

# Contesting Anglo-american Privilege in the Production of Knowledge in Geographies of Sexualities and Genders\*

Cuestionando el Privilegio Angloamericano en la Produccion del Conocimiento en las Geografías de las Sexualidades y los Géneros

Questionando o Privilegio Angloamericano na Produção do Conhecimento nas Geografias das Sexualidades e dos Gêneros

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## Abstract

Geographies of sexualities and gender identities have yet to fully grapple with Anglo-American privilege in terms of the production of knowledge in this area and it is increasingly faced with these questions. I examine how privilege has been discussed through engagements with hetero-/homonormativities before exploring the contestations of the Global North and the increasing calls for queer thinking to be aware of its contextual specificities. A critical interrogation of Anglo-American power geometries that create geographies of sexualities and gender is undertaken without reductively reproducing marginalisation/privilege binaries. It does this through a personal discussion of the author's positions of power as a white, lesbian academic working in England. Heeding the warnings not to reiterate simplistic hierarchies of Global North/Global South, the paper also examines the complex flows of power-geometries, particularly that not all Anglophone scholars enjoy institutional and other privilege all the time. I conclude by contending that this requires systematic change and collective engagement with the geometries of power that define academic knowledge in this area.

Keywords: Anglo-American hegemony; Sexualities; Privilege.

## Resumen

Las geografías de las sexualidades e identidades de género todavía no han afrontado directamente el privilegio Angloamericano en cuanto a la producción del conocimiento en esta área y cada vez se encuentran más cuestionamientos de este tipo. Aquí examino cómo el privilegio ha sido discutido a través de las normatividades hetero/homo antes de explorar las disputas del Norte Global y el incremento de las llamadas a un pensamiento queer que sea consciente de sus especificidades contextuales. Se lleva a cabo un cuestionamiento crítico de las geometrías de poder Angloamericano que crea geografías de las sexualidades y del género sin reproducir de forma reductivista los binarios de marginalización/privilegio. Con este objetivo, se presenta una discusión personal de la posición de poder de la autora como académica blanca lesbiana que trabaja en Inglaterra. Teniendo en cuenta las advertencias de no reiterar jerarquías simplistas en relación al Norte Global/ Sur Global, este artículo también examina los complejos flujos de las geometrías de poder, particularmente referentes a que no la totalidad de los académicos anglófonos gozan siempre de un privilegio institucional o de otro tipo. Concluyo afirmando que esto requiere un cambio sistemático y una implicación colectiva con las geometrías del poder que definen el conocimiento académico en esta área.

Palabras-Clave: hegemonía Angloamericana; Sexualidades; Privilegio



## Resumo

As geografias das sexualidades e de identidade de gênero não têm enfrentado diretamente o privilégio angloamericano como uma produção do conhecimento nesta área, e cada vez há mais questionamentos desse tipo. Examinamos aqui como o privilégio tem sido discutido através das normatividades hetero/homo, antes de explorar as disputas do Norte Global e o incremento das provocações à um pensamento queer, que seja consciente de suas especificidades contextuais. Se realiza aqui um questionamento crítico das geometrias de poder angloamericano, que cria geografias das sexualidades e de gênero, sem reproduzir de forma reducionista os binários da marginalização / privilégios. Com este objetivo se apresenta uma discussão pessoal da posição de poder da autora como acadêmica branca, lésbica, que trabalha na Inglaterra. Considerando as advertências de não reiterar as hierarquias na relação entre Norte/Sul globais, este artigo também examina os complexos fluxos das geometrias de poder, particularmente relativo ao fato de que nem todos os acadêmicos anglófonos gozam de privilégio institucional, ou de qualquer outro tipo. Concluo afirmando que isso requer uma transformação sistemática e um comprometimento coletivo com as geometrias do poder que definem o conhecimento acadêmico nesta área.

Palavras-Chave: Hegemonia Angloamericana; Sexualidades; Privilégio.

## Introduction

This paper seeks to bring into dialogue two areas that, whilst having significant potential for engagement, have yet to develop a conversation. Geographies of sexualities and gender identities<sup>1</sup> and critiques of Anglo-American hegemonies have much to say to each other. On the one hand, the discipline specific<sup>2</sup> engagement with sexualities outside of the Global North has been limited (however, see for example KULPA and MIZIELIŃSKA, 2011; OSWIN, 2005; 2007a; b; 2010 a, b; 2012; BAILEY and SHABAZZ, 2014a, b; TUCKER, 2008; see also BROWN et al., 2010; SILVA, 2011)<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, whilst critical engagements with Anglo-American hegemonies have taken critical and feminist geographies to task, there has been little engagement with sexualities geographies.

