

Lesbian Geographies?: Gender, Place and Power

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For those who have gone before and those yet to come.

Chapter 1

Introduction to Lesbian Geographies

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Introduction

Lesbian geographies is about where, and how, individuals who identify as, claim the term, or might be seen as, 'lesbians' (and queer women) live, work and play. It is about how these people find each other in certain places and also how they negotiate places where they are not welcome, subject to abuse and where they feel unsafe. It is also about how the possibilities for finding and creating spaces have changed as a result of social, political and legal changes, especially since the post war period in the 1950s.

Different sub-disciplines of geography could have provided a home for lesbian geographies. It would be expected that feminist geographies would have an interest in this area, and also that geographies of sexualities that emerged in the 1980s would be the place where lesbian geographies would sit. However, both feminist geographies and geographies of sexualities were not sufficient. Feminist geographies often presumed a heterosexual woman, and geographies of sexualities began by focusing exclusively on gay men. In the 1980s then the sub-discipline of lesbians geographies emerged, particularly in the UK and North America, to address the intersections between sexualities/queer and gender/feminist geographies.

Lesbian geographies provides an important critique of the intersections of patriarchy, sexism, homophobia and heterosexism, as well as ensuring that lesbians and queer women's spatialities are made visible. A critique of geographies of sexualities (for its initial focus on gay men, and continuing to often see sexuality and queer through the lens of

masculinities), is coupled with a challenge to feminist geographies where they (unintentionally?) reproduce heterosexisms in presuming the heterosexualities, and specific relationship forms between women and men. There are of course numerous examples of how geographies of sexualities offer important analyses of gender (as well as age, race and class), and similarly how feminist geographies engage with the nuances of sexual desires, identities and practices. However, this does not negate the ways that lesbian geographies question and challenge particular normativities that continue to be reproduced in discussions of gender and sexualities. Heterosexism and male dominance are a pervasive reality. Thus, lesbian geographies continue to be a salient focus in exploring marginalisation, inclusion, differences and othering, as well as exploring sexual and gendered cultures and artefacts.

This book on lesbian geographies argues that a focus on the intersections of gender and sexualities is not only important, but necessary in engaging with social lives and working towards social justice. For activists this book addresses the question, what does geography have to do with it? Why should we care about place, space, environment, contexts? And it attempts to contest the simplistic associations of place and sexualities that can accompany those answers. These often follow two trajectories: firstly that rural/urban spaces are inherently different - with the rural being a place of exclusion and marginalization and the urban a site of freedom; secondly these assumptions function on a national/international level, arguing that some countries are inherently “homophobic”, with others “gay friendly”. Whilst there can be little doubt that space and geographies play an important part in our sexual identities, desires and practices, these simplistic assertions negate the ways that urban contexts are places of homophobic attack, and gay ghettos in these areas can be targeted for this (see Myslik, 1996) and rural lives can be havens of safety and where alternative lives can be planned and lived (Bell and Valentine, 1995a; Smith and Holt, 2005; Browne, 2011a). What this book instead shows is that sexual and gender liberations are constructed in relation

to the place where they occur, that is place matters to how we do politics, how we create our identities, relationships, desires and communities. In doing so, we follow those who see that place is central to the form identities take, the ways our lives are lived and to what we can and cannot do. In other words, place is more than a backdrop to our activities, it plays an active role in constructing them (Hubbard, 2006; Browne and Bakshi, 2013b). Lesbian geographies are neither straightforward, nor universal, but what binds discussions in this area together are considerations of how gender and sexual normativities continue to marginalise lesbians and queer women.

We begin this chapter by exploring “what is a lesbian”. We come to the conclusion that there is no one definition or one way of understanding this term. Nevertheless we argue that it is both salient and useful, and that who gets to define and use the term when and where illustrates particular power relations. We then move to explore the scholarship on lesbian geographies as it developed in the Anglo-American academy, before looking at the Anglo-American power relations that these lesbian geographies are in the main located within. That is, we need to remember that any form of knowledge is, itself, a political project with its own power struggles and historical/spatial trajectories. We then develop our overview of lesbian spatialities by exploring texts written outside of the English language. Although these sections could have been ordered thematically, this runs the danger of subsuming lesbian geographies to Anglo-American texts, priorities and orders. By keeping them separate, this introduction seeks to highlight that which is usually forgotten or overlooked, in favour of that which is written in English language “International” journals. The chapter finishes by outlining some specific elements of the chapters and commentaries that comprise this book.

What is a lesbian?

Focusing on lesbian geographies enables an explicit focus on women/female-identified sexualities. Yet, the question of who is a woman and who is a lesbian is not a straightforward one. This vexed question can be answered in numerous ways depending on when we are discussing and where you are. In other words, the term lesbian is used, reclaimed and denounced in relation to the power relations in particular places.

The term lesbian does not have one historical meaning. The identity politics and identifications within the category “lesbian” are historically specific. Faderman (1992) has shown how the identity category of “lesbian” has only recently been recognised as such. Tracing the existence of same sex desire and love relationships from the sixteenth century through to the twentieth century, Faderman contends that we need to contextualise lesbian identities within particular historical periods and cautions against reducing love relationships and same sex enactments to twentieth century conceptualisations of identities.

However, it is not only the historical contingency of lesbian that has produced vexed considerations of what a lesbian is. Black, disabled and other critiques of feminist thinking sees gender and thus sexuality, as formed along the axes of multiple social differences. In other words being a Black lesbian matters both for your racial identity and your sexual identity, and this is not the same as being a white lesbian, your ethnicity, gender and sexuality all co-create your life experiences, opportunities, desires, privileges and exclusions. Similarly, queer critiques of identities take account of how class, race, age, (dis)ability, mothering and other social differences reconstitute identities such as women and men (Chouinard and Grant, 1995; Taylor, 2007; Taylor *et al.*, 2011; Isoke, 2013; Lane, this volume; Beresdeak, this volume). The question of who, or what a lesbian “is” then relates to all of our other identities and cannot be left to “common sense”. Instead it is formed through relations of power that are different for different people.

