Modernities in dispute: the debates on marriage equality in Colombia

Fernando Serrano-Amaya[1]

Abstract

In this paper I analyse the debates on same-sex marriage in Colombia during the 2000s using concepts from decolonial thought developed in Latin America or by Latin American scholars. Decolonial thought has a different genealogy than postcolonial theories. While the first is based on critiques of modernity and coloniality in the Americas, the second was born from the crisis of the colonial perspective in countries like India or in the Middle East. In spite of having different origins, postmodern, postcolonial and post-occidental thought share their dissatisfaction with globalised technological development and their scepticism about the project of modernity.

Introduction

In this paper I explore the ways in which modernity appears in the debates around same-sex couples' rights in Colombia. I argue that modernity acts in those debates as a 'straightening device' (Ahmed 2006), a rhetorical device that orients discussions on sexual politics towards straight directions of citizenship, nation and rights. However, as I will describe, such orientations happen in more than one way. In these debates, the articulation between modernity and sexual rights actualises not only evolutionary narratives (Hoad 2000) but also

---

1   Fernando Serrano-Amaya is an anthropologist at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. He has an MA in Conflict Resolution, University of Bradford, and is a PhD candidate, University of Sydney, Jser1926@uni.sydney.edu.au. This paper was presented at the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Conference 'Cultural ReOrientations and Comparative Colonialities', Adelaide, 22–24 November 2011.

hierarchies of difference that constitute Latin American social and racial orders (Quijano 2000). My intention is to define those debates about sexual politics as sites of struggles that are not easily explained in logics of linear or universal development and progress.

I will begin with some background information. Then I will present three perspectives in the debates and consider the ways they connect modernity and sexual rights. In order to reconstruct the debates, I look at the editorials and editorial notes of the two main newspapers in Colombia, *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador*. In them, I identify the different actors involved and the way they articulate the notion of modernity with marriage equality. I use the notion of 'articulation' developed by Stuart Hall (Grossberg 1986) to understand that relation. For Hall, articulation allows us to identify how ideological elements come to cohere in a discourse and how they do or do not become articulated with certain political subjects (Grossberg 1986: 53). In this short paper I focus on the early 2000s, when the topic entered the Colombian public sphere as a significant matter of debate.

The reflection I present here is part of a wider project on sexual politics in contexts of protracted conflict and the sexualisation of collective violence and transitions to democracy. That project includes the discussion of some 'critical events' (Das 1995) in the history of sexual rights in Colombia, interrogating activists' strategies, public policies and knowledge production. In the early 2000s I was involved as an activist and supporter of the struggles around rights, gender identity and sexual orientation. Later I developed an academic reflection on these events, which I intend will be useful for the history of social mobilisations and initiatives of social transformation. In my case, 'outsiderness' and 'insiderness' are not fixed or static positions in research but fluid, permeable and ever-shifting social locations (Naples 1997).

This paper is not a discussion about modernity as a historical event but about modernity as a way to understand change in relation to sexual politics. However it is important to mention that discussions of modernity in Latin America are extensive and have a long history that is impossible to condense into a short paper. For nineteenth-century liberal intellectuals,

modernity was what differentiated civilised cities from barbarian hinterlands, white elites from African or native subordinates, and virile forces of progress from their feminine burdens (Cancino 2008). Sociologists of culture in the 1980s, trying to trace paths towards democratisation, criticised the incompleteness of modernity in the region (Vidal 2000). Others emphasised the differences between European/United States' modernity and Latin American modernity (Quijano 1993). Critics of modernity have expressed their scepticism about the project of change that underlies modernisation and how it actualises colonial relations (Castro-Gómez 1998). Modernity in Latin America has been a division marker, an orientation, a way to measure transformations.

Sexual politics and sexual citizenship in Colombia

Colombia is considered one of the oldest democracies in Latin America. However, Colombia has suffered the most protracted conflict in the area (Pearce 1990; Sánchez 1995; Valencia 2001). In around 50 years of conflict, it has witnessed changes in dynamics, actors involved, areas of control and effects on society. At the same time, there is an important activism around social transformation, justice and peace led by civil society and grassroots organisations (García-Durán 2004). Since the 1980s there have been successive initiatives to demobilise and reintegrate illegal armed actors (Jones 2004). In the struggles between left-wing guerrilla groups (FARC, ELN)[2] and state forces and right-wing paramilitaries (former AUC), the country faces one of the gravest humanitarian crises in the world (Acnur 2012; UNDP 2003).