It is important to note from the outset, that this paper does not address the broader field of queer studies, nor does it take within its purview the broader history, ethnography and sociology of white privilege in Europe and its former settler colonies, or the universality of knowledge from postcolonial studies and allied fields. Moreover, it does not explicitly address the creation of geographies of sexualities and genders through postcolonial legacies (see PEAKE, 2011). All of these are

important, interesting and relevant, but beyond the scope of this, or indeed any one, paper. I hope that in beginning with a discussion of my privilege, the lacunas of this paper are taken up in further examinations of privilege amongst geographies of sexualities and gender identities scholars. My fear is that these absences are used to justify sidelining an uncomfortable discussion of how privilege operates, and recognizing privilege amongst those of us who are used to seeing ourselves as marginalized within the discipline of Geography.

In the UK, North America, and to some extent Australia and New Zealand (although see JOHNSTON and LONGHURST, 2008), geographies of sexualities, whilst still marginalized and often unwelcome, have been part of geographical academic writing, research and teaching for close to 40 years. Two key organisations, the Sexualities and Space Specialty Group, as part of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) and the Space, Sexualities and Queer Research Group (SSQRG) as part of the Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers (RGS/IBG), point to the acceptances of sexualities as part of geographical scholarship. And yet, when 'real' geography comes into question, when there are debates regarding, for example the return to an 'expeditions' focus in the

RGS/IBG, sexualities (never mind gender identities) are pointed to as the 'extreme'. It is the study of sexualities that is lauded as exemplifying the ways that Geography has, pun intended, lost its way. More personally, when discussing my work, it is rare that I don't receive a surprised reaction that sexualities and gender identities 'is' Geography. However in this paper, rather than exploring the continued heteronormalisations of the discipline's epistemologies, ontologies and/or methodologies, I am going to look at the privileged relationship that some Anglo-American academics have in this field vis-à-vis those outside this hegemony.

There can be little doubt that work from the Global South is now in circulation within geographies of sexualities and there has been a critique of the geotemporalities that can structure discussions of sexualities and sexual politics (KULPA and MIZIELIŃSKA, 2011) and the Western-centric creation of knowledges that privilege certain cities in the Global North (see BROWN, 2012; VISSER, 2012). These critiques of the framing of geographies of sexualities seek to rework the subdiscipline itself, asking for more than an 'add the Global South in and stir' approach. However, recognizing that power relations also operate within the Global North to create hegemonic knowledges does not negate the need to examine how: "knowledge produced in the Anglo-American world has more currency than knowledge produced elsewhere, in the 'rest of the world'" (PEAKE: 2011, p. 762).

The Anglo-American hegemony has been explored by authors, often from the Global South or 'nonnative' English speakers (for example, ALBERS, 2004; AALBERS and ROSSI, 2006; GARCIA-RAMON, 2003, 2004; GARCIA-RAMON et al., 2006; PAASI, 2005; VAIYOU, 2004). Those who are marginalized note their exclusions and the

systematic reproduction of hegemonic Anglophone norms, not only through language, but also through the nature of the questions asked and various academic approaches.

The issue of hegemony should not, as Garcia Ramon et al. (2006) note, be approached as 'a simple binary (Anglo-American/other) since many feminists [and I would add sexualities geographers] from other parts of the worlds have participated in this debate (in geographies of sexualities, see for example, Johnston and LONGHURST, 2008; KULPA and MIZIELIŃSKA, 2011). Moreover, these power relations affect Anglo-American scholars differently and thus the production of knowledge, as Mahtani (2014) notes there continues to be a 'toxicity' that affects geographies that affects people of colour and the knowledges produced in and through the discipline. As Vaiyou (2004) argues, the question is one of power geometries, that (re)constitute academic disciplines. In focusing on Anglo-American privilege then, the purpose is to address some of this privileges, including privileged forms of whiteness, without reiterating a simplistic North/South divide.

The question of how to contest this system can be read through explorations of how to 'cope' (HASSINK, 2007). What is less often explored are critiques of privilege from 'within' the Anglo-American hegemony and suggestions for contestation (for a notable exception, see KITCHIN, 2005). This examination of the personal draws on a long feminist tradition of believing that not only is the personal political, but that also, we need to be analytically aware of our own positionalities. For this reason, I critically interrogate my privilege in ways that I was inspired to do by Joseli Maria Silva's talk at the first European Geographies of Sexualities conference 2011. The purpose of this paper is not to suggest solutions; rather I am hoping

to address the silences that Mahtani (2014) identifies as creating toxicity, what Peake (2011) calls 'Geographies unspeakable'. My contention is that we need to reflexively explore the ways in which personal and professional power relations operate through privilege, as well as othering.

In exploring the privileges of the Global North, we need to rework not only who speaks for whom, but also some of what we understand to be the foundations of geographies of sexualities and gender identities itself. This requires an engagement with what has been written about privilege in geographies and also a critical interrogation of privileged subjectivities, including by those of us who (temporally and contingently) occupy these positionings. The multiple ways that this might occur need to be developed in dialogues that open up spaces, and at times silence those of us who have played a large part in creating this field. This paper seeks to be an uncomfortable read for some of us within the Anglo-American hegemony, recognizing that not all in this context occupy the positions of privilege discussed.