Moreover, queer spaces can seek to question and break down boundaries and binaries between men and women (Podmore, 2001; 2013; Nash, 2011; 2013). The question of how one becomes a woman (or a man, de Beauvoir, 1989), disrupts the assumption that one simply “is” a woman (or a man). Butler’s (1990) assertion that gender is performative rather than given, and that this performance is related to the heterosexual matrix (where men and women are constituted as opposites meant to come together), asks us to rethink the category woman. Butler asserts that to be a “woman” cannot be understood as simply possessing certain biological traits, but instead relates to how one is able to exhibit normative gendered behaviours (feminine) and sexual desire (heterosexual). By doing appropriate gendered and sexualised acts over and over again, this makes our “self” man or woman. Moreover, this repetition also makes us believe that these traits are “natural”, “innate” and “who we are”. This theory is called performativity, and is key to most poststructural and queer thinking regarding identities. Once categories of gender are decoupled from their fixed moorings, sexualities can no longer be held constant, as (Global North) definitions of sexualities (including lesbian) are based on clearly defined genders. This then poses a number of challenges to a category like “lesbian”, not the least of which is that it disrupts the idea that there is something fixed and stable that can be called a “lesbian” and that can be used to bring people together to form “a community”.

Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose (2000) took theories of performativity and used them to rethink the concepts of space and place. Seeing place and space as something that we “do”, rather than something that simply “is”, these authors opened up a range of new possibilities for considering how space/place and gender/sexuality are related. In particular, they enabled authors to think about how gender and sexualities both made place/space and were themselves made in and through place and space. From this thinking, gender has been shown to be formed through place, such as toilets, house design, city planning, workplaces, the street

(see for example WGSF, 1997; Domosh and Seager, 2001; McDowell, 1999; 2003; Browne, 2004; 2005; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). In other words, place and space are actively making gender, sexed bodies and sexualities.

Where sex/gender/sexuality is “performed” matters, because this plays a part in what happens. This is easiest to see in terms of the assumed norms of a place, and what is expected to happen there. In the main these norms are respected and adhered to, lesbian couples don’t hold hands or show affection, making a space seemingly “naturally” heterosexual (Bell *et al.*, 1994). When these norms are transgressed - a lesbian couple kisses in a supermarket - the norms of heterosexual space are questioned (Valentine, 1996). This can be recuperated (the couple asked to leave, ridiculed or subject to abuse) or ignored. What happens in the place not only remakes that place (tolerant, homophobic, and so on), it also remakes the couple (acceptable/unacceptable). These norms, actions and reactions all vary spatially, recreating places and those within them differently. In contrast to this perspective that sees identities as created in part through where we are, within gay studies, there have been some that see gay identities as diffusing globally supposedly mirroring identities and spaces in the Global North (Altman, 1996; 1997; 2001a; 2001b). However, these identities have been shown to be associated with Western values, ideals and familial organisation and do not always translate easily into local contexts (Adam *et al.* 1992; Plummer, 1992; Drucker, 2000; Grewal and Kaplan, 2001; Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan IV, 2002; Brown *et al.* 2010). “Queer” globalization scholarship has critiqued the assumptions of unidirectional and unproblematic acceptance of Western gay and lesbian identities in the Global South (for example, (Povinelli and Chauncey, 1999, Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan IV, 2002, Kulpa and Mizieleńska, 2011).

Context then is key in defining who and what a “lesbian” is and just as there is no single global LGBT culture or identity (Patton and Sánchez-Eppler, 2000; Boellstroff 2007; Jackson, 2009), neither is there one lesbian culture/identity/desire/relationship form. There

has not been a fixed referent of “lesbian” in lesbian geographies, from Munt’s (1995) argument that lesbians are constructed in the mobilisation of urban space, to Peace’s problematisation of the ‘epistemic concept of lesbian geographies’(2001, p.44). Platero (2009) drawing on historical work in Spain, questions approaches to the discourses and representations of lesbianism. She challenges the very term lesbian, which she argues refers to a subject that is product of the construction of a contemporary sexual identity of Western culture, where each half of the pair sorts and denotes what the subject is not, rather than what it is. This is not the case in all countries. For example, in Indonesia, relationships between women can conform to certain gender roles regarding male and female responsibilities but these gender roles are not fixed within the boundaries of normative Indonesian gender relations (Weiranga, 1999) . Therefore, although women within same-sex partnerships may take on butch/masculine roles, these still can transgress the traditional male roles. In addition to identities, politics are also spatially and temporally created. In the Global North, as Browne and Nash (2009) note, lesbian and gay activists might read the situation in Indonesia as “repression”, “denial” and “closeting”. Yet, these terms need to be critically assessed in relation to geographical specificity and globalising power relations.

However, it is not only in the Global South that lesbian identities have come into question. For many in the Global North, in light of queer critiques discussed above, lesbian becomes an identity politics that seemingly fixes desires, behaviours and practices, and fails to acknowledge the fluidities of gender and sexual identities (Browne, 2004; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; see also Ford, this volume for a discussion of the clashes between queer and lesbian identities). The deconstructing of the sign woman, the rise of understanding gender as fluid and constructed, the term lesbian is now seen by many as outdated both as an identity category and a mode of collectively organising and gathering (although see Podmore, this volume).

We therefore want to begin by seeing the label “lesbian” as fluid and constructed in spatial and temporal ways. Nevertheless, we use this sign because we believe that it has multiple uses:

Firstly, it operates as recognition of the ways in which heterosexual and patriarchal power relations (heteropatriarchies) continue to need to be contested. Work that is now labelled as queer, can focus implicitly on gay men, in ways that fail to recognise the gendering of queer. Similarly, discussions of homonormativity see certain “gay men and lesbians” as becoming normative through the advent of legislation such as gay marriage, in ways that replicates the social conditions (class, race, disability, age, and so on) supported by normative heterosexualities. These important critiques can often fail to explore the gendered differences between men and women, instead “gay men and lesbians” are considered homonormative in homogenous ways that do not account for gendered differences. There can be little doubt that certain (white, middle class, monogamous) women, as well as men, have benefitted from legislative change and the creation of new sexual norms. These changes have both reiterated dominant norms, and left some queers ‘out in the cold’ (Sears, 2005). However, the gendered differences in these incorporations continue to be striking. For example, lesbians who assumed positions of power in Brighton, UK were subject to vitriolic hate campaigns led by a gay male dominated press (Browne and Bakshi, 2013a; 2013b; see also Ford, this volume; Hartal, this volume).

