain of its debates in relation to non-elite communities and non-academic circles.

Cognisant of these dynamics, 'Queer' Asia, even in its inception as a small graduate conference in 2016, was always circumspect about the term 'queer', indicating this by placing it within single quotes within the platform and network's name. We remain strongly vested in interrogating the trajectory of the term and its critical apparatus. To the 'Queer' Asia network, the usage of queer mediates and emerges from our positionality at the intersection of queer and Asia: defined as 'queer' at the same time that we remain interrogators of the term itself. In this regard, we define 'queer' as a placeholder for conceptual tools that are yet to emerge (invoking the potentiality of that which may be defined by the term), even as we recognise the importance of queer theory itself in engaging with non-normative positionalities and lives, given the pace and scale of globalisation. Yet we argue that such tools cannot emerge if the intersection of 'queer' and 'Asia' is continually treated within queer theory as a passing fad. Herein, we are vested in the necessity of not just decentring Western discourse, but also critically reapproaching the exclusions (not just the ones APQ identifies) predicated in the academic circulation of queer theory. Stated within our goals, the conceptual apparatus of 'queer' is a call to decolonise queer theory by expanding its scope beyond academia into other forms of knowledge production, into public culture, and into the realms of art, film, and activism. Such a positionality is not dismissive of queer theory, but rather, in recognition of its potential, an expansion into the popular to crucially undo the exclusions

through which academic knowledge functions. Moreover, it aids and abets the proliferation of the discourses of queerness in Asia that counter hegemonic cultural nationalist formulations that argue, in the popular, that such sexualities, gender identities, or positionalities do not exist in Asian milieus.

The inclusivity and potentiality of that referenced under the term 'queer' is extended in our attitude towards our conception of 'Asia'. Broadly conceived in both spatial and conceptual terms, we define 'Asia' as those regions and countries divided up by the area studies formulations of Cold War imperialism (Wang, 2002; Puar, 2007; Schueller, 2007) as West Asia, Central Asia and the Caucasus, South Asia, South East Asia, and East Asia and China, as well as 'Asian' groups in the diaspora. However, in our applied strategy of comparative assessment, we do not emphasise area studies-style definitions of regions in the platform's activities, but foreground inter- and intra-regional debate, drawing out comparisons, similarities, and differences. Our interest is on modes of commonality and divergence between these different regions, the nuances of which may be sacrificed in both Western scholarship focused on specific Asian regions (as singular entities) and the regional discussions of 'queer' issues within Asia (or again, specific 'Asian' regions). Focusing on shared and divergent perspectives, commonalities, and struggles across a broad spatial and conceptual plane, 'Asia' is conceived as both a supplement (in the Derridean sense) to the universalism inherent in Western theorising (such as might be evidenced in the application of queer theory in Asian contexts) as well as a primary forum from which 'queerness' (in its potential forms) might be theorised. A focus on Asia should necessarily avoid generalising and universalising 'Asian' experiences and losing specificity; this is reflected in the chapters contained in this volume that focus on particular contexts (individual countries or multiple countries within a region). It can

be noted that the majority of the chapters do not cross 'Asian' regions, perhaps reflecting current area studies demarcations in specialisation and expertise in the academy. At the same time, commonalities and differences exist in exploring queerness in 'Asia', and it is from this point that an answer back to the Western centricity of queer theory and Western-as-universal conceptions of queer experience might be found.