This paper will explore privileges in two ways; firstly it will examine how geographies of sexualities and gender identities have discussed privilege through hetero and heteronormativities in the Global North. It will then extend this discussion and offer some locational nuances to engagements with privilege. Having set up the key tenets of geographies of sexualities, the paper will take a personal and reflective approach to critically interrogate my privilege as a white lesbian academic working in England. This takes up Peake's (2011, p. 766) challenge to: 'take responsibility for these relations, for it is through their working out that the future of geographical knowledge lies'

## Privilege in Geographies of Sexualities

I begin this paper with a partial discussion of privilege<sup>4</sup>, to offer some insights into how Anglo-Saxon geographies of sexualities and gender identities have engaged, and are currently engaging, with hetero and heteronormativities. This offers some insights into the academic sub-discipline of 'Geographies of Sexualities', which in part explores the lived experience of the spatialities of sexual and gender identities and provides some contextual background to readers unfamiliar with geographies of sexualities. In focusing on privilege rather than marginalization, this section also offers a different lens through which to view discussions of geographies of sexualities. This is not to suggest a binary of privilege/marginalization. Indeed as Noble (2012) shows when examining white gay men, privilege and marginalization are not mutually exclusive and there is a spatial and temporal creation of empowerment and privilege. This, however, does not negate critical interrogations of privilege nor the need for reflexive engagements with our own place in geometries of power.

In geographies of sexualities, we can arguably see privilege being explored through heteronormativities. I say arguably, because discussions of heteronormativities that understand hegemonic heterosexualities to be dependent on, and coalesce with, other social norms such as race, disability, class and gender (e.g. BROWNE, 2004, 2007; BUTLER, 1999, CHOUINARD and GRANT, 1995, KUNSTMAN and MIYAKE, 2009; TAYLOR, 2007; TAYLOR et al., 2010), have focused on marginalized groups and subjectivities. This has mainly been examined through lesbian and gay (and at times bisexual and trans) experiences (see BELL and VALENTINE, 1995, BROWN et al., 2007, DOAN 2007, HEMMINGS 2002). However, discussions of heteronormativities

offer more complex engagements with sexualities in that they challenge the straight/gay binary. As studies of prostitution and sex work have shown, not all heterosexualities are normative, hegemonic or valued. For example as research on sex workers has shown heterosexualities are often vilified, policed and persecuted for their 'inappropriate' use of space (see, for example, HUBBARD, 2000, 2011, HUBBARD and WHOWELL, 2008).

Insights into privilege have been developed through these discussions of marginalization, where heteronormative production of space is seen to be rendered invisible through repetition, reiterating norms to the point where they are assumed to be 'natural', fixed and unchanging (BELL et al, 1994; BELL and VALENTINE, 1995; BINNIE, 1997). These norms are not read as being 'sexual', instead sexualities become associated with other bodies, relationships and identities (Valentine, 1996). Heterosexualities are naturalised in everyday spaces, such as homes, work and the street (see for example BELL and VALENTINE, 1995; BROWNE et al, 2007; BROWNE, 2006; VALENTINE 1993 a, b, 1996). State supported heterosexualities, through the explicit exclusion of sexual others, also normalise and seek to naturalise particular sexual identities, practices, and relationships. The latter has been seen to be manifest through such privileges as: access to marriage and partner benefits; access to the military, and the absence of legislation prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexuality (BELL, 1994; BELL and BINNIE, 2000; BINNIE, 2004; COOPER, 1994, 1995, 2004; HUBBARD; 2000; RICHARDSON, 1998).

Heterosexuality is also core to geographical engagements with reproduction, populations, genders, education, politics, economics and so on. Within geographical research heterosexualities are often assumed

and other sexualities/sexual practices policed in the production of 'real geographical' knowledge (BELL, 1995; BINNIE, 1997, 2007). Examination of these privileges has predominantly been focused on those who exist outside heteronorms, in the main (white) lesbians and gay men, using disruptions of spaces, such as Pride, to illustrate the fluidities of space (see for example BELL and VALENTINE, 1995; BROWNE, 2006 BROWNE et al. 2007; JOHNSTON, 1998, 2005, 2007; VALENTINE, 1993). However more recently, normative heterosexualities have come into view, and considerations of the creation of heterosexualities has shown these to be fluid and constructed (HUBBARD, 2008; MORRISON, 2012 a, b). This contestation of uniform heterosexualities could be read as negating critiques of heterosexualities, because they suggest that not all heterosexualities are hegemonic or empowered. However, these engagements with heterosexualities speak to privilege in a different way. Rather than seeing heterosexualities (or indeed heteronormativities) as the norm against which other experiences, identities and behaviours are defined, exploring heterosexualities as always contingent and reformed through everyday practices denaturalizes them.