In this context, Colombia has formulated an extensive legal system to protect sexual orientation and gender identity (Serrano-Amaya 2009). Currently, same-sex couples in Colombia are recognised as de facto couples. They are granted similar rights to married or de facto heterosexual couples, such as social security, inheritance and immigration rights. In 2011 a new ruling by the Constitutional Court defined same-sex couples as a form of family protected by the Constitution (Sentence C-577, 2011). However, adoption by same-sex

---

2 FARC: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia; ELN: Ejercito de Liberación Nacional; AUC: Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia.

couples is still under discussion. The granting of these rights started in 2007 with rulings by the Colombian Constitutional Court. Those rulings were in response to legal mobilisations of activists, lawyers, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender organisations.[3] Between 1999 and 2010 nine bills to regulate the situation of same-sex couples were discussed in the parliament (the Congress and Senate). None of them has been successful. The last ruling by the Constitutional Court gave the legislature two years to regulate the topic (Sentence C-577, 2011). The ruling on the legal situation of same-sex couples in Colombia follows a pattern identified in countries such as South Africa, where Constitutional Courts lead legal changes. It differs from countries such as Argentina, where marriage equality was promoted by the legislature.

Sexual politics in Colombia has been the space of several struggles (Serrano-Amaya et al. 2010): the development of notions of equity, citizenship and rights in a context of state multiculturalism; the increasing conversion of the grievances of social movements to a language of rights and to litigation strategies; the coexistence of parallel tendencies towards the rule of law and the rule of para-institutional and informal ways of governance; the increasing privatisation of the economy with the rise of neo-liberal policies; and in general, a dispute between a variety of legal, illegal and para-legal actors over state control. I situate the debates that will be described next in this context.

Modernising authority

On 10 November 2002, *El Espectador*, the second Colombian national newspaper, published a full-page open letter to the Colombian Senate entitled 'Homosexual marriage? A bill against family, marriage and human nature is discussed in the Senate'. Signed by an ex-president, several high-ranking military officials, politicians and academics, the open letter was intended to draw attention to a bill to recognise same-sex couples as de facto couples. The bill in question was Bill 43, promoted by Senator Piedad Cordoba, and the third attempt to legislate

---

3   For detailed descriptions of same-sex couples' rights and the legal situation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in Colombia see Azuero and Albarracín (2009); and Serrano-Amaya, Pinilla, Martínez and Rodríguez (2010).

on the topic. Alarmed, the signatories of the letter considered that the bill was against the national Constitution, human nature, public health, family, culture, education, morality and natural law. In the following weeks three different versions of the letter were published in the same newspaper and in the other national newspaper, *El Tiempo*.[4]

These open letters articulated ideas of modernity, sexuality and rights in different ways. The first sustains that society has already reached a level of tolerance towards homosexuals that does not need additional legal measures. In it, change is not required and the current arrangements on gender and sexuality should be preserved as they are. This is, for example, the explanation that the ex-president who signed the first open letter gave for his position. For him, society should not go back to previous times of intolerance against homosexuals but there is no reason to 'fall for misleading ideas about modernism' that pursue unnecessary changes (Turbay 2002). Modernism and the granting of rights to same-sex couples are associated with temporary fashions that disorient adequate lines of change. That position characterised the perspectives of those who opposed marriage equality in the 2000s because they considered such legislation unnecessary since homosexuals were already protected by non-discrimination measures in the Constitution (Rubiano 2002; Serrano-Amaya, Albarracín, Pulecio and Sánchez 2012).

The second articulation connects ideas of nation and society to demand the protection of a certain space from what is perceived as foreign and non-Colombian. In the first open letter, the legal initiative was defined as the result of international pressures in favour of family planning and abortion coming from an 'anti-demographic imperialism' that, pretending to protect a minority, harmed core values of Colombian society. Again, this idea also permeated the debates throughout the decade. In July 2011 a coalition of Christian churches with a presence in the country signed a letter to the Constitutional Court stating that homosexual marriage was not only against the wellbeing of Colombian families but also against the core

---

4   The open letters were published in *El Espectador* on 10 and 17 November and 1 December 2002 and in *El Tiempo* on 18 November 2002.

ethical values of the nation (Redacción 2011). The fight against sexual rights has produced what years of calls for ecumenism could not.

