

Foreword

Gayatri Reddy
Gender and Women's Studies, Anthropology,
University of Illinois, Chicago

The fourth in this important series, *Sex and Intimacy in Later Life*, this volume, edited by Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan, Debra A. Harley, Shanon Shah and Paul Simpson, adds another important set of interventions in this newly emergent field of ageing and sexuality studies. Not only does this volume extend the important and critical framework calling into question the conceptualisation of ageing as decrepitude, lack, inherently asexual and non-pleasurable, but also, importantly, it does so by privileging frameworks and voices from the global South and East and from minoritised communities here and in the global North. In this process, it makes (at least) three important interventions into the burgeoning literature on ageing, sexuality and intimacy.

First, as mentioned, it complicates and fractures universalising narratives of ageing in relation to sexuality and intimacy by intentionally focusing on epistemologies, experiences and framings from the global South and East, and from Indigenous and migrant communities in the global North. Too often, research on sexuality and intimacy in relation to ageing has emerged from privileged, largely white communities, in the global North, implicitly privileging the lenses and logics of Western liberal modernity and its epistemological frameworks. Such logics stem, in part, from problematic colonial framings that mapped morality onto geography, differentiating and hierarchising analytic categories and 'illiberal' communities in the global South in its wake. These analytic framings sometimes live on today, manifesting as neocolonial, Orientalist dichotomies between ostensibly ahistoric and 'queerphobic' post-colonies versus modern, progressive and sexually liberated metropolises; in bounded understandings of self and sex, unmoored by familial and social milieus, in conceptualisations of relationality and intimacy; in the privileging of positivist epistemologies and methodologies of visibility and certainty, for example, as the primary modes of being and relating in the world. This volume intentionally problematises these framings and the analytic privileging of such Western epistemologies, dichotomies and 'proper' objects of modernity – focusing on sex, desire, intimacy and pleasure among those ageing to do so. It attempts to draw on multiple perspectives from the global South and East and from marginalised and minoritised communities in the global North to tease out, complicate and speak back to these partial and culturally and temporally myopic framings.

As such, it not only fractures these universal narratives and highlights less-seen modes of relating, but it also speaks to the necessary connections across geo-political boundaries in the contemporary globalising world. To use just one example, the first three chapters of the volume engage with *invisibility and ambivalence* in how ageing Indo-Trinidadian queer men, Indian *kinnars* and Chinese gay men in Hong Kong *negotiate and navigate* the long afterlives of colonialism, ongoing constraints of state and capital, and culturally specific normative discourses of gender, class and race (and their intersections), in articulating and enacting intimate lives. The thematic connections as much as the political-economic structural affinities and resonances across geographic boundaries speak to the value of a volume such as this.

Second and relatedly, through the framing described, this volume highlights ageing *as a process*, as a complex series of acts of *becoming*, not only in terms of a gradient of embodied change over time, but also in terms of contesting simplistic and Manichean binaries in the conceptualisation and analysis of ageing in relation to sexuality and intimacy. As such, it speaks to the necessity of relativising the understanding (and value) of ageing and ‘later life’ globally, given the varying culturally inflected thresholds and meanings of this concept outside privileged spaces of the global North. In this context, the chapters in the volume that speak to conceptualisations of ageing and sexuality among Indigenous women in present-day Canada, as well as unpacking agentive spaces to manoeuvre *within* the confines of patriarchy, whether in the Middle East and North Africa region, among older Indigenous Purépecha women, older migrant women in Britain who experienced the Partition of India, or through an intergenerational dialogue about sex and intimacy in Malaysia, are particularly germane. Collectively, this volume also allows for a more nuanced, *processual* understanding of the often-dichotomous analytic categories deployed in earlier research, such as young versus old, sexual agency of youth versus asexual passivity of older people, progressive sexual modernity in the global North versus regressive, conservative attitudes towards sex and intimacy in the global South.

Third, this volume not only critiques the limited representation of ageing as decrepitude but, importantly, it also highlights this process and the intimacies it engenders as fundamentally agentive and pleasurable, whether in pre-modern Islamic sex manuals, or contemporary post-colonies, within Indigenous spaces or migrant communities in the global North. Capturing what Saidiya Hartman (2019: 30) refers to, in a very different register, as the ‘secondary rhythms’ of life, the multidisciplinary and intersectional research gathered here speaks to abundance, not paucity; polyvocality, not uniformity; intimate joy, not lack of desire or pleasure.

Ultimately, what emerges from this collaborative and collective labour is an embodied text that pushes the emergent field of sexuality and ageing in new and productive ways. *Later Life, Sex and Intimacy* allows us to frame and

experience the mutually imbricated logics of geography, ageing and sexual agency differently, reorienting epistemological frameworks, histories and referents in the process. In so doing, it not only enlivens our understanding of sexuality, intimacy and ageing in the global South and East, but also engenders agency and animates the process and value of *becoming* in global world-making.

Reference

Hartman, S. (2019). *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co.