Contemporaneously in broader queer and sexuality studies, examinations of homonormativities have queried the ways in which privilege is afforded to certain identities and subjectivities. These were once sexually deviant and are now considered acceptable within particular forms of neo-liberal normalization that are classed, racialised and gendered, and how these in turn create new 'others' (DOAN 2007, 2010, DUGGAN, 2002; BRYANT, 2008; NAST, 2002; NASH, 2010; PUAR 2006; RICHARDSON, 2004, 2005;

RICHARDSON and MONRO, 2012, TAYLOR et al., 2010). Oswin (2007b) also notes how these agendas can also operate as a form of queer globalisations. Homonormative privileges that can be gained through marriage equality, can also hierarchise the monogamous couple, seeing this as the pinnacle of kinship/intimate bonds (WILKINSON, 2013). Importantly, a focus on homonormative, and often marriage based, politics can fail to address pressing issues for those whom marriage can further oppress and, for example, reduce access to healthcare and immigration rights (see SPADE, 2011).

Importantly, these critiques of homonormativity, whilst often focused on marginalization and those who are excluded from these new normativities, have also pointed to how privilege is used. In a recent blog entry, Judith Halberstam (2014, s/p) contends that we need to be aware of how certain young people have benefitted: "from several generations now of queer social activism by people in their 40s and 50s (who in their childhoods had no recourse to anti-bullying campaigns or social services or multiple representations of other queer people building lives)".

He suggests that those who have 'gay-straight alliances, their supportive parents and their new right to marry' can nonetheless:

internalize narratives of damage that they themselves may or may not have actually experienced. Queer youth groups in particular install a narrative of trauma and encourage [Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans] youth to see themselves as "endangered" and "precarious" whether or not they actually feel that way, whether or not coming out as LGB or T actually resulted in abuse!

Whilst it is clear that this experience is not

applicable to all (which I discuss further below), what is also apparent is that if scholars are to discuss and address privileged subjectivities through homonormativities, we also need to subject ourselves to the same critical scrutiny. We need to be aware that not all of us are endangered or precarious in our jobs, promotional opportunities and ability to publish. This is not to suggest that we ignore ongoing manifestations of heteronormativity in geographies, instead it is to say that we must augment this with a critical and reflexive engagement with the complex geometries of power that construct this sub-discipline.

Having highlighted some of key critiques of privilege in geographies of sexualities and gender identities, I now move to an explicit focus on locational privilege and the ways that presumptions of universality can be used to develop theoretical inferences and insights from the Global North. The purpose is to highlight how processes that have been identified in areas such as feminist geographies operate in geographies of sexualities. More than this, reading geographies of sexualities through the lens of privilege, rather than marginalization, offers a different perspective on these debates.

### Location, Location, Location: Where matters

The identity categories that predominate in geographies of sexualities and gender identities, and against which normative heterosexualities are defined, are lesbians and gay men, and secondarily bi and trans people. These are limited both in terms of who they include and also *where* these inclusions apply. It has been well established that there is no one unified global LGBT identity, culture, community or nation, despite claims to the contrary (BOELLSTORFF, 2005; JACKSON, 2009; PATTON and SÁNCHEZ-

EPPLER, 2000). These are Global North categorisations, tied up with specific understandings of family forms, economic structures, emotional bonds and sexual desires that are not uniform globally. They have their own histories and meanings which do not necessarily translate to other locations (KOLLMAN and WAITES, 2009). Work that problematizes the universalizing of LGBT identities, rights and movements, can challenge LGBT human rights claims in locations where Global North LGBT identities do not apply (BROWN et al., 2010; CRUZ-MALAVÉ and MANALANSAN, 2002; GREWAL and KAPLAN, 2001). What is less well explored is how heteronormativities and heterosexual privileges are recreated when Global North understandings of the heterosexual/homosexual binary is brought into question.

It is not only in discussions of heteronormativities that engagements with privilege have been reconfigured through sexual-spatial analyses. Geographers have been critical of the ways in which certain discussions of homonormativities can fail to recognize their locations, pointing to the need for spatial engagements with the complexities of homonormative privilege (OSWIN 2005, 2008; BROWN, 2009, 2012; NOBLE, 2012)<sup>v</sup>. Whilst complexity and nuance can close down critiques of privilege, in discussions of homonormativities other forms of (North American) power in regulating knowledge production are highlighted. Brown has argued that discussions of homonormativities can reproduce other forms of locational privilege (BROWN, 2012). He contends that theories of homonormativity are not only spatially specific, but produced in and through the places that are studied (i.e. Global North, mainly US cities):

The development of theories of

Homonormativity has primarily occurred in the same limited range of global cities that it studies – critical thought about homonormativity is largely the product of exactly the same spaces and social networks that it critiques (BROWN, 2012, p. 1067).

This is apparent in Halberstam's discussion of queer youth, who he is talking about/to are very specifically located. The irony that Brown identifies in conceptualisations of Homonormativity<sup>6</sup> can be related to geographies of sexualities, where it is increasingly being acknowledged that these have been focused on a limited number of cities/countries. Whilst this is changing, it is clear that these Global North cities have formed the basis of thinking and in wider sexuality/queer studies where critiques originate, can be overlooked and ignored, especially if you write from particular cities in and from the Global North (BROWN, 2012). Halberstam (2005) has challenged the assumptions that place certain cities in the Global North as 'pinnacles' of gay life (and indeed as enabling the possibilities of any LGBT existence), what he terms metronormativity. Cities, such as London, San Francisco, can be used to define the apex of sexual and gender freedoms. This Global North lens is then used to judge other regions and countries (see BINNIE, 2004; ROBINSON 2002; 2005). Such metronormative assumptions neglect the ways in which rural areas, towns and non-metropolitan/non-'gay' cities can enable sexual practices beyond heterosexual norms (see KRAMER, 1995). Halberstam (2005) argues that urban stories, particularly of migration from rural to urban, and from the Global South to the 'developed' world, make assumptions about urban utopian Euro-American lives that contrast with rural lives

and the closeted/'backward' 'developing' contexts.