Secondly, the term lesbian continues to be a salient way in which people identify. This category remains important for many and lesbians continue to collectively gather under the sign lesbian/dyke. Thus, this label also deserves academic respect and attention.

Thirdly recognising that “lesbian” is not a coherent or homogenous category and that labelling is fluid across space and time, lesbian geographies have the potential to further contest the very nature of geography and how we do geography. For the latter, we are

particularly interested in challenging the Anglo-American hegemony in geographies and sexualities/queer studies that asks for situatedness and positionalities, but feigns universality (see below; Silva, 2011; Brown, 2012; Kulpa, 2014).

Although we are arguing for the use of the category lesbian, we, as editors, do not define or pin down what “lesbian” might mean. We are not offering an overarching definition of lesbian, nor do we presume that this category is appropriate and works for all. We are aware that there are a wide range of possibilities and that the category lesbian is often centred in cis-lesbians in the context of Western cultures, making it difficult for trans, intersex and others from different cultural contexts to identify as lesbians. Our main interest is to explore how the category/label is deployed, resisted and also made invisible. This book seeks a consideration of what lesbian geographies are, and might be, recognizing that there is no one lesbian and that interactions with place and space reconstitute the terms of the debate and the identities themselves. Keeping this in mind, we now turn to examine the canon of lesbian geographies within the Anglo-American context.

Anglo American Herstories: Global North Lesbian Geographies

Anglo-American lesbian geographies take a number of forms and began by examining how lesbians appropriated urban space, looking at how lesbians negotiated space including heterosexualised space (that is space that is made to be heterosexual (Bell *et al.*, 1994; Bell and Valentine, 1995b). This section will give an overview of key trends through an examination of work published in geography journals or by key geographers that look at lesbian/queer women geographies. It does not look at studies on ‘lesbians and gay men’, queer or LGBT, because a focus on lesbians and women within this area is often overlooked. Moreover, articles that claim to focus on queer/LGBT/lesbians and gay men, often focus on men. The section begins by outlining a key binary in this sub-discipline, the urban/rural

divide, before addressing the ways in which the challenge of lesbian spatialities have been taken up through negotiations of time-space strategies.

Urban geographies

Anglo-American lesbian geographies emerged in the 1990s in response, to and developing from, urban geographies of sexualities that had their focus on gay men. Geographies of sexualities began in the early 1980s with explorations of gay ghettos in the USA (see Lauria and Knopp, 1985). The first key consideration of gay male urbanities was focused on San Francisco. Manuel Castells and Karen Murphy (1983) acknowledged that lesbians existed, but they used an essentialist argument to contend that the 'inherent differences' between the genders lead to different forms of spatial organising and territorial aspirations. This was quickly challenged by other geographers, who saw the differences between men and women as less related to essentialised gender differences and pertaining more to the different forms of oppressions that men and women experienced and reflecting differing economic and social circumstances, specifically women's transgression of the role of wife and mother, and men's differential access to economic and social resources (for example, Alder and Brenner, 1992; Peake, 1993; Rothenberg, 1995). Socio-economic forces between men and women were (and are) also at play where women's employment was (and is) limited and thus home ownership and funds to start up a business influenced territorial acquisition. Catherine Nash's (2006) work noted the overt hostility and differential treatment women received in gay ghettos in Toronto, such as insisting on male escorts, higher cover charges for women and dress codes to exclude butch women.

A focus on lesbians' residential organisation initially sought to "add women" in to gay male discussions. This took the form of comparing lesbian residential concentrations with gay men (Alder and Brenner, 1992; Peake, 1993; Rothenberg, 1995). The idea that there

was an inherent gendered difference between men and women was contrasted with the view that socio-economic engagements with gendered differences lead to differences in concentrations (Browne and Nash, 2009). What was clear was that although lesbian residential neighbourhoods did exist, these did not have associated lesbian commercial focal points, social or political control, such as electoral control that gay men held or activism (Benjamin *et al.*, 1973; Lauria and Knopp, 1985). Lesbian neighbourhoods were less visible than gay male neighbourhoods and were found in downtown cores of North American cities and in alternative urban spaces. Scholars thus argued that rather than being 'less territorial', women occupied and used space differently to men (Podmore, 1999, Lo and Healey, 2000; Nash, 2001, Podmore, 2001).

This was a fundamental and crucial challenge to geographies of sexualities, and geographical thinking more broadly. Recognising gendered differences demanded a reconsideration of how research was defined, core theories of space used and what was considered worthy of study. Lesbian geographies then demanded a different understanding of territories, claiming spaces and the creation of place. They began the task of exploring the mutual constitution of space/place and identities in ways that questioned the malestream, as Podmore (1999; 2001) contended contemporary paradigms of urban geographies could not accommodate lesbians' use and experiences of straight spaces. It was clear that lesbian geographies could not simply be "added in" to gay male geographies. Examining women's use of space reworked our core and underpinning understandings of what makes urban territories, spaces and places, how they are used and by whom.