Structure

The structure and organisation of this volume is divided into three parts, based on three general themes that have become apparent from our discussions over the three years: (i) Negotiations; (ii) Traces and Ambiguities; and (iii) Coalitions and Fractures. In line with the general strategies pursued by the 'Queer' Asia network, the volume contains contributions from academic authors, both tenured and post/graduate students, and non-academic authors, including activists, researchers, a film-maker, a lawyer, and an artistic practitioner. Additionally, it spans countries and regions in terms of both authors and subjects under the umbrella 'Asia', including Lebanon, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and the diaspora, including India. Some chapters contain more of a straightforward presentation of research and data, whereas others employ sophisticated analytical frameworks in challenging methodologies and theoretical approaches to the study of queer Asias. These variations show the different approaches being taken by our authors and their colleagues and peers, illustrating the multifarious activities, topics, identities, and strategies employed and examined through this research. Authors have been asked to foreground their data, whether empirical or theoretical, with a view to locating their research as a place from which theory might be developed. This fits with the positionality and decolonial impetus described above, situating these contributions

within 'Queer' Asia's major initiatives. Inevitably, however, in choosing contributions for this volume, there are notable gaps in the topics and regions presented here. The majority of these contributions were based on topics presented at the 'Queer' Asia annual activities (particularly 2017), but in seeking to contain within our selection a spread of topics, issues, and identities, unavoidably there will points of view that remain unrepresented. The gaps in this volume at times parallel conference and film festival lacunae. 'Queer' Asia has notably had few submissions from individual countries, including Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, and some parts of West Asia (such as Syria), with Central Asia and the Caucasus being represented only in 2018. While access to country and regional networks plays one factor in the range of omissions, the lack of possibility for cultural production and academic opportunities is another significant factor, with certain subjects always remaining underrepresented. At 'Queer' Asia 2018, programming tried to ensure better representation of underrepresented topics: Japanese artist Ryudai Takano's work on censorship and Syrian diaspora artist Alqumit Alhamad's work on sexuality, violence, and beauty; a panel discussion on Central Asia and the Caucasus featuring Nazik Abylgazieva from Kyrgyzstan (Labrys); films from Myanmar, Thailand, Pakistan, Argentina/France, and Bosnia, Greece, and Macedon; and a critical look at topics including business and LGBTQ+ inclusion, philanthropy in Asia, non-binary identity, and asexuality. In seeking to incorporate divergent heterogeneous queer Asian experiences, we acknowledge that a limited volume such as this one will include inevitable gaps, for which we remain aware and apologetic. However, the contributions discussed in more detail below cross a wide variety of topics and regions, and are intended to be read in discussion with one another. Further, they contain cross-threads for potential dialogue, serving to create spaces for learning, debate, and solidarity.

The first part, 'Negotiations', brings together four contributions through which self and identity is negotiated. Ahmad Ibrahim's chapter, 'Under Empire and the Modern State: Unravelling "Queer Precarities" inside Global Assemblages', explores the ways in which Hijra identity (loosely related to 'transgender') has been subsumed into wider state agendas, whether governmental or NGO. They argue that the figure of the Hijra remains largely outside of discourses that seek to shape this marginalised identity as a conceptual citizen, demonstrating a larger interplay between divergent processes of power in the construction of queerness and queer identity in South Asia. Turning to new media in tracing the construction of queer identity for popular consumption, Ben Murtagh's chapter, 'Reimagining HIV in Indonesian Online Media: A Discussion of Two Recent Indonesian Web Series', offers a critical insight into the way in which creative workers and activists in Indonesia are taking to the as yet liminal spaces afforded by web series to inform and mediate for lay audiences scientific and medical understanding of HIV/AIDS. Murtagh particularly focuses on how these web series carry forward important work aimed at cultural destigmatising of HIV/AIDS in Indonesia in a climate of increasing Islamic anti-LGBTQ+ hysteria. Approaching the topic of marginalised and stigmatised identities through their work as a practitioner, He Xiaopei reflects on the work done by the Pink Space Sexuality Research Centre in China in taking to the cinematic form to engage with issues around desigmatisation of desires at the intersections of poverty, disability, and queerness. He's 'Rich in Desire: Sexualities and Fantasies Deriving from Poverty, Stigmatisation, and Oppression' focuses on the lived, spoken and unspoken, desire of communities often seen as marginalised, including people with disabilities, people living with HIV, and those who have eschewed normative gender and societal models in both China and the UK. By examining three films, He presents queer desires and sexualities as they are mediated through

