

# QUEER OF COLOR CRITIQUE

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Queer: a traumatic history that has been re-claimed? Queer: synonym for odd, strange, disturbing? Queer: anything or anyone that does not fit within the norm? Queer: an identity for those who are left in the margins? Queer: a sexuality? Queer: a sickening feeling? Queer: a noun? Queer: never fully describes those it seeks to represent (Butler 1993)? Queer: a critique of normativity?

*Queer: a verb / a process.*

*Queer: a theory?*

*Queer: a theory.*

*Queer: a “subjectless” theory.*

*Queer: a “subjectless” theory that examines anti-normative subjectivity (El-Tayeb 2011).*

*But, what is queer about Queer Theory?*

**JUST OVER A** decade ago, David Eng and colleagues (2005, 1) asked: “What is queer about queer studies now?” – a question that has also been picked up by *lambda nordica* (see, Tudor 2017). This provocation came from the not so queer turn of Queer Theory within mainstream academia towards “queer liberalism.” Queer liberalism’s single-issue formulations (around sexuality) of queer politics called for the “murderous inclusions” (Haritaworn et al. 2013) of certain privileged “queer” subjects into the racist, sexist, and heteronormative state across Europe and North America. This not so queer turn of mainstream “queer liberalism” is increasingly being entangled with capitalism, homonationalism (Puar 2013), homonormativity (Duggan 2002), and queer liberal secularity (Puar 2014) as a result of its detachment from a broader understanding of sexuality as a

concept which is constructed in close interaction with race, gender, and class. This not so queer turn of Queer Theory has led a few individuals such as James Penney (2013) to claim that Queer Theory has run its course. But when we declare the end of Queer Theory – what scholarship of Queer Theory are we referring to? What bodies are read as “authorities” of the scholarship? Are there not Queer Theories rather than a theory?

*Queer: a theory?*

*Queer: theories.*

*Queer: “subjectless” theories.*

*Queer: “subjectless” theories that examine anti-normative subjectivity.*

*So, what is queer about Queer Theories now?*

Is “Queer of Color Critique” what is queer about Queer Theories? The body of interdisciplinary scholarship within the fledging field of Queer of Color Critique, pioneered by among others, José Esteban Muñoz and Roderick Ferguson, put in conversation women of color feminism, materialist analysis, poststructuralist theory, critical race theory, and queer critique (El-Tayeb 2011). By retuning to key authors of women of color feminism, Queer of Color critique claims that there is no Queer Theory without authors such as Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa and as a result establish a framework that “interrogates social formation as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practises” (Ferguson 2004, 149). Queer of Color Critique moves Queer Theory away from an exclusive focus on sexuality as its sole site of critical inquiry and refuses to let gender, race, and class be a ghostly presence. Instead, it normalises simultaneity in its articulation by asking in what ways has the racialised, classed, and gendered discourse known as sexuality dispersed. In doing so, scholars that have contributed to this fledging field have drawn critical attention to the governing logics of knowledge production and the assumptions that form the basis of Queer Theory. The works of body within Queer of Color Critique have addressed three broad themes:

- I. The complicated role of the nation state
- II. Migration, diaspora and interlinked notions of exile
- III. Examined performance, aesthetics, and the erotics

In particular, the range in which the scholarship has expressed itself in theatre, novels, essays, poetry, political manifestos, performances, and everyday gestures has provided a foundation, which uses an interdisciplinary framework from its inception. As such, *Queer of Color Critique* speaks to ways of being, of resisting, of moving and most of all – ways of collapsing those distinctions through dance (Tompkins 2015).

