

Sexuality Policy Watch

Asia Regional Dialogue Sexuality and Geopolitics

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Hanoi, Vietnam

I. Background

Sexuality Policy Watch (SPW) is a global forum committed to examining the political dimensions of sexuality and developing analyses that allow for more informed policy discussions on sexuality issues. SPW has approached these objectives in various ways, most recently by examining the dynamics of sexuality and politics in ten countries and two global institutions, a research project that culminated in the e-publication *SexPolitics: Reports from the Front Lines*. From this research effort, SPW identified four themes associated with sexuality—state, religion, science, and economics—that it believed warranted further attention to advance the field of sexuality, intellectually and politically. In addition to these themes, SPW recognized a need to shift its analytical focus from nations and institutions to geopolitics and regional specificities. Both of these developments set the stage for the Regional Dialogues, intended to bring together experts from different disciplines and areas of expertise to critically discuss the ways the state, religion, science and economics intersect with sexual identities, health and rights, in three regional contexts (Asia, Latin America and Africa). Asia was the first region to be examined.

As determined by the Asia Regional Task Force—Le Minh Giang (co-chair, Vietnam), Khuat Thu Hong (Vietnam), Radhika Ramasubban (co-chair, India), Saira Shameem (Malaysia), Rosalia Sciortino (Thailand) and Michael Tan (The Philippines)—the Asia Dialogue was to focus specifically on the actions, agencies, processes and power relationships through which sexualities are constructed, contested and constantly changing. Of particular importance to this Dialogue was not only to describe sexuality and sexuality-related issues but also to develop action steps for innovative policy and intervention-based work (referred to as “tipping points”). Also of critical importance was to engage in a discussion that was most relevant to Asia yet maintained a focus on the complex interplay between macro-processes and regional or sub-regional processes. Concepts such as flows and interconnections guided the discussion. The Asia Dialogue took place over the course of three days and included four sessions and one concluding session to analyze crosscutting themes.

II. Session One: Viagra versus Condoms

General framework

Viagra and condoms are distinct sexual products with very different implications in terms of pleasure and power. However, they also have important commonalities: both effectively ignore the economic and political context within which sex occurs and sexuality is located; both are

emblematic of biomedicalization; and both, on account of their being cheap, portable and self-controlled, can be situated in the context of neoliberalism, understood as a political strategy that makes health an individual as opposed to state responsibility.

Names of panelists: Jayashree Ramakrishna (India) and Huang Yingying (China)
Chair/Discussant: Lenore Manderson (Australia)

The overview paper presented by Jayashree Ramakrishna compared condoms and Viagra within the context of contemporary heterosexuality and heteronormativity in India. The analysis unpacked the different trajectories of each technology. Viagra fits neatly with dominant representations of masculinity that are part of Indian culture, in particular within the Ayurvedic tradition, characterized by rigor, strength, procreation and the need to maintain a balance of vital bodily fluids. Within this tradition, sexual release is an important aspect of masculinity for men 20-40 years old; this is reinforced by notions of femininity. For women, marriage and reproduction affirm both adulthood and social status. Although Viagra is considered a new technology, there is a long history in Ayurvedic medicine of products to enhance male sexual performance. The introduction of Viagra, however, has changed how erectile dysfunction is understood. Whereas previously the problem was viewed in terms of relationship issues or psychological inhibitions and treated holistically, it has now become more biologized and medicalized.

In sharp contrast, condoms are a time-tested product yet not widely accepted in India. While the social emphasis on procreation is partly responsible for this resistance, other issues are at play: a general silence in India around sexuality issues; a conflation of condoms and sexual pleasure or sex toys; the growing popularity of abstinence-based sexual education; the disbelief that condoms work; and, with the increased prevalence of HIV, a heightened emphasis on testing and treatment as opposed to prevention and condom use.