Both narratives – of a change that should not be proceeding and a national space that needs to be protected – are reinforced by the representation of homosexuals and marriage equality as a menace. In the first and second letters, homosexuality in general and same-sex marriage in particular were associated with the transmission of illnesses, non-reproduction and the decay of societies, since, it was stated, homosexuality was the cause of the collapse of the Greek and Roman empires. In this way, same-sex couples were positioned as a threat to the core of society, as if they were an alien 'other' attacking a clearly established 'us'. This association between homosexuality, decadence and degeneracy is not new and can be associated with the developmental tropes that persist in the construction of homosexuality (Hoad 2000). However, I suggest that they also have particular meanings in the context of these debates.

At the same time that these debates over sexual rights were occurring, Colombia lived through a complex process of reshaping of the state. Such change was caused by the increased influence in public administration of non-state actors such as left-wing guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries and drug barons. This model of governability combined private violent coercion with capture of public resources, restrictions in public life, and alliances between political, economic and social elites (Gutierrez Sanin 2010). It was also supported by the presence of an authoritarian and vertical project of change and the fast social mobility secured by drug dealing. From 2002 this type of governability gained presence and influence in the political alliance that governed the country until recently, using strategies of intimidation and manipulation of political elections (Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos 2009). I argue that the public irruption of the perspective against same-sex couples described above was a useful way to reinforce such an authoritarian project of change. Sexual politics were the arena in which to redefine hierarchies of difference between some citizens and others, to increase ideas of threat and menace, and to strengthen divisions between 'us' and 'others'.

The representation of marriage equality as being in opposition to national identity follows a pattern of associations between nationalism, tradition and heteronormativity presented in discussions over sexual rights in countries such as Mexico, Brazil (De la Dehesa 2010) and the United States (Sullivan-Blum 2009). Just as in the transition from colonialism to democracy in countries like Zimbabwe (Epprecht 2005), or in transitions toward economic integration as in Poland (Graff 2006), homophobic discourses in Colombia have been incorporated in new ideas of fatherland that trigger processes of political and economic change.

Modernising elitism

The last idea should not lead to the conclusion that non-homophobic perspectives or narratives in favour of same-sex rights are separated from other nationalisms or other evolutionary narratives. Recent scholarship shows that certain representations of homosexuality and citizenship in European and North American societies reproduce ideas of 'good citizenship' (Clarke 2000), normalcy (Richardson 2004) and nationalism (Puar 2007). The two other forms of articulation between modernity and sexual rights that I will explore in the following paragraphs show that it is not possible to create sharp separations between evolutionary narratives and sexual rights. They also raise the need to locate the debates around sexual rights in the specific contexts of citizenship and ways to understand modernity.

The ideas expressed in the 2002 open letters and press releases against marriage equality created an unexpected debate. In the days after their publication, almost all main media and a diverse set of editorialists, commentators and academics criticised those positions for their intolerance and resistance to the 'reality' of same-sex couples and 'their rights'. From this point in the debate, led by intellectuals, academics and editorialists, the recognition of same-sex couples' rights was posited as an expression of the modernisation of Colombia and a way to measure how modern the country was. The idea that it was also the recognition of a reality implied a definition of same-sex couples as a unified subject in need of visibility.

As in the previous case, the positioning of the debate in time and space was fundamental. Sometimes using humour and sarcasm, media commentators in favour of same-sex marriage

used a variety of terms to describe the antagonist position as an anachronism: they were represented as 'inquisitors' (García-Valdivieso 2002), protecting faith and tradition, remembering the Spanish Tribunal of the Holy Office of Inquisition. They were 'primitive humans living in caves', anchored in past centuries and acting against the 'triumph of European civilisation' represented by the recognition of rights for gays and lesbians (Rentería 2002). They were also 'Victorians' who thought that homosexuality was a perversion but who should not expect the state to legislate in the same way (Redacción 2001). For others, these new regulations were just challenges of modern societies that the country needed to face in order to 'advance' towards a more equalitarian society (*La Patria* 2011).

For those with this perspective, the recognition of same-sex couples' rights would include Colombia in the list of those few countries that legally protect homosexuals (Redacción 2001). This reference to other countries where similar laws existed was used to argue that no social catastrophe happened once the rights of same-sex couples were recognised. However, that reference could be seen not just as a factual recitation of countries with legal developments, but a way to orient the debate towards a certain imagined community of nations. As some editorialists said, same-sex marriage was an expression of pluralistic and modern societies (Redacción 2002).