Lesbian ruralities

In contrast to urban areas, rural areas are relatively underexplored in lesbian geographies, as well as geographies of sexualities more broadly. This is despite calls for

nearly 20 years to engage with differences including sexual, gendered, racialised, and disabled in discussions of rural idylls (Cloke and Little, 1997, Cloke, 2002; 2003). Studies in this area have explored political engagements with the rural, migration, lives in rural areas, representations of rural areas and rural festivals (Little, 1999; 2007; Smith and Holt, 2005; Browne, 2009b). In broader geographies of sexualities hostile ruralities are often contrasted with accepting urban spaces, studied through the lives of those who migrated from the rural to the urban, and often identifiable gay areas (Weston, 1995). Although the stories of those who have migrated from rural areas to the utopias of cities such as San Francisco and New York are important, Browne and Nash (2009) suggest that there is a need to examine rural sexualities beyond “citified” identities such as lesbian and gay (see also Kramer, 1995).

Lesbian separatism has been a key way in which rural lesbian politics has been explored. Valentine (1995) demonstrated how some women in the 1970s saw the rural as an escape from ‘man-made’ cities, and as an opportunity to live differently to patriarchal norms, creating new values and spiritualities. The rural afforded the opportunity to live separately from men, to live more self-sufficiently and to avoid the trappings of what was seen as male culture. However, as Valentine shows, disagreements between women and exclusions were also a feature of these communities. Whilst Valentine implies that as a result of these fallings out and exclusions, these communities all but disappeared, Browne (2009a; 2009b; 2011b) illustrates that lesbian separatist communities continue to exist. She explores the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, illustrating the new challenges facing these festivals, namely around contestations of the sign “womyn” (a term used to take the “men” out of “women”), and how womyn’s spaces are defined as not being inclusive for trans womyn. However, she also illustrates that these spaces are powerful gatherings of womyn, who work towards contesting everyday patriarchies and seek to create feminist utopias.

Smith and Holt (2005) examined the gentrification of rural areas by lesbians and found that, similar to non-lesbian migrants, lesbians were moving from urban to rural areas and engaging in processes of gentrification. This points to the problematic assumptions of difference associated with 'otherness' in ruralities, where lesbians may engage in similar patterns of accumulation and capitalist consumption practices (Browne and Nash, 2009).

These studies emphasise the clustering of lesbian communities and thus replicate earlier urban work that assumed particular forms of territorialisation as the sole focus of lesbian geographies. In addition, examinations of rural homosexualities, which looked at public sex spaces and men who have sex with men in the USA (Kramer, 1995), have pointed to how identifications such as "gay" can be read as urban and unrelated to sexual practices. This sees sexual identities as spatially contingent, and has implications for how we look for, and at, female sexualities in rural spaces.

Negotiating Time-Space

Research that has focused specifically on lesbian spaces shows that lesbians both contest and negotiate heterosexual norms by using time-space strategies (Valentine, 1993a, Valentine, 1993b, Valentine, 1995a). This means that at different times of the day or different days of the week, lesbians reproduce spaces in very different ways. For example, lesbians/queer women appropriate straight nightclubs or gay bathhouses, and in this way they rework the meaning of that space for the duration of the event (Valentine, 1993b; Nash and Bain, 2007b).

One aspect of this area has been the resistance of heterosexual norms and reworking of spaces outside of these norms. This takes a variety of forms. Perhaps most obviously, overt forms of political activities (such as 'dyke' and Pride marches; Browne, 2007; Johnston, 2005a; Podmore, this volume) and expressions of sex/desire (Podmore, 1999; 2001; Bain

and Nash, 2006; 2007), challenge the ways in which space can be rendered heterosexual, and/or lesbians/queer women (a)sexualised. Lesbian and gay territories, discussed above, can act as a form of resistance, creating spaces, such as gay ghettos, that can provide political, social and economic strength (Lauria and Knopp, 1985, Rothenberg, 1995). However, it is not only through claiming territories that we can see resistances to heterosexual norms.

Geographers have also explored how resistant spaces are created through everyday activities in the mundane aspects of daily life. Studies have shown how music (Valentine 1995b) , TV (Millward, 2007; Cefai, 2014), clothes (Munt, 1995), socializing (Valentine, 1993a; 1993b), online groups (Wincapaw, 2000) and sport (Caudwell, 2007; Muller, 2007a; 2007b; Muller-Myradahl, 2011) create real and imagined spaces that challenge the exclusions and oppressions that can be felt in everyday spaces.

Lesbians may not resist these norms, create or rework spaces. Strategies are also used to negotiate everyday spaces such as work (Kawale, 2004), the street (Valentine, 1996), schools (Gabb, 2005) and homes (Johnston and Valentine, 1995; Elwood, 2000). An awareness of the potential for violent abuse, misogyny and lesbo-, as well as homo-, phobia means that women can take precautions in everyday spaces to hide, conceal or downplay their identities, relationships and desires. Yet, these negotiations are complex and spaces such as the home can be sites where the expression of sexual identities is possible, as well as potentially abusive (Johnston and Valentine, 1995; Elwood, 2000; Gorman-Murray, 2008). Moreover, abuse may not simply arise from heteronormative others, but can also be found within violent lesbian relationships (Holmes, 2009).

A focus on how power operates and is resisted and negotiated highlights the uneven social relations not only between heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, but also within lesbian spaces. The social organization of working class lesbian communities, and particularly butch/femme cultures in the 1950s and 1960s, explored the intersections of class,

gender and sexualities (Kennedy and Davis, 1993; Nash, 2001). This literature recognised the social acceptability of working class women frequenting downtown taverns and restaurants, in contrast to the domestic expectations of middle/upper class women. Examinations of more recent manifestations of lesbian spaces have noted how class continues to be pertinent, although pointing to the exclusions of working class women from lesbian and scene spaces (Taylor, 2007). Intersectionalities have also explored race (see Isoke, 2014 and Lane, this volume), disabilities (Chouinard and Grant, 1995) and mothering (see Gabb, 2011 and Beresdeak, this volume). Indeed geographers have noted how anti-violence and separatist initiatives can reiterate existing (white, middle class) norms (Valentine, 1995; Grant, 2000; Holmes, 2009). McLean (2008) noted how women who relinquished their lesbian identities are ostracised from lesbian communities, arguing that despite discussions of fluidities there are limits to the inclusion of diverse performances of sexualities. This is also important in relation to gender, and Catherine Nash's work with transmen illustrates the complex relationships these men have with lesbian and feminist spaces where they once felt acceptance, belonging, inclusion and ownership, but now as men have an ambiguous relationship to these spaces. Thus, lesbian geographies not only examine the possibility of resistance from normative heterosexual inscriptions of place, but also address internal limitations, exclusions and repressions. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of discussions of intersectionalities within lesbian geographies. Whilst these power relations bring into question the coherency of the category lesbian itself (see above), this does not negate the importance of gender in considering sexualities, rather these multiple differences and power relations need to be accounted for.