This brief analysis indicates that even today sexual conservatism is quite pervasive in the Indian cultural and political context. But conservative norms and practices co-exist with deeply rooted expressions of sexual diversity and novel manifestations of resistance to dominant sexual norms, as exemplified by the ongoing campaign to repeal Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalizes same sex relations (the so-called sodomy law). Very clearly the urgent need to expand HIV prevention policies was one main factor contributing to the call to repeal Article 377. This indicates that public health concerns may be bringing issues of sexuality back into the political limelight. Another sharp illustration is the recent campaign (beginning in January 2009) organized to assert new forms of female sexuality in India. Known as the Pink Chaddis' (female slips') campaign, it uses the internet to respond to attacks and harassment experienced by young "pub-going" women in various cities. The campaign disseminates strong images to contest dominant norms and assert women's autonomy in terms of dress and social and sexual behavior.

The short paper presented by Huang Yingying looked at how sexual advertisements are regulated and practiced in different contexts in China. In 1989, advertisements for sex-related products were prohibited, a law that was strengthened in 2007. At the same time, however, advertisements still circulate and actual regulations differ across spaces and products. For example, college campuses advertise no-pain abortions and emergency contraception, while condom commercials are heavily monitored. Condom promotion is usually under the framework of HIV and not explicitly linked to sex or sexuality. Some condom commercials never show a condom or

mention the word “condom.” If sexuality is addressed, the language is usually focused on men’s sexual pleasure, even when the target audience is women. Condom companies, however, remain intent on selling their product in China and persuade governments to at least allow advertisement of their brand name. Yet the subject of condoms is still taboo, especially in the realm of sex education.

Discussion Points

- Both papers highlighted the role of age and gender in shaping access and use of sexual technologies. Both papers demonstrated the impacts of state control, which are also likely to be spatially defined and class determined. For example, if the internet lies outside state control mechanisms, people who do not have internet access are left under the heavy hand of government and advertising.
- The analysis of Viagra in particular provides an opportunity to revise our dominant assumptions about tradition, modernity and class. We tend to assume that men and women from lower classes use more Ayurvedic medicine than allopathic, but the lived experiences of individuals reveal a different picture. In India, men from all backgrounds take advantage of the lower-priced generic forms of Viagra.
- Both papers clearly indicated that sex-related products are embedded in much more complex macroeconomic and policy contexts in which population control policies, the market strategies of pharmaceutical companies, the internet and the effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic are intertwined. The discussion also suggested that we still lack a better and deeper understanding of geopolitical flows and the ways that geopolitical forces create different markets for different sexualities.
- But the panel also sharply revealed how condoms present a particular dilemma. On one hand, they are seen as disgusting; they are hardly promoted; they are considered the responsibility of women; they stifle pleasure; they are culturally taboo; they challenge notions of trust and romantic love; and, they serve as a means of surveillance and control (e.g., the 100% condom use policy used as a justification for brothel raids). On the other hand, there is still an urgent need to take continuous and positive actions with respect to their dissemination: condoms are a small, singular, effective technology to which the most diverse populations must have greater access. And we must raise the question of whether there is enough political will to increase condom distribution.
- Viagra seems to signal that complex cultural politics are at work. In particular, in the case of Asia where sexual anxiety and sexual satisfaction (usually male sexual satisfaction) are widespread, we are witnessing local cultures being recast under the impact of this global sex product.

III. Session Two: Negotiating Multiple Identities

General framework

This session addressed the complex interplay of power and how people wage battles on various fronts to carve out space for the realization of human rights. It examined on the importance of multiple identities, systems of control and acts of resistance.

Names of panelists: Dédé Oetomo (Indonesia), Pimpawan Boonmongkon (Thailand), and Khartini Slamah (Malaysia)

Chair/Discussant: Saira Shameem (Malaysia)

The overview paper by Dédé Oetomo focused on *waria* in Indonesia. *Waria* are men who change their gender in ways that challenge dominant social norms. However, within this broad definition there is considerable variation in *waria* identity. Some *waria* are more feminine, modifying their bodies through hormone use or sex-reassignment (legalized in 1973). Others are more masculine or “closeted” (they only cross-dress for pageants). Some *waria* never cross-dress. The boundaries between *waria* and other identities are not sharply defined. Not all men who dress in drag (gay or straight) identify as *waria*; similarly, not all men in relationships with *waria* identify as *waria*. Transgendering in Indonesia is definitely contextualized.