This perspective follows an idea of the modern as civilised and opposed to barbaric and obscure attachments to traditions. It uses a narrative of progress based on inclusion in 'another' history, the history of European countries, and on distance from the past. It is not coincidental that much of this side of the debate was voiced by editorialists in leading national newspapers. They followed a Latin American tradition coming from the nineteenth century of enlightened and liberal elites interested in modernity as an expression of separation from the colonial past, and oriented towards Europe as model of the modern (Larraín 2000). This tradition permeated intellectuals throughout the twentieth century (Cancino 2008). For Ahmed (2006) orientation is a way to reside in space, a starting point from where the world unfolds and is aligned. Orienting this side of the debate towards countries that have already recognised same-sex marriage reinforces that intention to live in the modern. It also creates

an alignment not just between straight and non-straight lines (2006: 563) but between modern and non-modern processes of change. If orientation is not only a matter of space but also of temporality (Ahmed 2006: 554), for these modernising elites their endorsement of such rights is a way to jump into a desired modernity.

Modernising rights

Going back to 2002, almost immediately after the publication of the open letters gay and lesbian activists and their supporters reacted. Three weeks later, an alliance between civil society organisations, academics and activists published a press release in the national newspaper *El Tiempo* entitled 'In pursuit of an inclusive Colombia'. Using a legal frame and a language of rights, they described the bill under discussion as a development of democracy and a promotion of the cultural changes required for peaceful coexistence. They presented the development of constitutional principles such as equity, non-discrimination and free development of personality as a reason to approve the bill. In this logic, granting rights to same-sex couples was a duty of the state in order to dismantle exclusions and the permanence of 'second class citizenship'.

This position needs to be considered in the discourses of activisms and grassroots organisations working on sexual rights. Discussions of heterosexuality, normativity and the regulatory practices of gender and sexuality have a long and distinctive history in Latin America, in the struggles against dictatorships, political exclusion and liberatory practices (De la Dehesa 2010; Viteri, Serrano-Amaya and Vidal-Ortiz 2011). The connection between a language of rights and citizenship also has a long tradition in Latin America, dating from the processes of democratisation started in the 1980s. Women's organisations have been fundamental in that association and in linking it with reproductive and sexual rights (Craske and Molyneux 2002). Since the early 1980s Latin American gay and lesbian organisations have framed their grievances in the language of rights rather than liberation discourses, following both the challenges and needs of the particular political situation of the region and global trends (Brown 2002). As De la Dehesa (2010) stated, in the cases of Mexico or Brazil

considering gay and lesbian politics as a copy or globalisation of international trends would be reductive and would deny a long history of local debates.

However, the narrative developed by activists in the debates around marriage equality in Colombia also has a resonance with global trends that needs to be explored. There have been important exercises to compare and theorise the similarities and simultaneities in transnational gay and lesbian mobilisations and, in particular, the framing of grievances in a language of international human rights. Adam, Duyvendak and Krouwel (1999), for example, provided an overview of 16 countries and demonstrated the importance of national politics in the constitution of transnational gay and lesbian movements. However, this does not explain sufficiently what is global in such 'worldwide' mobilisation, its causes and consequences, giving the impression that those local expressions are some kind of variations on the same theme. Globalisation tends to be assumed as a fact, a phenomenon resulting from international declarations (Kollman and Waites 2009) and a variety of cultural and political events (Altman 2001).

The narrative oriented towards 'pursuing an inclusive Colombia' uses some elements of this global trend. Lesbian and gay Colombian activists have developed a complex network of communications, alliances and contacts to obtain national and international support for their grievances, which was at the base of their presence in the above debate. Their efforts, as they were expressed in the mentioned narrative, demand the realisation of concrete processes of change, using the space of transnational activism and international human rights organisations. They also brought into play elements that became an important political argument in a country struggling to develop democracy in the context of protracted conflicts, such as the reference to exclusion, peace and equal citizenship. Even more, looking for inclusion in the nation was a reaction to the other narrative that represented gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights as foreign impositions and therefore as non-Colombian.