Spatialising theory in this way has meant that places in the Global South can become fixed and the theories developed there seen as specific to that region. As Kulpa (2014) noted, scholars in and of the Global South are asked to discuss the place, to offer an understanding of the 'differences' of these places and are often brought back to the specifics of this place rather than being able to develop and discuss theoretical insights more broadly (see also KITCHIN, 2005). In contrast, in the Global North, scholars speak in universal terms, generating thinking that is presumed to be universally applicable, such as the theory of 'the homonormative' that Brown takes issue with:

'[As] this analysis has gained popularity, homonormativity (and, even worse, *the* homonormative) has increasingly come to be represented in both academic and activist writings as a homogeneous, global external entity that exists outside all of us and exerts its terrifying, normative power on gay lives everywhere.' (BROWN, 2012, p. 1066)

Sexualities and (queer) theories do not travel intact, and whilst we might be able to identify trends that appear across particular cities in the world, such as the decline of the 'gaybourhood' (BROWN, 2013; GHAZIANI, 2014; NASH, 2013), the 'view from nowhere' must always be questioned (Haraway, 1991). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the book *Decentering Western Sexualities*, in which Kulpa and Mizieleńska (2011) ask for a rethink of the geotemporalities that are assumed in assertions of progress/backwardness. They provoke a consideration of how spatio-

temporal realities matter when thinking about sexualities. Thus, placing work in its context is a political act, because as Peake (2011, p. 764) notes: '[i]t is through such 'placeless practices' that academic power lines are drawn'. Therefore addressing these power relations is not only about recognizing work from the 'rest of the world', but also placing our work.

In placing work in geographies of sexualities and gender identities, we need to take the critique of Anglo-American dominance in a variety of areas of geographies and apply this to the subdiscipline. This enables a critique of the academics and systems that set research agendas and parameters that are measured and evaluated on standards set by some of us in the Global North.

### It's not (just) About You: Reflecting on Privilege

In this section of the paper, I change tone and seek to explore some elements of spatio-temporal privilege in the sub-discipline of geographies of sexualities. I do so to offer some insights into the Anglo-American hegemony from the perspective of someone who has become part of 'the canon' of geographies of sexualities and gender identities and who works within what Peake (2011, p. 764) terms the 'enviably stable institutional framework' of British geography. I seek to critique Anglo-American privilege as a way of developing insights into how this hegemony might be both infiltrated and challenged. I also hope to encourage further reflexive engagements with the inequitable power geometries that define the field, that are uncomfortable and indeed staunchly resisted.

Although Irish by birth, childhood and identity, I have worked in England for over 10 years and undertook my doctoral research



here. During this time I have researched and written about English and American experiences of sexualities, gender and space. In my teaching I focus on UK/USA research to encourage students to consider their sexualities, to avoid the exoticisation of 'other' sexualities and genders, as well as refuting assumptions that sexual and gendered inequalities only exist 'elsewhere'. This makes what I teach and research very much in line with what Garcia-Ramon (2004) terms 'Anglo-Saxon' geographies of gender and sexualities.

It has long been argued that normative masculinities (see for example, BERG, 2002, BUTZ and BERG, 2002) and heterosexualities (see for example, BINNIE, 1997; 2007) create forms of systematic privilege, which can go unrecognized. I have also argued elsewhere that women and others in privileged roles in the academy need to both acknowledge, and address, their privilege, recognizing that discussions of oppression and othering should not blind us to power relations between 'us' (BROWNE, 2008). Whilst this was easy to say as an early career academic who worked on LGBT issues, I am increasingly realizing that the reflexive attention to 'our'/my privileges is something that I need to both reflect on and address. Here the privileges I can name (recognizing that there are many other moments where I don't notice) pertain to my position as a white, cisgendered, permanently employed lecturer/researcher in a British Institution, with full access to most journals in my field. I have over 70 publications, occupy a variety of editorial positions, and regularly receive requests to review journal articles/books in the areas of sexual and gendered geographies. Increasingly I am also being asked to look at grant proposals from the UK and international funding bodies. These roles and 'achievements' often place me in positions of power to have a say in

deciding who is published and who gets funding. In other words deciding the production of knowledge that is 'good enough'.

I also take on tasks such as editing key books and, with colleagues, set some of the parameters of the field of geographies of sexualities and gender identities. I am invited to conferences, where my expenses are paid. I am privileged to travel freely through border controls, with my main worry relating to the size of the queue and if my daughter will cope. So in many ways I carry what McIntosh refers to as a 'knapsack' of privileges:

An invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day... Privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks (p. 3-4).