Waria have been officially recognized by the state since the 1960s when the New Political Order was established after the dictatorship. At that time, the newly formed Council of Islamic Clerics was asked to make a ruling on men undergoing sexual reassignment procedures. As this ruling was being considered, the government created the name *waria* to replace previous, more derogatory labels that had been used to identify this group. However, state recognition has not ensured the safety or social acceptance of *waria*. Contradictory as it may seem, especially after democratization in 1998, *waria* have become regular targets of militia violence (the militia harassed anyone who could pay a fine). Also as a result of the decentralization that followed, conservative Islamic political forces have gained strength at local levels, which also triggers discrimination and repression, as in the case of Aceh where Shari’a law has been imposed. *Waria* also face barriers when accessing health services and in the labor market.

The first short paper by Pimpawan Boonmongkon looked at the multiple identities of women living with HIV in Thailand. In Thai society, “good” women only have sex within marriage. Women with HIV, however, challenge this norm by developing multiple, short-term monogamous relationships. They also attach new meanings to sex, such as desire, personal satisfaction, revenge, love and duty. Despite moral judgments, some HIV-positive women exercise their rights to have children (although they have limited rights in terms of custody). In sum, the politics of identity for women living with HIV affords them a new sense of agency but also puts them at risk for HIV re-infection and limits their access to sexual health and rights. Future HIV policies should recognize that women have diverse identities that impact their lives and that these identities change over the life course.

The second short paper by Khartini Slamah discussed the disjunctions between “transgender” as a concept and a lived reality. As a concept, there are certain assumptions (e.g., a transgender person is a drag queen, transvestite, gay man, LGBT or MSM). The lived reality of being transgender challenges such categories and their assumptions. Being transgender also means that a number of fundamental human rights continue to be unmet (including rights to housing, employment, health and having a voice). Transgenders need a space to say who they are and what they want; these are not special rights but equal rights.

Discussion Points

- One cross-cutting theme that emerged from the papers is the key role of language, in particular the power of the state to construct sexual identity labels (e.g., in the case of *waria*). But at the same time the analyses illustrate how meanings are perennially contested: labels are assigned different meanings in different locales.
- In addition, the panel emphasized once again that it is crucial to think about gender and sexuality as two distinct but interdependent domains. As the papers suggest, transidentities seem to be less threatening to the gender binary as long as the individual “passes” for one gender or the other. The multiplicity of sexual identities, however, seems to elicit more violence and discrimination (lesbians and gays are the targets of violence, while transurgeries are increasingly socially acceptable).
- One important observation was that no mention had been made of female-to-male transgenders, an absence that seems to reflect their general absence in social movements. This absence may be because female-to-male transgenders are by and large not “out” as often as other groups or because they are simply fewer in number given the risks of female-to-male surgery. But as one participant (Malu Marin) reminded the group, it may also be related to the fact that for a long time, at least within the feminist movement, strong political and theoretical positions have been raised against butch lesbians.
- The conversation on multiple identities also triggered a key question regarding political strategy. For a long time we have been struggling to honor and give visibility to sexual diversity. But this endeavor faces a tension because in the sphere of politics, the sexual diversity approach has been less effective than strategies that are grounded in the politics of identity. To a large extent the experience of the past few decades suggests that human rights are more successfully achieved the more we essentialize sexual identities. Though we do not have a solution to this dilemma, it is important to raise it.
- Another blind spot identified in the discussion was the fact that no mention was made of intersex persons and the Asian scenario with respect to “corrective surgeries”; such surgeries are a blatant infringement on human rights, an issue that has recently gained political visibility globally.
- The discussion also led to a brief conversation about access to safe sex reassignment surgeries in the Asian region, which connected with the debates of the first session on Viagra and condoms as this procedure can and should also be considered a medical product. The reality of the region in that respect is that presently most surgeries are performed in Thailand. And, a comment was made that because the surgeries are provided within a strictly market frame—that is, available to anyone who can pay—it is not clear if adequate technical and ethical protocols are being followed.
- A last comment concerned religion. The presentations identified a particular paradox with respect to religious views on sexual identities. For instance, with respect to Islam, there is considerable variation in response to non-normative gender and sexual identities. On the one hand, there are political openings (especially through partnerships with moderate groups), as exemplified by the *waria* mosques in Indonesia; on the other, Asian societies are also experiencing the global trend towards religious dogmatism in relation to sexual matters. In addition, country experiences (e.g., Vietnam and China) also indicate that not everywhere is religious dogmatism the main source of sexual discrimination and oppression. And, in other countries, unexpected convergences are also being observed in relation to sexual conservatism between religious and non-religious sectors.