Taken together, this research shows that lesbian place making is complex and multifaceted, and takes different theoretical frames (for example, socialist feminist, social constructionist, queer). Moreover, these negotiations, resistances, appropriations and

reworkings are not stable or necessarily coherent. They do not fit the norms of the geographical discipline, and have reworked thinking about space, place and territories, requiring different ways of engaging with sexualities and spaces. Our contention is that gender matters, not only in the object of study, but also how things are investigated, by whom and what research questions are posed and explored. In other words, engagements with gender recreate the epistemologies and methodologies of geographies of sexualities, as well as geographies more broadly.

Taking this contention seriously also requires an examination of the hegemonies of lesbian geographies. Whilst, as we have seen this literature is broad and varied, there can be little doubt that in the main lesbian geographies is located within the Anglo-American hegemony. The next section begins by querying the construction of these knowledges recognising that language borders often create cultural restrictions. We engage with literature on lesbian spatialities beyond English language to expand current knowledges to other cultural models and discourse structures, diversifying and enriching our understandings of the complexities of social lives.

Beyond the Anglo-American Hegemony

Geographies of sexualities have been disseminated mostly from the Anglo-American academia. Similarly, the focus on lesbian geographies, although limited when compared with research on gay issues, is also present mainly in this academic context. A significant body of research on geographies of sexualities is being produced in diverse countries and languages, (for example, Silva, 2010; Duplan, 2012; Platero, 2012; Silva, Ornat & Junior, 2013), but due to the hegemony of English in academic publishing that research is located outside the purview of the English language academy (Ferreira, 2013). This has meant that research in these areas is stifled and remains unrecognised not only with Anglo-American contexts, but

also within the discipline of geography around the world. One of the main purposes of this edited book is to contribute to the creation and recognition of non-hegemonic knowledge in the area of geographies of sexualities, presenting research from authors of diverse cultural backgrounds. After an examination of the ways in which English language hegemony operates to constitute itself through written texts and publications, this section will begin this venture by giving an overview of existing research and perspectives on lesbian geographies beyond English in ways that reflect and explore diverse cultural settings.

The dominance of English: Creating Geographies of Sexualities

The Anglo-American hegemony and the exclusivity of the use of the English language has been the subject of much critique outside of geographies of sexualities (Garcia-Ramon, 2003, 2004; Aalbers, 2004; Vaiou, 2004; Paasi, 2005; Aalbers and Rossi, 2006; Garcia-Ramon *et al.*, 2006). One of the key pressures that underpin this hegemony is the push to publish in indexed journals with high impact factors. This leads researchers from diverse nationalities to select 'international' journals to disseminate their work. These journals are mostly written in English. However, to produce research in national languages is important in social sciences given relationships with research participants and the need to develop differentiated cultural models of research that relate to types of discourse according to linguistic communities and research traditions. Moreover, carrying out research in one's own language, but expressing or translating the findings in English constitutes a major barrier to researchers who are non-native speakers of English; it increases individual and collective time, costs, and psychological and financial investment, and it enhances asymmetries between researchers based on their native language (Hamel, 2006). As Garcia-Ramon (2011) states, linguistic hegemony is a form of power that dignifies certain academic traditions, while disempowering others. There are practices that could potentiate plurilingualism in

academic research, for example: international conferences accepting presentations and papers in other languages besides English; international journals with review committees in significant other languages so that manuscripts in other languages besides English could be submitted and reviewed, and if accepted to make available resources for translation; and making researchers who are native speakers of English to learn at least one other language thereby avoiding monolingualism in academia (Garcia-Ramon, 2011). Multilanguage reviews committees could be easily constituted considering that researchers that are non-native speakers of English and publish in international journals are proficient in at least two languages: their native language and English. Review policies open to other cultural and discourse models could also help to democratise the selection process and reduce vertical power relations based on the control through Anglo models and the English language. Publishers, and ultimately all the academic community, would profit from multilingual practices given the fact that their authors would write within the full wealth of their own cultural models, discourse structures and languages, and would not be forced to reduce their conceptual potential to the limits of their proficiency in English, providing richer sources for publication (Hamel, 2006). The effects of this dominance (as well as the lack of acceptance of sexuality within the geographical canon in contexts such as Latin America, see Silva, 2011) are clear.

Thus, in contrast to our focus specifically on geographies above, this literature review on lesbian geographies beyond the Anglo-American academy will include social science research that addresses lesbian issues and deploys the concepts of place and space. The present attempt to draft a review of research on lesbian issues beyond English written publications does not aim to be comprehensive. Instead it is a starting point to encourage and motivate readers to explore further. This review also only accounts for publications in Spanish, Portuguese and French, just a sample of the wide possibilities outside the English

language. There are many more publications worth exploring in other languages, but the specific context and competences of the authors set the limits to this exploratory review.

When we search for the expression “Lesbian geographies” in Google scholar in Portuguese “Geografias lésbicas”, Spanish “Geografias lesbianas” or French “Géographies lesbiennes”, there are almost no results. One could contend then that the expression “Lesbian geographies” is specific of the Anglo-American academia and that research on lesbian issues in the field of geography in other cultural academic contexts either does not exist or has not been labelled as such. Moreover, if we search for academic works on lesbian issues only in the specific area of geography in Portuguese, Spanish or French languages the results are also scarce, notwithstanding some noteworthy examples. Looking for research centred on lesbian issues beyond the English language within research on sexualities demonstrates that lesbian geographies are as underrepresented here, as in the Anglophone academic context. This is a common trait that reflects gender inequalities in academic research production.