However, claiming same-sex couples' rights as part of the development of democracy, inclusion and citizenship implies the recognition of the normative nature of human rights

narratives in which activists frame their demands. The modernity they look for is one oriented by the rule of law and the realisation of universal human rights. This struggle to be included in the idea of nation could explain the sometimes disrupting presence of Colombian flags in gay pride parades in cities like Bogota, and reminds us of the melancholic desire to belong to the norm mentioned by Crimp (2002). In this case, following Spivak's famous phrase, if the subaltern wants to speak, it has to be in the language of rights, in the space of litigation and towards the modern liberal myth of rights.

Conclusion

One possible reaction on reading the open letters and press releases, especially for those familiar with the language and strategies of activism and identity politics, is to label these arguments as expressions of homophobia and to associate them with representations of Latin American societies as driven by church influence, tradition and conservatism. However, with the previous description I tried to show that just looking at the homophobic references in these narratives reduces their complexity, hides the persistence of evolutionary narratives in social and cultural debates, and renders invisible their connection with projects of modernity and nationalism. It also positions other actors in the debate, such as editorialists, academics and activists, in a positive or progressive side. The associations homophobia=pre-modern and gay rights=modern reinforces representations of countries such as Colombia in which lacking human rights in relation to sexual orientation or gender identity reproduce global racisms, new forms of orientalism and cultural hierarchies (Waites 2008). Even more, the positioning of such narratives as vestigial or as part of a dark past that needs to be overcome denies the coexistence of different ways to produce knowledge about sexuality. In the introduction to a book about sexualities in Eastern Europe, Mizielinska and Kulpa (2011) stated that, while in the West change in culture and sexual politics is experienced in a 'time of sequences', a straight time, in the East it is a 'time of coincidences', a queer time. They use that difference to explain how in post-communist European countries in a short period of time there was a simultaneous presence of homophile, LGBT and queer politics and knowledge. I suggest that the three perspectives in the debate are examples of such temporal coincidences in sexual politics.

Here the discussion introduced by decolonial scholars can be useful. Decolonial thought has a different genealogy than postcolonial theories. While the former was born from the crisis of the colonial perspective in places like India and the Middle East, the latter is based on critiques of modernity and coloniality in the Americas (Mignolo 2007). In spite of having different origins, decolonial and postcolonial thought share their dissatisfaction with globalised technological development and their scepticism about the project of modernity (Castro-Gómez 1998). While decolonial thought offers a radical critique of Eurocentric ideologies of development, postcolonial scholarship criticises the orientalism that positions non-Europeans as inferior others (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007). According to Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel (2007), Eurocentric ideologies produced the dichotomies civilisation–barbarism, development–underdevelopment and western–non-western. I suggest that the actualisation of such ideologies in the debates around same-sex marriage add another dichotomy: homophilia–homophobia.

The three perspectives in the debate around marriage equality in Colombia share the rule of law as the key element of social transformation. However the idea of what law should be considered differs. While critics of same-sex rights still claim the pre-eminence of natural law, activists claim the rule of human rights and liberal law. For decolonial thought, the first decolonisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was incomplete because it was limited to juridical and political events (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007). For them, the decoloniality required in the twenty-first century needs to target the racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, epistemic and economic hierarchical relations that are still acting in the global world (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007: 17). In this way, the rule of law in this debate represents its own limit to change. Both perspectives restrict the possibilities for other alternatives to produce change in gender and sexual orders that are not directed to gaining legal reforms. In the debate there is no reference to a repressive use of the law. However, despite the different perspectives here, law operates in the disciplinary sense mentioned by Stychin (2003): a way to construct proper behaviours.

The three narratives identified in the debate also have in common a call for universalistic approaches to the relations among rights, modernity, gender and sexuality. However, they differ in their understandings of those relations. In the first narrative, there is a unified 'us' defined by traditional ideas of nationhood and fatherland that resists the challenge presented by diverse 'others'. In the second, there is the need to orient the country towards a Eurocentric modernity that acts as a universal ideal. In the third, in the frame of universal human rights marriage equality and the rights of gender and sexually diverse communities can be realised. The three also share evolutionary tropes that are used to participate in the debate. However, the kinds of tropes they employ are different. In the first narrative, the opposition to marriage equality is used to reinforce hierarchies of difference in which 'others' are menaces of degeneration. In the second narrative, the trope is progress as a unidirectional movement towards civilisation. In the third, it is also progress but in terms of democratisation, inclusion and equality. In that way, what is in the debate is not just a dislike of homosexuals but a different project of change, citizenship and nation.