IV. Session Three: Sexualities in the Tech Era: Progress or Pathology?

General framework

This session focused on public and private technological spaces and the various ways technologies create new self-determined sexualities and subversions to broader religious and state structures.

Names of panelists: Michael Tan (The Philippines), Khuat Thu Hong (Vietnam) and Mayra Indira Ganesh (India)

Chair/Discussant: Radhika Ramasubban (India)

In the overview paper, Michael Tan explored the social implications of the digital revolution, and its impact on sexuality. The analysis traced the origins of email and the subsequent explosion of internet sites, blogs, outsourcing, networking and medical transcription that all have come to characterize the early 21st century. This history is marked by reproducibility, portability, flexibility, accessibility, autonomy, decentralization and anonymity. However, Tan also strongly underlined that technologies are inherently social: they are shaped by society and at the same time reconstitute social relations between people and between people and the world. Digital technologies, by extension, are not non-spaces, but cultural artifacts, spaces that are socially constituted and constitutive. The social dimensions of digital spaces manifest in various ways. Digital spaces are libraries (where you archive secret or objectionable files), recreational sites or sites of re-creation (where you reinvent yourself or your world), socialization sites and sites for social networking (dating) or social change (political mobilizing).

On the one hand we can perceive these digital spaces as a triumph of sexual diversities and intimate possibilities. However, they also reinforce rules and regulations and re-inscribe boundaries of social exclusion (perhaps as an extension of modern capitalism with its need for rationality and control). Some internet sites are highly gendered (women talk about cooking, men talk about motorcycles). Some dating sites only further alienate “traditional sexual outlaws” by barring them from entry. Ultimately, information and communication technologies are not wired worlds but lived worlds. We must always situate them in the context of the everyday.

The first short paper by Khuat Thu Hong presented three sexual scandals in Vietnam. The first, in 2004, involved a young celebrity singer whose nude photo had been widely disseminated. Some blamed her for being indulgent; some saw her as a victim; others claimed she was brave and beautiful. The scandal caused such a stir she was forced to emigrate to the United States or else face “questioning” by the Vietnamese government. The second scandal, in 2005, concerned a rising star who sued her boyfriend for disseminating a video of them having sex. In the course of the process, she was accused and prosecuted for being a call girl and sent to a re-education camp. When released she also left for the United States. This was her “price to pay” for the lifestyle she had chosen. This woman can be considered the first “Vietnamese sexual exile.” The third and last scandal, in 2007, was of a soap opera star blamed for a “black video” she posted on the internet. She was not officially chastised, but she was sent to a camp, her TV show was canceled and she was forced to publically apologize.

These stories reveal two versions of sexual politics in Vietnam. In one version, the state assumes a moral policing role, creating new regulations on dress code for performers and internet content. The state has also recasted cyberspace as an inherent threat, a venue through which people transform themselves from passive consumers into social actors. In the second version, for many young people, the sexualized body (particularly the female body) is seen as an asset, a shortcut to fame and opportunity. Together these political realities represent a central tension between desires to modernize and desires to return to tradition.