*Queer of Color Critique: a snap, a twist, a turn, a strut, a jack.*

*Queer of Color Critique: a twerk, a twirl, a one-step or even a two-step.*

*Queer of Color Critique: a dance towards queerer Queer Theories?*

*Thus, is Queer of Color Critique what is queer about Queer Theories?*

*Queer of Color Critique* provides a foundation for Queer Theories to take a queerer turn. However, this queerer turn is still riddled with its own problematics. The USA and the unique forms of resistance that emerged within the country continue to remain foundational to *Queer of Color Critique* and method. As a result, American archives and methodology make other geo-histories within the scholarship visible or invisible. In other words, though *Queer of Color Critique's* engagement with migration and diaspora provides the scholarship with a transnational perspective, this perspective that emerges is laced with and often exports American power relations, while sometimes failing to highlight how it is marked by this location. This enacting of area studies parochialisation has led Maya Mikdashi and Jasbir Puar (2016) to read any form of Queer Theory (including *Queer of Color Critique*) as American studies, especially as it fails to think of racial difference across different temporalities and spatialities. Thus, can *Queer of Color Critique* be understood as queerer if it reproduces the very same epistemological violence of re-centring North American knowledge paradigms?

*As such, can Queer of Color Critique be what is queer about Queer Theories?*

The way in which knowledge is produced is always caught up in certain histories and relations of power (Zalewski 2006). Therefore, we need to ask: How might we develop Queer of Color Critique that is not already American in its orientation and as a result does not reduce other geohistories and their subjects to mere case studies (Srinivasan 2019)? How might we broaden Queer of Color's understanding of empire beyond the current assertion of US Empire and neoliberalism in order to acknowledge various colonial legacies haunting different countries? What would it mean to imagine an analytic of race within Queer of Color Critique that goes beyond the transatlantic trajectory of slavery? I ask this question because, although a lot of Queer of Color Critique scholarship does not use the middle passage epistemology as the starting point of their analysis, they often base their work on North American Critical Race Scholars whose theorisation is based within the transatlantic trajectory of slavery. This is not to say that the transatlantic trajectory is not important, but rather this question calls for us to think about what other analytics of racialisation we could bring in conversation with this trajectory. How might we engage with the complexities of racialisation, gendering, class, and sexuality through multiple oceanic regionalities? In what ways has the racialised, classed, and gendered discourse known as sexuality dispersed in divergent temporalities and spatialities? Should we be calling for Queer of Color Critiques?

*Maybe, Queer of Colour Critique can be what is queer about Queer Theories?*

Despite its emergence as a North American resistance theory, Fatima El-Tayeb (2011) and Jin Haritaworn (2015) have shown how Queer of Color Critique can be a useful theoretical framework, especially when it is put in conversation with local resistance theories in Europe without erasing cultural specificities. This is because all "theoretical concepts begin as regional concepts and they are all once historically and contextually specific before they are widely disseminated, applied,

or assumed to be universal” (Lionnet and Shih 2011, 23). This is not to suggest that all concepts including Queer of Color Critique should be assumed to be universal, but rather welcomes one to centre the contradictions of a local application of a once regional concept, while acknowledging its roots and the power relations it invokes. By doing so, Queer of Color Critique will move towards becoming Queer of Colour Critique: a theory without a single “voice;” but will critically interrogate the differences and tensions when thinking through the racialised, classed, and gendered discourse known as sexuality dispersed in divergent temporalities and spatialities in alliance with context specific theories. Thus, Queer of Colour Critique will become a locus of contradictions that will adjust its “gaze” in order see what has been “submerged in the process of unmarking Whiteness and Global Northerness” (Tinsley 2008, 206). The intersectional foundation of Queer of Colour Critique’s framework lends itself to build alliances with local resistance theories, in order to interrogate complex power relations and anti-normativity that comes from multiple directions. I am not sure if Queer of Colour Critique is what is queer about Queer Theories, and I don’t think it really matters either.

*Queer of Colour Critique: a locus of contradictions.*

*Queer of Colour Critique: a snap, a twist, a turn, a strut, a jack.*

*Queer of Colour Critique: a twerk, a twirl, a one-step or even a two-step.*

*Queer of Colour Critique: a dance towards queerer Queer Theories?*

*Is Queer of Colour Critique what is queer about Queer Theories?*

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