socio-economic status, disabilities and medicalised identities, and other forms of social rejection. While the desires and fantasies of these subjects in many cases remain unspoken and unheard, Gabriel Semerene's chapter, '*Mithliyy, mithlak*: Language and LGBTQ Activism in Lebanon and Palestine', examines how identities and desires are named, negotiated, and claimed through the primary domains of activism and language. Whether creating neologisms, adopting existing transnational discourses, or reclaiming slurs, Semerene argues that LGBTQ+ identity is negotiated in these very acts, forming the subject for rights and claiming a stake in the naming of communities and identities. In these contributions, negotiations are revealed to be crucial in constructing, making sense of, and living queer, Asian identities across the regions. The first part closes with an interview with Alana Eissa, a human rights activist and a transwoman who has recently been granted asylum in the UK. This interview examines discrimination and difficulties facing LGBTQ+ movements in Malaysia, strategies for organising and activism, and some of the difficulties faced in claiming asylum based on trans identity.

The second part, 'Traces and Ambiguities', explores the ways in which queerness is performed, traced, and represented. David Lunn's contribution, 'Queer Desires and Satirised Empires: Notes on Aubrey Menen's *A Conspiracy of Women* (1965)', teases out the complicities in myopic reading practices that rely on canonical literary formations to obfuscate queer texts through a close reading of the satirical work by the Indo-Irish author Aubrey Menen. By questioning the constant positionality to resituate Menen's work in relation to literary canons, Lunn calls attention to the way in which even the terrain of postcolonial literature is riddled with normative ideals regarding texts that eschew the inclusion of queer literary precursors. Lunn situates Menen's writing on either side of the decriminalisation of same-sex sexuality in the UK in 1967 alongside significant pertinent questions attesting to the continued

importance of Menen's work in unsettling racial and postcolonial rigidity vis-à-vis queerness. Picking up on these exclusions in a different context, Loo Zihan's chapter, '*Queer Objects: An Archive for the Future*', examines the process of creating a queer archive in the postcolonial nation state of Singapore, in the context of national identity, state governmentality, legal criminality, and recognition. While presenting an account of state power, Loo provides an insight into the queer community in this context, simultaneously demonstrating the ways in which queer traces exist and are made visible or permissible through engagement with the state. Further analysing what is historically and contemporaneously permitted and visible is Kate Korroch's examination of 'The Isolated Queer Body: Harisu's Dodo Cosmetics Advertisement', where the transgender body is examined as a consumer product in relation to South Korean advertising and new media. Korroch positions the model Harisu's isolated body in regards to both the gender play undertaken in the advert, across similar advertising strategies in South Korea, and in relation to Harisu's own self-actualisation, presenting the conscious and unconscious construction of gender norms and ambiguities. The second part closes with an interview with Floyd Scott Tiogangco, a Filipino activist and visual artist specialising in performance, installation, and conceptual art, and the subject of *Slay*, one of the films premiered at the 'Queer' Asia Film Festival 2018. The interview expands on their lived experience as a homosexual, trans-androgynous, genderqueer person and their negotiations with the limits of gender expression and sociocultural norms. These reflections trace the imbalances between gender expression and identity and power structures in this region that affect human rights.

In the third and final part, 'Coalitions and Fractures', we turn to examine the ways coalitions and fractures have featured in queer organising and theorising. The contribution by Geoffrey Yeung, 'Intersex Advocacy in Chinese/Sinophone Contexts: A Primer,