The second short paper by Mayra Indira Ganesh explored cell phone use among *kothis* in India, a phenomenon that opens up the discussion of how we understand the social construction of sexuality. *Kothis* are biological males who represent a range of masculinities and femininities. They are also heavily criminalized under the sodomy laws and are clearly marked by AIDS control programs. In public health vocabulary they fall under the MSM category. They use their cell phones for a number of purposes: attracting a partner; sharing text images of themselves or someone else; gaining status and prestige; monitoring their peers; meeting up for quick or unexpected sexual encounters; making friends; sharing news about cruising spots; and falling in love.

While this is a new reality, it is also important to situate cell phone use within the larger history of media in India. Media has always been about the project of nationhood: a tool to establish citizenship and Indian cultural values. As media spaces have been increasingly infiltrated with sexual content, scandal and resonances of terrorist activity (e.g., terrorists hacking into email systems), media and information systems have been recast as a national threat. When we move from this macro-level to the everydayness of technologies—that is, how they are integrated into the moral economy of individuals and households—something like the cell phone takes on local meaning while still retaining the history that preceded it. For *kothis*, cell phones are a means of establishing identity. As much as cell phones are a liberating technology, they are also a source of potential harm for *kothis*, as anyone can use the data stored in cell phones for blackmail purposes.

Discussion Points

- These papers pointed to the complex issues entangled with technologies, moving the discussion far beyond the simple binary of progress versus pathology.
- An important point raised by the panel is that technology must not be conceptualized as a singular thing; rather studying technologies requires that we study specific sub-technologies in terms of their use and effects.
- Also while new information technologies are virtual, their outcomes can be portrayed as real in the sense that they constitute a key mediator of social relations and representations.
- New information technologies are renegotiating and redrawing the boundaries of the public and private. In the particular case of internet sexual scandals, police acting as moral authorities enter into private spaces. And yet, while the state may be encroaching on private lives, technologies create new spaces the state cannot reach. For example, cell phones allow you to walk around in a “sanitized” space yet do things that are transgressive, even if only virtual.

- But other paradoxes are at play. New information technologies have enlarged the spaces for women's and young people's sexuality to become more visible. However, as these groups are seen as markers of national integrity and honor, they become targets of surveillance and contestation.
- While cell phones and internet tools can become a means of personal and private control (boyfriends monitor the whereabouts of their girlfriends), they are also a means of expression, autonomy and intimacy (a woman married to a migrant can bypass her in-laws and communicate directly with her husband via cell phone); of doing business (as the economic situation shrinks opportunities, the cell phone is an especially useful business tool); of reporting/documenting violence and abuse (sex workers and migrant domestic workers have effectively used cell phones for this purpose); of circumventing the state (in Nigeria youth can access a sex education curriculum that the state and adults forbid them from accessing through school); and most principally of social networking.
- But the question remains as to whether technologies are emancipatory. While they create opportunities, they do not necessarily challenge power structures. In many places, for instance, gay and lesbian groups may have a tremendous online presence but no offline reality. Similarly, the internet has become a place for a transgender movement to form, but in some cases this virtual political expression may give a distorted impression of who belongs to the community. In the case of migrant domestic workers, they may use cell phones as a link to the outside world, but they may also have to spend half their salaries on the phone bill. There is also the potential for "technological ghettos."
- When we talk about information technologies, we still tend to focus on countries, on state-based regulations. But important global political processes are also underway that must also be watched and analyzed especially in terms of how the internet is being governed. In these debates, regulations are by and large triggered by "sexual content," as in the case of pornography and pedophilia.