Euarda started this literature review by focusing on authors who have gained international recognition and those in sexualities journals that publish in Spanish and Portuguese. From this point on she built from the articles and references, creating a database with a significant number of publications that would support a solid literature review. Although the majority of the papers addressed here are written in languages other than English, considering that the authors included also publish in international journals, some papers are in English. This goes some way to challenge the Anglo-American/Other binary that Garcia-Ramon *et al.* (2006) identify, where scholars are seen as either Anglo-American or ‘other’. They argue that feminists from other parts of the worlds have participated in the debates that have constituted feminist geographies (Garcia Ramon *et al.*, 2006). We would contend that this is the case for lesbian geographies as well, and thus the binary we

deliberately use in this chapter, should be questioned. Indeed as we will see, the lesbian geographies outlined above have overlaps with Anglo-American lesbian geographies.

There are some areas worth noting, before we examine the literature. Firstly it is largely women who produce research on lesbian issues. We are certain that this is not a mere coincidence. The gender bias of authors of research on lesbian issues reflects the peripheral nature of this thematic in academia (Duplan, 2012). Secondly, an ever-present fact in all the publications that we addressed is the inclusion of references to English publications, and the fact that often they are predominant. This reflects the fact that Anglophone academic production in geographies of sexualities is widely disseminated due to the extension and wealth of research but also to linguistic hegemony. Nonetheless, there are some significant examples where non-English publications on sexualities have focused specifically on lesbian issues. The first is the first edition of the journal *Genre, sexualité & société* published in the spring of 2009 that produced an extensive engagement with theoretical and empirical research on lesbians. The second is the emergence of the journal *LES Online* a multilanguage publication which aims to promote studies and scientific research as well as intervention projects and opinion pieces related to different aspects of lesbian issues. The main differences in comparison to hegemonic academic production is not so much the topics addressed as the cultural context that shapes diverse approaches and understandings of sexualised power relations. We now move to explore some key aspects of this literature.

Lesbian Spatialities

We begin with a key question that vexes lesbian geographies: Where are the lesbians? This is the question raised by Melissa Corlourer (2013) in the book *Géographie des homophobies* [Geographies of homophobias] (Alessandrin & Raibaud, 2013). We will answer this in two ways, firstly looking at everyday lives, and then moving to activism.

‘A kiss is not just a kiss’ when two women kiss in public spaces (Blidon, 2008). There are pervasive, hidden, subtle, non-verbalised and implicit heteronormative codes of behaviour that inscribe everyday socio-spatial landscapes and as a consequence same-sex public displays of affection are modified, or entirely absent (Ferreira & Salvador, 2014). The results of recent research conducted on same sex public displays of affection in France (Blidon, 2008) and Portugal (Ferreira, 2011) show similar results. Most participants identify feelings of ‘not being safe’ and fear of discrimination as the main reasons for refraining from same-sex public displays of affection (such as holding hands, hugging, kissing). Gender matters when it comes to same sex public displays of affection. LGBT friendly spaces are one of the few public spaces where the participants feel comfortable displaying same-sex affection; however, these spaces are understood to be friendlier to gay men, further limiting the spaces in which lesbians feel safe/comfortable enacting public displays of same-sex affection (Ferreira, 2011).

Because of these ongoing forms of othering, Corlouer (2013) claims that (notwithstanding Queer theories that ask us to question identities, and blur boundaries and binaries between male/female, men/women, gay/straight, see above), there is a need for lesbian-specific commercial spaces as long as discrimination persists and lesbians continue to look for public spaces away from the prying eyes that still persist. The results of a recent survey conducted among lesbians in the cities of Toulouse and Paris (Chetcuti, 2010) support this claim by showing that lesbian places are perceived as a ‘counter-space’, a place of emancipation from the heterosexual and patriarchal norms, free from the insults or aggressions lesbians are likely to suffer in public space. Anne Clerval and Pauline Brunner (2013) further elaborate on this idea by arguing that the concept of patriarchal society is crucial in understanding the intersections of gender and sexual orientation in the context of social discrimination and that the term lesbophobia makes these intersections visible.

Yet, this understanding should not be taken as seeing lesbians as passive, indeed the research shows resistances to be key to engaging with lesbian geographies. A recent research study conducted in 2009 on lesbians' spaces in Paris (Cattan & Clerval, 2011) identifies how social and online networking, though invisible to mainstream society, reveal lesbians' ability to overcome spatial injustice and establish alternative geographies in the city. Lesbian itinerant parties, a series of one-off events, not identifiable on the phone-book or on a map of Paris, create a network of places through which lesbians can negotiate their access to the city, both in posh areas of the West of Paris and on the frontline of gentrification, extending way beyond the homosexual "territory" of the Marais (Cattan & Clerval, 2011). It is interesting that similar social networks were reported when examining the spatialities of lesbians in Rio de Janeiro between 1950-1960 (Nogueira & Rago, 2005) and in Barcelona under the Franco regime (Albarracin, 2008). In these studies, the social practices of lesbians are mostly organised in diffuse and ephemeral networks which crisscross cities. As we saw above, these lesbian geographies contest traditional theories of urban space of "territories" as continuous and visible areas. These spaces of lesbian conviviality are temporally specific spaces of resistance and can act as important reference points for the construction of lesbian identities.

There are some examples of research that explore ways to actively transform public spaces into more safe and friendly places for lesbians. Ferreira and Salvador (2014) have conducted the research 'Creating Landscapes' in Portugal to explore the potential of collaborative web mapping to disrupt the pervasiveness of heteronormativity and to promote agency and empowerment for lesbians. They argue that lesbians can create new landscapes by producing and sharing geospatial web content with their memories, experiences, emotions, thoughts and opinions on same-sex relationships. Everyday practices, when inscribed in networked digital media as spatial representations and narratives, carry the potential to make the invisible visible. Lived representation of same-sex public displays of affection through

collaborative web maps can disrupt heteronormativity and create public spaces that are empowering for lesbians and bisexual women.

