

Featured Review Exchange

Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression.
Ed. by Meredith L. Weiss and Michael J. Bosia. Urbana, IL:
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As editors Meredith Weiss and Michael Bosia point out, bias against same-sex sexuality and those who engage in same-sex intimacy is a global phenomenon. In their introduction to this collection of essays by noted scholars of sexuality and politics, Bosia and Weiss argue that the field needs an approach to the study of homophobia that refuses to reduce it to individual prejudice or even to ideology. Instead, Weiss and Bosia conceptualize “political homophobia” as “a state strategy, social movement, and transnational phenomenon” that is enacted “in the course of nation building and as part of the legitimation of political and economic power” (2–3). Central to this framing is a conception of homophobia as not only *political* but also *modular*, providing a productive lens on a set of phenomena that may seem unrelated until they are connected to each other conceptually and empirically. In describing homophobia as “modular,” Bosia and Weiss emphasize the similarities and portability of homophobic ideas and discourses whose lack of fit to the social and political circumstances of their deployment may confound observers.

Bosia and Weiss unsettle the common worry that Western lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) activists and states import and impose Western categories of sexual identity on “same-sex loving” people in the non-Western world. They point out that “in many cases, it is the homophobes who import a model of same-sex intimacy in terms of Western concepts of LGBT community” such that “political

homophobia incites a Western sexual binary, which in turn structures reactive organizing among sexual minorities through identities that draw from the Western binary” (16). This dynamic in which oppression is met by a defense that mirrors the terms of group-based harm is consistent with Hannah Arendt’s often-quoted principle of resistance to political discrimination: “if one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew. Not as a German, not as a world-citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man, or whatever.”

The majority of contributors to *Global Homophobia* are political scientists by training; however, this disciplinary homogeneity belies the wide range of subfields, topics, and scholarly perspectives the authors bring to the volume. The authors address a range of global contexts and themes that include the role of religion in generating and maintaining homophobia (Karya J. Kaoma, Conor O’Dwyer, Weiss, Katarzyna Korycki, and Abouzar Nasirzadeh); the political effects of homophobic violence (Bosia, Amy Lind, and Sami Zeidan); the legacies of colonialism and communism on postcolonial and postcommunist nations (Kaoma, O’Dwyer, Lind, Zeidan, Mark Blasius, and Christine (Cricket) Keating); and the transmission of political homophobia between and among nations (David K. Johnson, Weiss, Korycki and Nasirzadeh, Blasius, and Keating). Readers will also benefit from key terms and concepts that are associated with the political homophobia frame. Particularly useful are Kaoma’s use of “collateral damage” to describe the effects of United States culture wars on LGBT Africans; O’Dwyer’s analysis of the “E[uropean] U[nion] effect” on LGBT-related legal frameworks; Weiss’s concepts of “homopositivity,” “anticipatory countermovements,” and “preemptive homophobia”; and Blasius’s explication of “regimes of sexuality.” Referring to two non-Western contexts, Korycki and Nasirzadeh offer “anti-same-sex” and Blasius offers “same-sex loving” as culturally-responsive alternatives to “homophobia” and “gay.”

A significant feature of the volume for some readers will be the many ways in which authors negotiate with queer theory. In their introductory chapter alone, Bosia and Weiss unsettle familiar queer-theoretical assumptions and conclusions in four significant ways. First, they note that queer theorists focus on oppression based on gender and sexuality but tend to miss the social movement mechanisms by which state and other elites use homophobic discourses to consolidate and maintain power. Three other topics of productive engagement and disagreement with queer

theory follow from the conceptualization of political homophobia as discourses, activisms, and public policies conceived and enacted by *anti-LGBT* actors. Bosia and Weiss complicate the popular concept of homonationalism, emphasize that the relationship between neoliberal globalization and anti-LGBT discourses of gender and sexuality can take many forms, and directly challenge commonly-held understandings of how Western categories of sexuality and gender migrate to and become imposed on non-Western national discourses and social actors. Together, these differences seem to underwrite the editors' affirmation of the necessity under some circumstances for Western states and human rights activists to work with and on behalf of LGBTQ people in contexts where political homophobia has been deployed against them.

Because Bosia and Weiss address themselves to queer-theoretical claims and assumptions both implicitly and explicitly in their introductory essay, I wonder how they would characterize more directly the promise and potential pitfalls of queer theory for researchers in the field of politics and sexuality. In what ways can queer theory — the most popular paradigm for the study of sexuality in the humanities — be useful to political scientists who study the global politics of sexuality and, just as important, what are its limitations? Another question: scholars of sexuality and politics who are likely to borrow and advance the conception of homophobia that is simultaneously political and modular might benefit from having the relationship between “state [and “state-sponsored”] homophobia” and “political homophobia” clarified. Is state homophobia merely a subset of political homophobia that distinguishes between state and non-state actors or institutions, or can the difference be understood in other ways that cast light on fruitful distinctions between the two?

The authors in this volume make important contributions to activism and scholarship at the intersection of sexuality and politics, not by speaking with one voice but by taking regional and global perspectives, and combining theoretical analysis with close attention to empiricism. Refusing to affirm a simple progress narrative of LGBTQ well-being, and placing sexuality and gender identity at the center of inquiries into nationalism, state formation, and social movements, the authors and editors model an approach to these subjects that has not yet become standard in the discipline and study of politics. *Global Homophobia* should contribute both to expanding disciplinary conceptions of “the political” and to informing new scholarship on sexuality and politics.