V. Session Four: Migrant Labor and Sexual Politics: Known and Unknown Linkages

General framework

This session focused specifically on migration with particular focus on labor migrants, the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group among mobile populations. The analysis of migration in Asia is critical not just because migrants are at particular risk for HIV and are seen as vectors of disease, but also because trends and rules are heavily influenced by deeply ingrained gender and sexuality norms. Most principally the human rights of migrants, in particular their sexual and reproductive rights, are systematically violated.

Names of panelists: Rosalia Sciortino (Thailand), Le Bach Duong (Vietnam) and Malu Marin (The Philippines)

Chair/Discussant: Le Minh Giang (Vietnam)

The overview paper by Rosalia Sciortino focused on Southeast Asia migration trends and addressed the need to recognize the human rights and in particular the sexual and reproductive rights of migrants. In Southeast Asia, the migrant population is increasing as countries are

becoming more dependent on low-skilled migrant labor. States are also making efforts to control the flow of migrants through contract labor, which monitors both the recruitment and employment of migrants within their borders. While contract labor has a long history in the region reaching back to colonial times, at present we are seeing its revival in many diverse forms.

Within the context of contract labor, the expectation is that migrants come, work and leave. The migrants face a number of difficulties: they are subjected to physical examinations, they are exploited and they often face debt. They also must abide by rules such as restricted contract length and prohibitions against unionizing. But rules extend beyond the issue of labor directly affecting conjugality, sexuality and reproduction. Unlike high-skilled labor migrants who are encouraged to bring their families to the country of destination, low-skilled labor migrants cannot bring families or establish families. Women who are found out to be pregnant are immediately fired and children born outside their “home” country are not legally recognized by any country. Migrants are only seen as having sexual lives when it serves the needs of the receiving country, as in the case of Korea where marriage is encouraged between Korean men and Vietnamese migrant women. In addition, there is a very tenuous line between trafficking, sex work and migration. Policies that collapse these categories tend to prevail and deny agency to female migrants, particularly migrant sex workers.

Sciortino concluded by strongly affirming that it is urgent to challenge the assumption that contract labor is the best way to manage migration. It is urgent to re-humanize labor migration, guarantee the human rights of migrants and reinstate their sexual agency and reproductive rights.

The first short paper by Le Bach Duong draws links between sexuality and migration in the Vietnamese experience. In Vietnam the history and political economy of migration is marked by large movements of people usually associated with war and turmoil, perceived advantages and disadvantages of mobility, and negative attitudes toward outsiders. Today in terms of exiting policies the government promotes planned migration and uses policy measures to prevent unauthorized migration. The media also plays a powerful role in producing anti-immigrant sentiment, casting immigrants as social burdens, social evils and the cause of social disorder. There is also a prominent moral discourse that views the sexual lives of migrants as morally and socially wrong; for example, women who go abroad to marry are seen as selfish and rebellious, a perception that stems from a deeply rooted history of associating women with traditional Vietnamese virtues.

The second short paper by Malu Marin discussed the experiences of Filipino migrant workers, many of whom are contract laborers. These migrants maintain their social ties in the Philippines (especially with the help of new information technology), but at the same time build new homes in the countries of destination. The main drivers for migration are not only economic, but also include the desire for adventure and ability to express repressed sexual identities. As in other cases the sexuality of migrant women is heavily regulated. They face mandatory pregnancy and HIV testing. There are also restrictions on marriage, abortion, dress, days-off, interactions with men and religious practices, particularly in the case of migrants that live in the Gulf countries. Under contract labor, Filipina migrant workers are expected to undergo pre-departure programs, which focus on abstinence and family values. It will be necessary to make the sexuality of

migrants more visible without causing a backlash. Pre-departure programs may be one point of intervention, although we will need to identify others.

However, migrant women are sometimes able to maneuver and exercise more personal autonomy even in these very restrictive contexts. For instance, they take advantage of their free time (e.g., when going to Church services) to meet partners and develop relationships, or even to create “sexually transgressive” communities (e.g., lesbian groups in the Gulf area). But quite evidently these and other “transgressive” behaviors are kept secret from employers and families at home.