The continuing manifestations of gender inequalities reinforce the importance of lesbian rights movements and the multiple ways that this has operated in diverse political contexts. For example, the history of the lesbian movement in Spain intersects with political changes, from the “transition” years in the 70s when Spain moved from the dictatorship of Francisco Franco to restoration of the Spanish Monarchy, with the reestablishment of democracy until the present time. Gracia Trujillo (2008) presents a chronicle of the political history of the lesbian movement in Spain, building on the collective memory of activists and resisting the hegemony of the LGBT movement that silences the diversity comprised within the LGBT acronym. Her work shows that the lesbian movement has come a long way from the total absence and non-recognition of lesbian’s existence in the law on dangerousness and social rehabilitation and an act of Spanish penal code adopted by the Franco regime on 1970. Lesbians have had to articulate for themselves a political discourse and social presence to ascertain their visibility in the context both of the feminist movement and the LGBT movement (Trujillo, 2008). The discourses and representations about lesbianism in Spain since the Franco era through to the present times are thoroughly addressed and questioned in the interdisciplinary book edited by Platero (2008a). Platero (2008a; 2008b) argues that the social, political and economic context during the dictatorial times of Franco in Spain made invisible sexual and gender dissidents, including lesbians and butch women, and reinforced the binary construction of sex, gender and sexual orientation. There is evidence that the invisibilisation of lesbians during the Franco regime was not due to ignorance but a result of a political strategy that rendered lesbianism invisible in Spanish society (Osborne, 2012). Although there was a regime of oppression, there are also accounts of lesbians who, during the dictatorship, organised encounters and used a code to identify each other. For example,

they used code words like “libreras” (bookseller) for lesbians (Albarracin, 2008; Platero, 2009).

The intersections, coalitions and tensions of the lesbian collective action with the LGBT and Feminist movements are a recurrent topic of research. The political visibility of collective lesbianism in relation to the Feminist and the LGBT movements, and its difficulty in creating an autonomous voice has been researched by diverse authors, who have shown that there are tensions as well as potentialities in these relationships (for example, Almeida & Halborn, 2008; Coelho & Pena, 2009; Santos, 2009; Ferreira, 2014). These tensions and political invisibilities are evident in diverse situations, such as being spatially restrained in Pride marches (for example, Gomes de Jesus & Galinkin, 2011).

Of course differences between lesbians are also important, the concept of intersectionality is particularly important in lesbian geographies. Different aspects of identity combine to shape the experiences of lesbians and their experiences need to be understood intersectionally and spatially, as complex processes that involve the mutually constituted identities that shift in space (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2013a, 2013b). Platero’s (2010) research on the multiple discriminations of butch girls in school illustrates the importance of space and the complexity of interrelations between power strategies, naturalised social norms, activism and public policies, giving voice to those “in the margins”. Salima Amari (2010) presents how lesbians of ‘Moslem culture’ in their country of origin (the Maghreb, the Middle-East, Africa) use cyberspace as an alternative to the loneliness of private space and the impossibility of public visibility. She found that cyberspace erases international borders, challenges the oppressive cultural norms and allows lesbians to communicate with other lesbians transgressing national boundaries.

Platero (2012) offers an important approach to intersectionality by debating how the hegemonic subject is also intersectional. Conversely almost everyone who experiences

discrimination and exclusion also experiences privilege in some areas of life. Focusing on everyone's vulnerabilities and privileges, Platero (2012) urges us to research beyond exclusion and inequality and to also address privilege as intersectionally constituted.

This section illustrates both the richness of research on lesbian spatialities beyond the English language, and also the limitations of contemporary academic theorising that focuses almost exclusively on both English and the Anglo-American academy. There is more to be done, and as Platero reminds us, the focus should not only be on those asking for space at the table.

Overview of the book

This volume explores lesbian geographies in diverse geographical, social and cultural contexts. These papers take a range of theoretical and empirical focuses. It presents new approaches to lesbian geographies, using English as a working language for the chapters. However, the Anglo-American hegemony is not taken as the starting point nor was engagement with these literatures a requirement for the chapters. In this way we sought to disrupt this cultural framework.

The first chapter of this book 'Seduced victims and irresponsible mothers: family reactions to female same-sex relationships in Hungary', by Rita Béres-Deák, presents an ethnographic research on a post socialist country, which explores the reactions of the family of origin to female same-sex couples. Having research conducted in nonwestern countries by local researchers constitutes an opportunity to go beyond hegemonic Anglo-American discourses and research on sexualities. In this chapter, Rita Béres-Deák argues that the reactions of the family of origin are related to normative gender expression expectations and the fear that the lesbian stigma might extend to the non-heterosexual family members. The stories reported in this chapter illustrate how the home can become a site of regulating sexual

behaviour but also how women in lesbian relationships can take agency and claim intimate citizenship within their family circle.

Carla Barrett's chapter 'Lesbians at Home: Gender and Housework in Lesbian Coupled Households' seeks to reconsider the 'seemingly unremarkable' spaces of housework. How women negotiated their domestic roles, including housework and parenting can challenge dominant heteronormative narratives, without unconditionally celebrating lesbian relationships. It is clear from Barrett's chapter that heteronormative discourses are negotiated and contested reiterating their importance in lesbian relationships and everyday practices.

Moving from the intimate sphere, Julie Podmore's chapter 'Contested Dyke Rights to the City: Montréal's 2012 Dyke Marches in Time and Space' draws on media reports, informant interviews and participant observations to analyse the politics of the performances of the two separate 'dyke marches' in Montréal in 2012: the LGBT Women's March organised within the established pride movement, and the Radical Dyke March organised by grassroots groups from queer anti-capitalist, radical queer and queer of colour movements. In this paper, Podmore's goal is to examine the local conditions that gave rise to these two marches in the summer of 2012, to compare and contrast their gendered and spatial politics, and to reflect on what these dyke marches indicate regarding the spatial and gendered politics of LGBTQ pride movements in contemporary Montréal.