[And/or] Special circumstances... which I experience but did not earn but which I have been made to feel are mine by birth, by citizenship, and by virtue of being a 'normal' person (MCINTOSH, 1988, p. 7).

The privileges I carry are all privileges that I have only partly earned, that I have also been given through 'special circumstance'. In this case not through birth, but through access to the right lecturers/mentors at times that make me feel very lucky, the privilege of affording (through my parents' second mortgage), a Master's degree and parental support through a PhD. I am privileged to currently work in a supportive department, that doesn't (dare to?) question my research foci and a University located in a city that should be 'leading the way' on Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans equalities (BROWNE and BAKSHI, 2013).

These privileges are often invisible to me, and I fear that I have used, and still use, them in ways that reiterates my power as an Anglophone academic. Silva in 2011 brought this home to me. In her paper at the European Conference of Geographies of Sexualities she quoted a review that she received from an English-speaking journal. The reviewer said:

- 1) First, it is not well linked to the literature (in English) on feminist and queer geography.
- 2) As such, the paper provides important and interesting empirical work but does not position it within the current literature that a paper seeking publication in [name of journal] would usually target.

As I listened to this talk and heard this quote, my privilege was checked. I could have written this review. It is something that I would have said trying to be supportive but maintain 'academic standards'. However as Silva points out, such academic/scientific standards are constructs of power, and can stand in the way of important and meaningful dialogue. This policing role can silence those whose avenues for publication are already limited, in Silva's case through the firewalling of publications in Brazilian geography journals. Silva (2011) not only notes the creation of specific forms of knowledges and the ways this relates to access to (highly priced Global North) journals, she also points to the irony of this review, as it questions some of the tenets of queer and feminist geographies:

All scientific production is a result of space-time, dependent on technical, economic and political contexts that are not considered by reviewers who take the produced theory in their context as a

parameter for adjustment. The position adopted by the reviewers seems somewhat contradictory in the evaluation of articles coming from non-anglophone countries, since the researchers of queer and feminist geographies consider essential the adoption of prospects of positionality and reflexivity. (SILVA, 2011).

Knowledge production is indeed created through, in Silva's words 'different spatial contexts of scientific production'. Garcia-Ramon (2004) notes that there is a plethora of ways to do gendered geographies. Regional contexts matter in setting the agenda and how topics were chosen and approached. The same point can be made with regards to sexualities.

Who should be read, included as 'key/core texts' and regarded as defining the state of the field prior to a paper being deemed 'worthy' of publication also needs to be considered. Indeed, even the agendas that I have outlined in the section above are focused on Anglo-American concerns; I quote predominantly Anglo-Saxon authors and, as I am monolingual, only those who write in English. I am performing my privilege, and language is important beyond translating texts into different languages<sup>7</sup>:

language ... represents a way of thinking ... it carries a complex web of power relations ... [that] affects ... our scholarly traditions, with their distinct ways of approaching the subject, their logics and their preferences and values. (Garcia-Ramon, 2004: 369)

These power relations maintain specific hierarchies that then reproduce and are reproduced in specific contexts. It not just what sexuality 'is' in terms of identities,

globalizing LGBT categories or queer transnationalisms, but also how sexualities are studied, framed and considered. As has been argued in other contexts, research topics are chosen to reflect dominant concerns in Anglo-American geographies (GARCIA-RAMON, 2003; 2004; HASSINK, 2007, PAASI, 2005).

In sexualities, it could be argued that in order to engage in the field you must address, and define yourself in relation to key topics in this area. I defined these, above, through hetero/homo-normativities, but there are numerous other ways that Global North geographies of sexualities and gender identities might be categorized. The point is that, regardless of the categorization, in order to engage with or break into this area, reviewers and others will ask the author to place their research within this Anglophone and Global North focused field in order to be 'good enough'. What Garcia-Ramon and Silva's words bring home to me is that the parameters of 'good enough' knowledge is not objectively defined, but subjectively produced through my, and other people's, privilege:

[S]tandards are defined by a few, or worse, by those who have the power to dictate the parameters that should be considered to allow those who can participate in the select world of geography considered to be "international quality. (SILVA, 2011)

These standards, as performances of privilege are rendered invisible, accepted and seen as acceptable. More than this, they are seen as necessary to preserve the rigour of the area, to produce 'proper' academic knowledge that is aware of (deferential to?) existing discussions of geographies of sexualities. They are contained within many Anglo-American people's knapsacks of

privilege, they are not earned, instead scholarly traditions are inherited, passed down through generations of academics, who are then asked to maintain the 'quality', ensure 'rigour' and in this way preserve the discipline.

Let me be clear, I am not suggesting that previous research does not need to be engaged with in order to build theory and offer further insights into sexual and gendered lives. What I am doing is pointing to how this reproduces particular geometries of power. We need to be aware that those who do not hold such privileges must work to be part of these discussions, to be part of geographies of sexualities and gender identities. As Silva (2011) contends: "In a world in which social processes are global, the lack of dialogue between researchers from different cultures can produce even more exclusion and silencing".