The debates around marriage equality have changed in the last ten years because of the fragmented recognition of rights. Gay characters are now common in the Colombian mass media. Several cities in the country have developed public policies to target the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens and national institutions have been forced to do the same (Serrano-Amaya 2011). Some of these representations follow the homonormative logic described in US politics (Clarke 2000; Duggan 2003; Puar 2007). For Puar (2007) 'homonationalism' is a national homosexuality emerging in national politics of recognition and inclusion that not only regulates it but also its racial and sexual norms. For her, liberal politics have incorporated queer subjects, depending on the production of orientalised terrorist bodies and in new 'homonormative ideologies' that reproduce gender, class, national and sexual systems of exclusion. This critique follows other analysis of the development of European sexual democracies against the reinforcement of anti-Muslim stereotypes and immigration restrictions on Muslim subjects (Graff 2010). However, the political context, state structures and democratic styles of the United States or European countries are neither

the same as Latin American countries nor do they necessarily produce the same kind of others.

While what I described here shares with Puar's analysis the connection between sexual politics and war politics, in particular the war on terror, the case of Colombia offers a different situation. The Colombian government in the last decade was one of most well-known regional allies of the war on terror led by the United States. In Colombia Muslims, Arabs or Sikhs could not be positioned as the terrorist others required to justify the war on terrorism and the reinforcement of nationalist ideas, among other reasons because of the limited presence of such communities in the country. This does not imply that gender, sexuality and race are not connected in social and racial orderings (Serrano-Amaya and Viveros 2006). That place of otherness that supported the securitisation of society was already occupied by a diverse set of subjects defined by a meticulous range of hierarchies of difference: guerrillas and their supporters as the enemies of society; internally displaced people as the ones who did not adjust to modernisation; Indigenous and Afrocolombian communities as those who resist modernisation; marginalised urban young men as actors of violence in need of adult control; impoverished homosexuals and *travesties* as social threats. In these hierarchies of difference, racial, class, gender, sexual and generational orders merge with ambiguous moral categories such as the division 'good citizens' versus 'bad citizens', often repeated by the previous Colombian government. Such categories resonate with the 'coloniality of power' mentioned by Quijano (2000) and with traditional colonial divisions based on ideas of decency. However, they were actualised as part of strategies for pacification that extended the war on terror.

During the last ten years opponents of same-sex marriage have also incorporated a language of rights in order to avoid associations with homophobic statements and to modernise their positions (Serrano-Amaya et al. 2012). This use of a language of rights by antagonist actors raises questions about the meaning of rights in contemporary debates around citizenship and identity. The increasing presence of gender and sexual orientation in global human rights also creates new geopolitical arrangements. In December 2011, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave a speech to the United Nations in Geneva declaring that 'gay rights are

human rights'. Her declaration was based on a long tradition of activism and lobbying by gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender organisations to frame their grievances in a human rights perspective and in a global context. In an international arena of human rights diplomats, Clinton's declaration challenged the idea that gay rights were a western invention, defining them as a 'human reality'. Her statement was seen as an important step in the global recognition of sexual minorities as a collective group requiring particular protection. It was also a confirmation of the connections between identity politics, global activism and new cultural hierarchies.

From a decolonial perspective, human rights implies a global design articulated with the production of international divisions and hierarchies of labour and race (Grosfoguel 2007: 214). The inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in human rights discourses can be seen as an extension of such design, by the reproduction of an androcentric (MacKinnon 2006) and heterosexual matrix (Butler 2009), as feminist and queer theorists argue. In this way, the three narratives described above have in common being 'straightening devices' (Ahmed 2006) that need to be decolonised.

Homophobia was explicit as never before in the recent political campaign in Colombia. Nowadays the public debate around marriage equality fluctuates between a highly technical legal discussion, the media's contradictory inclusion of gay men in soap operas, and fears about adoption. The result of these debates is a 'heterarchy' (Kontopoulos 1993) of powers, powers that are pursued in hegemonies presenting different projects of modernity. This dispute does not mean that hierarchical relations of class, race, sexuality and nationality disappear, but that they are realigned according with the needs of such projects of change.