Gilly Hartal then explores lesbian politicisations through the linkages between gender, sexuality and national belonging and its implication on symbolic, spatial and performative boundaries. Based on ethnographic research conducted at the Tel Aviv Gay-Center, the chapter 'The Gendered Politics of Absence: Homonationalism and Gendered Power Relations in Tel Aviv's Gay-Center' examines how the production of LGBT socio-spatial politics disciplines and excludes lesbian, bisexual and transgender activists. Hartal argues that the

convergence of the municipal space and (homo)national discourse create gendered exclusion and silencing, covering up spatial and organisational politics pervasive at the Gay-Center.

The negotiations of exclusion and silencing also play a part in Lisa Hardie and Lynda Johnston's investigation of the importance of music spaces for lesbians during their coming out process on their chapter 'Full of Secrets I'm Too Afraid to Tell: Music as Safe Lesbian Space'. Based on interviews with lesbians from United Kingdom and New Zealand the authors argue that music can create an imagined space that plays a significant role in feelings of belonging, such as safe home spaces by 'hiding in music', 'private' spaces within 'public' spaces that work as a 'mobile closet', and how 'musical barometers' can help lesbians to judge whether places are safe and identity affirming places.

Judging safety and danger is key to Stefanie Claudine Boulila's chapter 'What Makes a Lesbian Salsa Space Comfortable? Reconceptualising Safety and Homophobia' also addresses music but from a different perspective, she explores the sexual spatialisation of salsa spaces through the narratives of non-heterosexual salseras. Drawing on conversations with salseras who identify as lesbian and bisexual based in two English metropolitan areas, Boulila argues that their experiences as salseras in heteronormative salsa spaces cannot be captured within dominant homophobia paradigms, as they are marked by sexism as much as they are marked by heterosexism and heteronormativity.

Continuing with a music/dance theme, Katharina Wiedlack and Masha Neufeld's chapter 'Мы не рокеры, не панки, мы девчонки - лесбиянки / Not Rockers, Not Punks, We're Lesbian Chicks: Staging Female Same Sex Desires in Russian Rock and Pop', explores the ways in which Russian music allowed for a certain visibility of 'women-desiring women' in the 1990s. This, alongside political debates, created lesbian identities in the post-socialist Russian state. However, these spaces were foreclosed in the middle of the last decade. Wiedlack and Neufeld describe the 'harsh headwind of homophobia' that emerged

in the 2000s with the rise of hostile discourses and political contexts, through the experiences, presentations and representations of lesbian artists, where women feared not only for their livelihoods but also their lives.

Moving from music to another cultural form, 'The queer film festival as a gender-diverse space: positioning the 'L' in GLBTIQ screen content' explores the Queer Fruits Film Festival outside of the main urban conglomerations in Australia. As festival director, Akkadia Ford offers an ethnography of the key areas of tension in the politics of gender at a Queer film festival, particularly single gender programming, the tensions between trans and lesbian groupings and issues of equality. All of this is contextualised within the socio-economic context where gendered and sexualised power relations meant a dearth of lesbian film makers after a certain career point. This created both the lesbian spaces that were to be found in the festival, and also how queer space itself is defined.

Marta Olasik's chapter takes a theoretical view of the issues at play in lesbian Geographies. 'Location, Location: Lesbian Performativities That Matter, or Not' then examines the possibilities of lesbian geographies, and particular the geotemporalities and spatialities that are inherent to these. Drawing on her Polish experience Olasik offers a deft analysis of the contractions of lesbian experiences and the importance of their contextual grounding. Provocatively exploring the key elements of community and performativity, the possibilities Olasik ends on are full of hope.

Nikki Lane centralises the intersectionality that forms as key part of Olasik's chapter. Her chapter 'All the Lesbians are White, All the Villages are Gay, but Some of Us are Brave: Intersectionality, Belonging, and Black Queer Women's Scene Space in Washington, D.C.', analyses of how race, class, sexuality and gender co-constitute us in creating (gay) space. The layers of belonging and exclusions are illustrated spatially as different aspects of participants' identities gain importance in different contexts, creating hegemonic spatial orders.

Emphasising the importance of emotions and the feelings of space in constructing racialised, gendered, classed and sexualised spaces, Lane argues for engaging with the active way individuals make sense of their everyday lives.

Marianne Blidon offers our first commentary on the articles in the book, she urges further considerations of the transnational and globalisation, not only in how we study lesbian geographies, but also how we create academic and knowledge networks. Locating herself in French geographies, Blidon notes the importance of transnational relationships and meetings to create lesbian geographies in ways that both centralise and also create spaces beyond Anglophone hegemonies. She highlights that there is much to be done, but much to be offered by lesbian geographies in considering the ‘contemporary world and the gap that exists between norms, the everyday and the extraordinary.’

Catherine Nash closes the book with a deft commentary regarding the key themes of the collection. She structures her commentary around identities and subjectivities, place and the self and finally inclusion and exclusion, offering a different reading and perhaps a contents list than what we have here. She concludes with optimism regarding the possibilities of the field of lesbian geographies, including the critique of the Anglo-American hegemonies that limits our knowledges and thus our horizons.

Conclusion

This book brings together some noteworthy original contributions to lesbian geographies. Taking forward the important task of developing considerations of gender, sexualities and geographies, it seeks to enable further considerations of these important intersectionalities that augment other ways of considering issues of social justice. Key to this endeavour is contesting the Anglo-American privileges that have to date dominated this field, as well as broader geographies of sexualities. Lesbian geographies will continue to be

challenged by queer critiques not only to the identity of lesbian, but of the category of woman itself. Taking these considerations forward, without negating the ways in which gendered and sexualised power relations continue to be salient in everyday lives, will remain a key task of lesbian geographies of the future.

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