Discussion Points

- The papers brought to the fore the exploitation of migrants and the question of sexual citizenship, specifically whether people are seen as laborers or full persons. Our entry point should be to address migrants’ lives and rights as those of a full person. In light of draconian rules and conditions that currently prevail, the question has been raised if making recourse to labor unions would be a strategic move in this direction.
- These analyses have also highlighted the key question of different types of bodies: economic bodies, sexual bodies, productive bodies, reproductive bodies, the body politic and bodies at different crossroads. Each body serves different interests and is governed by different means (e.g., Vietnamese women are welcome in Korea for marriage purposes while men going to Korea for work face stricter controls). Bodies also raise societal and state anxieties: these include state anxieties about controlling bodies and social anxieties about bodily contamination and unplanned migration.
- It is crucial to avoid the pitfall of conflating trafficking, sex work and migration. While trafficking into forced prostitution certainly exists and is devastating, sex workers are also migrating all over the world at will. As a result of moral panics around trafficking issues, immigrant women are often “rescued” and sent to repatriation camps whether or not they were ever trafficked or even engaging in sex work in the destination country. Some repatriation camps operate more like prisons and do little to address the stigma women face once they return home. We must remember that women often migrate to other countries precisely to exercise their rights. Anti-trafficking laws can have other unintended consequences. For instance, in the Philippines condoms can be used as evidence of trafficking into forced prostitution. This creates barriers to both female migration and scaling up condom use.
- In addition, the trafficking debate can draw attention away from the importance of looking at exploitative migration. It is very difficult to differentiate between trafficking as defined by the Palermo Protocol and other mechanisms often used by migrants to get to a country of destination that may imply payment, debt and deception.
- At the level of legal frameworks it is very problematic that draconian anti-trafficking laws are either in place or being adopted, while no safe labor migration laws exist or are being proposed.
- Also when examining mobile populations, it is vital to recognize their heterogeneity. Most migration policies are crafted to respond to the needs of “typical” migrants, such as someone migrating from rural to urban areas or skilled labors searching for jobs in other countries. While even within this category there is considerable variation no consistent policy analysis or intervention addresses the much greater diversity of migrant trends. In

relation to this particular issue we might use the concept of “lateral citizenship” borrowed from Aihwa Ong.

- Eventually the most blatant paradox in the domain of contemporary migration is that while populations are becoming increasingly mobile, state borders are also being reconstituted and becoming less permeable.
- Other paradoxes were also identified by the panel. On one hand, migration may mean sexual repression, but on the other it can mean greater freedom of sexual expression. For instance, many gays and lesbians migrate because of their sexual preference, even if they do not find the outlet once they arrive.
- Reflecting on the life experiences of migrant workers it becomes clear how sexuality is a core element of trends and rules but also points towards the complex interactions between sexual norms and behaviors that are constructed differently in different contexts. This variation of sexual patterns and meanings can often mean increased vulnerability for those who migrate as well as for those who are left behind. For instance, if Filipino domestic workers are prone to sexual abuse in countries of destination, the Filipina wives left behind by migrant husbands may also be at risk of HIV because the men may have experienced from less control over sexuality when they were away.

VI. Session Five: Cross-Theme Analysis: What have we learned the politics of sexuality in Asia? Where do we go from here?

Rosalind Petchesky (USA) offered the first cross-theme analysis, noting how it no longer serves us to speak of the structures (state, religion, science, economy) the SPW framing paper initially proposed, but rather to emphasize interconnectedness, flows, tipping points and constructed realities. Sexualities, for example, are lived through a remarkable reality of circuits and flows that slice through these four structures, effectively destabilizing them. This leaves us with the question of whether this points to new realities for transformation, or more alienation, exploitation and individualization.

She also proposed a framework for thinking through the issues raised in the foregoing discussion, pointing towards two crosscutting themes: agency versus control and porous boundaries versus camps. She called these coexistent possibilities, each of which is characterized by floating discourses, floating identities, floating technologies and floating bodies and borders, and each of which intersects with issues class, race and gender.