We often explore these lacunae through who is excluded from the dialogues, and yet those who are privileged also need critical interrogation. How these processes reproduce privileges and power is frequently rendered invisible and taken-for-granted, just 'part of the job'. If we want to address the power geometries that create both the scholarly discipline of geographies of sexualities and gender identities, we need to work both on the power relations that are seen as 'external' to the field and also consider how power relations between 'us' might be addressed to create different processes of knowledge production. These critical interrogations of privilege are the responsibility of academics working in the Global North; critical reflection should be a key part of our scholarly endeavors. And yet, even when placing our work, recognizing its 'spatial context' of scientific production, systematic assumptions regarding the Global North can challenge our efforts, as I will now argue.

### But You Are Universal....

In this final section, I want to acknowledge the ways that this systematic production of privilege is not located in one person and to point to how privilege can be reiterated through the broader enactment of power geometries. I do this, not to let myself (or anyone else) 'off the hook' or to create shared empathies, instead this section seeks to point to the ways that critical geographers variously located, need to collectively address Anglo-American hegemonies. This is regardless of our positioning in relation to geographies of sexualities and gender, because this sub-discipline is of course created through networks and interactions with wider geographies and geographers.

I work in a system where my research in Brighton and other areas of England and the USA suggests that I have something 'universal' to say. Indeed when Leela Bakshi (an activist researcher) and I wanted to argue that place matters in our book *Ordinary in Brighton?: LGBT, Activisms and the City*, we sought to contend that whilst there were interesting themes that could be applicable to other contexts, the specifics of the economic, social and political circumstances were crucial to how 'equalities' were/are experienced. We aimed to take the discussions of place and geographies seriously, to question the 'god trick' of seeing all, of knowing all. In this way, we aspired to follow Robinson in questioning the parochialism of Western knowledges that can feign universality (ROBINSON, 2002; 2005), by rendering our knowledge as located and specific. We sought to challenge the presumptions that Brighton/the UK/the Global North 'leads the way' and others should follow.

To some publishers/reviewers, our book was seen as unmarketable, even though the focus on a city in the Global North reiterated

all kinds of privileges. This is in contrast to Rodriguez-Pose (2004) who contends that papers dealing with certain issues in the Global North are more likely to be published than those dealing with the same issues in the Global South. Our book was too specific, too located and too normal to be an object of fascination, feeding an intellectual curiosity of 'other places'. After all, Brighton is 'known'. Hassink (2007) argues that nonnative speakers tend to include more contextualization and less assumed knowledges as part of their presentations, when compared to native speakers. Seeking to contest our privileged positioning; because our work implied that all studies/theories are grounded and created in part from where they are conceived and practiced, we were critiqued for seeing contextualization (or where things happen) as key to understanding how sexual and gender equalities are enacted. I believe that this was in part because we failed to perform our privilege in the appropriate way, to generalise from Brighton in ways that supposes universality. I wonder, if our data had been focused on a city in the Global South, if we had contended that place matters and showed how this was the case, would our book be considered 'better'? 'More appropriate'? This raises questions about whose knowledges are considered global and universally applicable, and how the Anglo-American hegemony reproduces privileges not only by silencing and excluding those in the Global South, but also policing the knowledges that emanate from the Global North.

Of course, the privileges I have discussed are not evenly distributed amongst Global North scholars. Not all Anglo-American scholars enjoy institutional privileges, including time to write and research; many are subject to racism, sexism, ableism and homo/bi/trans-phobia in ways that I have not experienced. It is important to reiterate that

the processes I describe in this section do not let me, or others in similar positions, off the hook. It should not be forgotten, that despite this process, this book was published, once again placing me in a privileged position of being published, having book reviews and author meets critics sessions at conferences. Instead of asking for empathy or commonality here, I want this brief example to emphasize that systematic change is needed, alongside individual contestations. It is not enough for me to acknowledge my privilege. We need to address the social relations and shared practices that constitute scholarly theorizing, and what counts as knowledge. Contesting Anglo-American privilege then is not about identifying a privileged individual and vilifying them, although engagements with our own privilege and positionalities are necessary. But more broadly, it is about collective, honest and open engagements with, and challenges to, the geometries of power that recreate the discipline.

### Final Thoughts

This paper is written from the position of a white lesbian woman who works in, and is very much a part of, the Anglo-American canon of geographies of sexualities and genders. Its purpose was to explore privilege in the creation of geographies of sexualities and gender identities, specifically in relation to Anglo-American hegemonies. In doing so I have included a critical engagement with my privilege in this arena, without seeking commonality in difference/exclusion. Too often discussions of Anglo-American privilege are recuperated in discussions of shared agendas, but there are moments where privilege needs to be named, to make 'us' not welcome. I am committed to continuing in my work of exploring the intersections of gender, sexualities and spaces, but what this

looks like and who this serves in the years to come is necessarily undecided. This means I, and others, need to be prepared to have our privilege called out, noted and our voices silenced. I hope this paper begins broader discussions of how knowledge is constructed in geographies of sexualities and gender identities.