Acknowledgements

References

Acemoglu, D, Robinson, J and Santos, R (2009) *The monopoly of violence: evidence from Colombia*, http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic637140.files/Acemoglu%20Formation%20of%20the%20State%20July%2010%202009.pdf

Acnur (2012) *Desplazamiento interno en Colombia*, http://www.acnur.org/t3/operaciones/situacion-colombia/desplazamiento-interno-en-colombia/

Adam, B, Duyvendak, J and Krouwel, A (1999) 'Gay and lesbian movements beyond borders?' in B Adam, J Duyvendak and A Krouwel (eds) *The global emergence of gay and lesbian politics: national imprints of a worldwide movement*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA, pp 344–371.

Ahmed, S (2006) 'Orientations: toward a queer phenomenology', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12(4): 543–574.

Altman, D (2001) *Global sex*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW.

Azuero, A and Albarracín, M (2009) *Activismo judicial y derechos de los LGBT en Colombia: Sentencias emblemáticas*, ILSA, Bogotá.

Brown, S (2002) 'Con discriminación y represión no hay democracia: the lesbian and gay movement in Argentina', *Latin American Perspectives*, 29(2): 119–138.

Butler, J (2009) *Frames of war: when is life grievable?* Verso, London.

Cancino, H (2008) 'Pensamiento social, ciencias sociales y modernidad en América Latina', *Sociedad y Discurso*, 13: 46–60.

Castro-Gómez, S (1998) 'Latin American postcolonial theories', *Peace Review*, 10(1): 27–33.

Castro-Gómez, S and Grosfoguel, R (2007) 'Giro decolonial, teoría crítica y pensamiento heterárquico' in S Castro-Gómez and R Grosfoguel (eds) *El giro decolonial: reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global*, Siglo del Hombre Editores; Universidad Central; Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, pp 9–46.

Clarke, E (2000) *Virtuous vice: homoeroticism and the public sphere*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Craske, N and Molyneux, M (2002) 'The local, the regional and the global: transforming the politics of rights' in N Craske and M Molyneux (eds) *Gender and the politics of rights and democracy in Latin America*, Palgrave, Houndmills, Basingstoke, pp 1–31.

Crimp, D (2002) *Melancholia and moralism: essays on AIDS and queer politics*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Das, V (1995) *Critical events: an anthropological perspective on contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, New York.

De la Dehesa, R (2010) *Queering the public sphere in Mexico and Brazil: sexual rights movements in emerging democracies*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Duggan, L (2003) *The twilight of equality: neoliberalism, cultural politics, and the attack on democracy*, Beacon, Boston, MA.

Epprecht, M (2005) 'Black skin, "cowboy" masculinity: a genealogy of homophobia in the African nationalist movement in Zimbabwe to 1983', *Culture, health & sexuality*, 7(3): 253–266.

García-Durán, M (2004) 'Colombia: challenges and dilemmas in the search for peace', *Accord*, 14: 4–9.

García-Valdivieso, G (2002) 'Buscan inquisidor', *El Tiempo*, 21 November.

Graff, A (2006) 'We are (not all) homophobes: a report from Poland', *Feminist Studies*, 32(2): 434–449.

Graff, A (2010) 'Looking at pictures of gay men: political uses of homophobia in contemporary Poland', *Public Culture*, 22(3): 583–603.

Grosfoguel, R (2007) 'The epistemic decolonial turn: beyond political-economy paradigms', *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3): 211–223.

Grossberg, L (1986) 'On postmodernism and articulation: an interview with Stuart Hall', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10(2): 45–60.

Gutierrez Sanin, F (2010) 'Reflexiones a proposito del libro "Y refundaron la patria"' in C Lopez (ed), *Y refundaron la patria: de como mafiosos y politicos refundaron el estado colombiano*, Corporacion Nuevo Arco Iris, Congreso Visible, Dejusticia, Grupo Metodo, MOE, Bogota.

Hoad, N (2000) 'Arrested development; or, the queerness of savages: resisting evolutionary narratives of difference', *Postcolonial Studies*, 3(2): 133–158.

Jones, A (2004) 'Parainstitutional violence in Latin America', *Latin American Politics and Society*, 46(4): 127–148.

Kollman, K and Waites, M (2009) 'The global politics of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender human rights: an introduction', *Contemporary Politics*, 15(1): 1–17.

Kontopoulos, KM (1993) *The logics of social structure* (vol 6), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Larraín, J (2000) *Identity and modernity in Latin America*, Blackwell, Malden, MA.