- Floating discourses refer to the ways that public health discourse has been reformulated and deployed through neoliberal globalization. In this context, discourses relating to Viagra and condoms function symbolically. In terms of Viagra, if the erect penis signifies male pleasure and the phallus is in danger of becoming permanently impotent, Viagra is marketed (particularly to upper classes) as a means to resuscitate it. This provides a powerful metaphor for thinking through capitalism itself: stimulus packages are like Viagra for capitalists. Condoms on the other hand represent governmentality, danger and nonpleasure. They are also classed and racialized. Here, we see a resurfacing of old moral panics about the over-stimulus of the “poor man’s” libido. But we also need to be aware and examine further how religion is filtered through such discourses: how it lurks in the background or is recast in terms of public values. This is not to suggest separating out an analysis of religion but to rethink how we have been theorizing it thus far.

- Floating identities refer to the ways that sexualities and genders are being perpetually reinvented. This raises the concern—addressed above—that some forms of identity recognition come at the price of individuality and fluidity. Identity politics are a contradiction we cannot escape. We need categories. We need them to build social movements and apply for donor funds. But this also pushes us toward static identities and forecloses in-between spaces of sexual desire and gender expression. We need a human rights framework that accounts for these “trans”-spaces.
- Floating technologies speak to shifting boundaries, possibilities and tensions between the public and private, the social and individual. Information and communication technologies allow for a variety of new lives, spaces, networking opportunities, political assemblages and power relations. This challenges prevailing assumptions about consumerism being urban, white, western and inherently problematic. This discussion also raises caveats and doubts: cell phones as tools of surveillance and blackmail; the self as limited by the technologies that come to embody it.
- Floating bodies and borders address the stigma and social anxieties associated with migrants, the resealing of national borders and old and new forms of states of exception (e.g., detention centers, brothel raids and rehabilitation camps). To develop effective campaigns, we need to foreground notions of agency, migrants as full persons, and migration as necessary for nation-building.

Pan Suiming (China) offered the second cross-theme analysis, addressing specifically issues of sexuality under communism in China. The communist party was established in the 1920s. When the party began recruiting from rural areas around 1927 it had to develop a new public image: it chose sexual abstinence as the basis for this image. After the establishment of the new government in 1949, abstinence was reinforced as a tool to control the majority of people (even today members of the communist party must not show any signs of sexual promiscuity). The communist hero is asexual. The open door policy beginning in 1978 has challenged this rationality. One of the strategies used to maintain communist support has been to reduce control over people’s private lives. This is the politics of sexuality now in China. Technologies such as the internet and cell phones have sped up connectivity and refashioned sexual lives.

Closing Comments

- The Hanoi SPW debates tell us that people express their sexualities however restrictive and regulated their situation may be. Yet sexual *repression* takes unexpected forms. In India, in response to British claims of an “unrivaled native sexuality,” the state has sanitized sex through strict sexual rules. Then religion has been codified to fit into this public policy backdrop. In the Philippines, the Church has joined hands with leftist parties during the 1980’s democratic transition.
- Given that sexuality debates have landed primarily in a landscape of binaries (sexuality and gender; biology and culture; agency and victimization, and so on) the metaphor of *flows* is useful to recognize pleasure and discourses of power.
- We have also, by and large, lost sight of *disorganized* expressions of sexuality. The politics of sexuality cannot be confined to organized expressions of sexuality.
- Lastly, if one angle of the crosscutting analysis emphasizes fluidity, flows and porosity, another is the theme of power structures that have resurfaced as the politics of sexuality

in China has been brought to the fore. In this analytic context, it is not trivial to recall that China is the emerging power of the world and that the Chinese economic model has become the “ideal” for many governments around the world, in particular those now clamped in the G20, as well as left-wing governments in Latin America. We should also note that this ideal is still strongly alive among left-wing movements, which in many countries are our potential allies in what concerns the intersection of sexuality and social justice.