However, I am also very nervous of setting up a binary, of new/old knowledges, where knowledges from the Global South are celebrated because they emanate from 'other places' and 40 years of geographies of sexualities and gender in the Global North are discarded. This neglects the complex and multiple power geometries that create the sub-discipline. This both reiterates the 'exotic other', and fails to recognize the immense gains produced through the inclusion for geographies of sexualities and gender identities into geography in certain parts of the Global North. How 'new' epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies can rework geographies of sexualities and gender identities cannot and should not be proscribed, nor should they be uniform. At times, it might be expedient to ignore certain areas of work from the Global North, and at other times working together, critiquing and developing thinking in this area might be required. The call is then not only to continue the work from the Global South by authors who are located there, but also more engagement with how knowledge is produced in ways that created hegemonies and privileges. There are losses and gains in the many approaches that might be taken, and because of this a multitude of approaches are needed.

I do not see this as an 'add the Global South in and stir' agenda, taking knowledges about other places and making them our own (see KITCHIN, 2005). Indeed, what I hope to have made clear is that the tenets of geographies of sexualities and gender

identities have to shift and the need for this shift arises from the sub-discipline's own historical and geo-temporal positioning. It is about acknowledging, addressing *and using* Anglo-American privilege to rework the system, recognizing that this is also about addressing hierarchies within the Global North. Reworking might include supporting those who are put into marginal and othered positionalities, querying privileges that are afforded to some who work in the Global North, and remaking of the power geometries in which we are all embroiled. I believe that beyond academics in geographies of sexualities and gender identities, all critical geographers have a stake in, indeed a responsibility to understand and use research to work towards diverse and multiple forms of sexual and gendered liberations.

In acknowledging my privilege and critiquing it, I seek to follow Silva (2011) in creating dialogues, not to talk about the 'Other', but instead I hope this paper will instead facilitate more resistances, more critiques and more discussions. As Mahtani (2014) notes silences are crucial in maintaining the toxicity.

To finish then, I want to remove my privileged white Global North self from the centre, not rewriting others stories/research, but creating spaces where these may be heard/published. For that reason, I end with the words of bell hooks:

In the end, I want to I am waiting for them to stop talking about the 'Other', to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak . . . Often this speech about the 'Other' annihilates, erases: 'no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about

yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the centre of my talk.' Stop. . . we who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space. (hooks, 1990, p. 151–52).

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst clunky, this phrase encompasses trans and genderqueer, identities, activisms and exclusions that have been important for this area in the Global North. Where I use Geographies of Sexualities, I am referring specifically to the study of sexualities. It has been argued that Queer geographies cannot be conflated with geographies of sexualities (see Browne, 2007; Oswin, 2008). Whilst I would agree with this, the line between these areas is blurry and undefined. Thus, for the purposes of this paper and ease of reading I will not refer to queer geographies, but do take queer geographies somewhat into the purview of the argument. However, I do still take as important the topic of identities, which I do not believe queer geographies are now 'beyond' affecting as they do everyday lives as well as the power relations discussed here.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I focus specifically on the discipline of Geography, acknowledging that there is much work outside of that explores sexualities and gender identities in the Global South. The focus on geography is important, as this is a discipline that is resistant to sexualities work outside certain contexts, see for example Silva, 2011. Moreover, in terms of studies of sexualities and gender identities, geographies would benefit significantly from further engaging not only with contexts outside of the Global North, but also in rethinking sexualities and gender identities and the construction of knowledges through such engagements.

<sup>3</sup> This is not to suggest that work has not been critical of power relations within the discipline, indeed key to engagements with homonormativities have been explorations of power relations between 'queers' (for example, Elder, 2002; Nast, 2002; Bailey and Shabazz, 2014a, b), critiques of queer globalisations (for example, Rushbrook, 2002; Puar, 2002) as well as critical engagements with complicities (Oswin, 2005). Rather than exploring these in-depth, this paper instead explores some of the hegemonic power relations that construct geographies of sexualities and gender identities, and require our critical attention.

<sup>4</sup> This does not aim to be comprehensive, and other articles/authors could be included, instead it traces the broad contours of these discussions.

<sup>5</sup> Within this line of thinking we might also include Puar's discussions of homonationalisms that have shown how certain American gay men and lesbians have been brought into nation-building in ways that demonise 'foreign' others. For example, the justification for war on the grounds of 'human rights' can see the Global North as needing to 'save' gay men and lesbians who are 'persecuted' in Other places (Puar 2007).

<sup>6</sup> The capital H is deliberate for Brown to indicate the ways in which 'the homonormative' has come to dominate discussions in problematic ways.

<sup>7</sup> Thus, whilst it is important that journals publish in other languages, that abstracts re translated into various languages (see Garcia-Ramon et al., 2006; Kitchin, 2005), this does not necessarily address the power relations discussed here.

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