Accompanied by an Interview with Activist Small Luk', surveys significant developments and trajectories in intersex activism, in Hong Kong and globally. Presenting regional similarities and differences in both framing demands and organising, this contribution demonstrates the specificity of local organising, while claims are still made to global platforms and frameworks. The possibility of organising on a macropolitical level is taken up by Po-Han Lee's chapter, 'Queer Asia's Body without Organs: In the Making of Queer/Decolonial Politics'. Lee provides an examination of the theoretical complexities in conceptualising 'Queer Asia', particularly as it might offer philosophical and political potential in reconfiguring queer and decolonial studies. Reflecting both on the 'Queer' Asia conferences (2016 and 2017) in conjunction with other projects envisioning Queer Asia, such as the ILGA-Asia Conference 2015, Lee contemplates themes of ambivalence, coalitional politics, and the multiplicity of queerness and Asianness in the pursuit of understanding what 'Queer Asia' is and its components. Turning away from a theoretical to a political engagement with coalitional organising, Nadje Al-Ali and Ghiwa Sayegh's chapter, 'Feminist and Queer Perspectives in West Asia: Complicities and Tensions', undertakes an examination of queer feminist activism in West Asia. Pointing to wider complicities, discontinuities, tensions, and specific trends between heterogeneous geographical regions, Al-Ali and Sayegh analyse the emergence of queer feminist spaces that challenge the nature of radical organising and push for an understanding of the indivisibility of struggles in the face of ongoing political struggles. This final part closes with an interview with Alqumit Alhamad, a Syrian diaspora artist whose work invokes powerful expressions of gender, sexuality, and violence. This interview traces the evolution of Alhamad's intersectional art and activism, particularly in relation to his migration to Sweden.

The range of topics, countries, regions, contributors, and wider issues raised in the contributions in this volume form just

some of the topics and approaches crucial to the study of 'queer Asia'. Given the rich variety and substance presented here, we acknowledge the impossibility of a common starting point, but instead here seek to emphasise the potential openings made possible by such a productive imbalance through foregrounding multi-scalar dialogue and negotiation. As such, this volume does not seek to present a unifying original argument, but rather focuses on presenting the diversity inherent here, although we acknowledge the inevitable lacunae in such an approach, whether the critique relates to a lack of 'academic' rigour (in practitioner and activist pieces) and unified approach, or the representation of different subjects, topics, and individual countries or regions in this collection. We have aimed to highlight some of the important conversations and discussions happening in relation to 'Queer' Asia, which serves to work in parallel with our annual events, online materials, blog series, videos, and ongoing events. Access and inclusivity was part of the original requirements for this collection of contributions, with a focus on producing a collection of pertinent issues, themes, approaches, and strategies being undertaken by colleagues working on their own versions of a queerer Asia. As a final word, we are grateful to Zed Books for their support of this project, as an accessible publisher who we feel reflects our own political standpoint in their projects and approach to publishing. Equally, we would like to thank the wider contributions of all those who have been and remain involved with 'Queer' Asia, for the space created and the multiplicity of voices who have participated in their project. This volume is but a small example of the invigorating and crucial work being undertaken in service of a queer Asia.

Notes

1 The third 'Queer' Asia conference and film festival, titled 'Bodies X Borders', occurred in June 2018.
2 Full details of the annual events and run-up events from 2016 to 2018 can be found on the website (see www.queerasia.com).

3 The 'Queer' Asia network, having not heard of the 'Queer Matters' conference at the time of organising the 2016 conference, arrived at this stance independently of the reflections on the 'area ghettos' at the 2004 'Queer Matters' conference by scholars such as Helen Hok-Sze Leung and Akiko Shimizu (Jackson et al., 2005).
4 The involvement of several scholars at the APQ network is also reflected in the important critical work being published at the Hong Kong University Press' Queer Asia series, although this series has until 2017 been largely focused on countries in eastern and south-eastern parts of Asia, and one volume on the Pacific Islands.
5 This is not to suggest that collaborative research projects that straddle the spaces of activism, film, and academia do not exist, nor to argue that creative ways to co-opt the present university structures for positive social change cannot be found. The collaborative, partner-focused, and capacity enhancement-driven project Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights (Nicol, 2018) is one such inspiring example.

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