MacKinnon, CA (2006) *Are women human? And other international dialogues*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Mignolo, WD (2007) 'El pensamiento decolonial: desprendimiento y apertura. Un manifiesto' in S Castro-Gómez and R Grosfoguel (eds) *El giro decolonial: reflexiones para una diversidad epistemica mas alla del capitalismo global*, Siglo del Hombre Editores, Universidad Central, Universidad javeriana, Bogota, pp 25–46.

Mizielinska, J and Kulpa, R (2011) '"Contemporary peripheries": queer studies, circulation of knowledge and East/West divide' in R Kulpa and J Mizielinska (eds) *De-centring western sexualities : Central and Eastern European perspectives*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey, pp 11–26.

Naples, N (1997) 'A feminist revisiting of the insider/outsider debate: the "outsider phenomenon" in rural Iowa' in R Hertz (ed) *Reflexivity and voice*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp 70–94.

Patria, La (2011) 'Igualdad ante la ley', editorial, *La Patria*, 8 February.

Pearce, J (1990) *Colombia: inside the labyrinth*, Latin American Bureau, London.

Puar, J (2007) *Terrorist assemblages: homonationalism in queer times*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Quijano, A (1993) 'Modernity, identity, and utopia in Latin America', *boundary 2*, 20(3): 140–155.

Redacción (2001) 'El derecho a ser gay', *El Tiempo*, 26 November.

Redacción (2002) 'Se calienta debate gay', *El Tiempo*, 12 November.

Redacción (2011) 'Iglesias del país se unen contra el matrimonio homosexual', *El Tiempo*, 22 July.

Rentería, P (2002) 'Furia en la línea gay', *El Tiempo*, 13 November.

Richardson, D (2004) 'Locating sexualities: from here to normality', *Sexualities*, 7(4): 391–411.

Rubiano, P (2002) 'Una grave lesión a la institución matrimonial', *El Tiempo*, 25 November.

Sánchez, G (ed) (1995) *Colombia, violencia y democracia*, 4th ed, Iepri, Colciencias, Bogotá.

Serrano-Amaya, JF (2009) 'Colombia' in C Stewart (ed) *Greenwood encyclopedia of LGBT issues worldwide*, Greenwood Press, Los Angeles, pp 73–88.

Serrano-Amaya, JF (2011) *Challenging or reshaping heteronormativity with public policies? A case study from Bogota, Colombia*, working paper, University of Sussex, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.

Serrano-Amaya, JF, Albarracín, M, Pulecio, M and Sánchez, C (2012) *No somos homofóbicos pero ... Iglesias y diversidad sexual y de género en Colombia*, unpublished manuscript.

Serrano-Amaya, JF, Pinilla, MY, Martínez, M and Rodríguez, A (2010) *Panorama de derechos sexuales y reproductivos en Colombia*, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights, Bogotá.

Serrano-Amaya, JF and Viveros, M (2006) 'Regímenes de ordenamiento social y representaciones de diferencia en Colombia contemporánea' in C Cáceres, G Careaga, T Frasca and M Pecheny (eds) *Sexualidad, estigma y derechos humanos*, PASPA/UPCH, Lima.

Stychin, C (2003) *Governing sexuality: the changing politics of citizenship and law reform*, Hart, Oxford.

Sullivan-Blum, CR (2009) '"It's Adam and Eve, no Adam and Steve": what's at stake in the construction of contemporary American Christian homophobia' in DAB Murray (ed) *Homophobias: lust and loathing across time and space*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Turbay, JC (2002) 'Ni intolerancia ni equivocado modernismo', open letter, *El Tiempo*, 24 November.

UNDP (2003) *El conflicto, callejón con salida: informe nacional de desarrollo humano Colombia 2003*, 2nd ed, UNDP, Bogotá.

Valencia, A (ed) (2001) *Exclusión social y construcción de lo público en Colombia*, Cidse, Cerec, Bogotá.

Vidal, H (2000) 'Confronting the catastrophes of modernity: the cultural sociology of Jose Joaquin Brunner', *Latin American Perspectives*, 27(4): 80–102.

Viteri, MA, Serrano-Amaya, JF and Vidal-Ortiz, S (2011) 'Como se piensa lo "queer" en America Latina?' *Iconos*, 35(1): 47–60.

Waites, M (2008) 'Analysing sexualities in the shadow of war: Islam in Iran, the West and the work of reimagining human rights', *Sexualities*, 11(1–2): 64–73.