

Notes on the discussion after Gilles Kleitz' presentation 'Why is Development Work so Straight?'

Queering Development Seminar Series, 27.1.00

Theoretical implications

Issues raised

- Is it possible or desirable to find some sort of 'function' for sexuality within development? An example was given of HIV programmes in which 'gay communities' were made functional within development by using them for AIDs education and prevention.
- Queer theory would only be useful to the extent that it opened up spaces for dissonance, rather than constructing a new group of 'others' that needed to be developed.
- Is queer theory exclusively a Western notion? Or might it provide room for non-western ideas about sexuality? An example was given of how a gender training made local categories of sexuality invisible, suggestion that a queer approach might have been better.
- The danger of imposing normative categories of homosexuality, as well as heterosexuality, in development work.

Practical implications

There was a framing question relating to the practical implications of inserting 'queer' into development. Should sexual difference be incorporated as gender was? Would it be possible to develop a 'sexual differences framework'? What would the implications of this be?

Issues raised:

- The problem of having to work within institutions to 'deliver' development. A practical example was given of working with young male sex workers, where not all sex workers felt represented by the institution that the project choose to work with.
- The issue of differences within the gay community.
- What can be done if sexuality is not usually openly discussed in a certain country? The possibility of using gender training to introduce the 'messiness' around sexuality'

"The Bush Makes You Butch"

One participant asked for some more explanation of this interesting contention in Gilles paper. Gilles explained that this was a reference to the notion of the "Great White Hunter" as the model of masculinity in Zimbabwe. This identity has also been adopted by young black men, including those who work in development projects. The 'Great White Hunter' has also been 'kitchified' through its packaging and marketing for tourists.

Issues raised:

- The adoption of ‘the great white hunter’ by black men needed to be seen within the context of colonialisation, as a possible reaction to the ‘feminisation of the native’.
- This example shows the fluidity of signals of gendered identity: that gendered identities can be appropriated and utilised despite the history of oppression associated with it.
- Are attempts around ‘consciousness raising’ of Zimbabwean development staff an extension of colonial relations? Or can the adoption of the ‘Great White Hunter’ pose be challenged in such a way that that colonial histories are exposed and questioned?

Human rights

- Parallels can be drawn between the way women’s human rights are framed and gay and lesbian human rights. The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission has done this, and produced a report on lesbian human rights world-wide (Unspoken Rules: Sexual Orientation and Women’s Human Rights, Rosenbloom ed, Cassell, London, 1996)
- The discourse of human rights and sexuality in Zimbabwe was discussed, with reference to Oliver Phillips presentation
- DFID recently produced a paper on human rights, was sexuality included?

Working with donors and development agencies

- Public pressures and homophobia might keep donors from funding development projects that focused on gays and lesbians.
- The difficulties of being gay or lesbian and working in development-practical things like getting visas and work permits for partners, or partner benefits from donor agencies.