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Editorial

Peripheral Visions of Alternative Futures: Feminist Techno-imaginaries

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INTRODUCTION

Feminism has a long history of wrestling with technologies: not only with the inequalities and blind spots inherent in research, production, and marketing, but also with the effects of different technological forms and arrangements on social relationships, ways of life, and on the body. Technologically permeated societies are a global reality, and feminist, queer, critical race, decolonial, and crip theories are pivotal in offering critical analyses and ways of imagining, producing, and using technologies differently. This issue of *Feminist Encounters* re-inspects the entanglements between technology and imagination from a range of feminist perspectives in disciplines like science and technology studies (STS), philosophy and critical theory, media history and media archaeology, cultural history, and cultural and comparative literature studies.

Greek-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis's theorisation of the *radical individual imagination* and the *socially instituting imaginary* (1975/1987) foregrounds the creative, world-building function that shared forms of meaning play in our social worlds. The history of Western philosophy tends to regard imagination as mere reproduction/representation, i.e., a mental copy of the real; in contrast, Castoriadis's work offers a conceptualisation of the imagination and the imaginary as inherently creative and productive of the social. Accordingly, this Special Issue asks how diverse feminist *techno*-imaginaries can help us rethink and transform historically stabilised forms of meaning, especially shared understandings of what technology can do, and envision more emancipatory ways in which it can transform our social worlds. Inviting contributions from diverse local and regional contexts, this issue sets out to investigate the implications of socially and culturally situated feminist techno-imaginaries, i.e., beliefs, accounts, and visions of *possible*, *desirable*, *alternative*, *and radically different* futures from diverse feminist perspectives.

The issue interrogates how these future visions relate to extant shared understandings of 'forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology' (Jasanoff, 2015: 13). In the field of STS Sheila Jasanoff conjoins the 'normativity of the imagination with the materiality of networks' in her understanding of 'sociotechnical imaginaries' 'as collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures' (Jasanoff, 2015: 13). Taking her definition as one possible point of departure, this Special Issue of *Feminist Encounters* surveys the ways in which feminist techno-imaginaries relate to current and mainstream technological developments, but also to *peripheral* technological pasts and possible futures. For this purpose, we understand the term techno-imaginaries broadly, as referring also to those visions and underlying practices that are not necessarily institutionally stabilised and are collectively held only in specific milieus.

Feminist accounts (both future- and past-oriented) tend to remain on the margins of academic discussions about socio-technological entanglements, their histories, prognoses, and poetics. Dominant societal understandings of technological transformations and their impact on thought, imagination, and society therefore tend to omit numerous paths not taken; inventions that turned out to be, or are presented as being, a *cul-de-sac*; developmental failures with unfulfilled potentials for furthering social justice; and an account of geopolitical inequalities in global technological competition, labour exploitation, and ecological impact.

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Hegemonic techno-imaginaries also lack proposals for technologically entangled *radically different* futures that would depart from present forms of labour exploitation and commodity consumption, from currently normative gender- and sexuality-scripts, from structural racism, from the neo-colonial exploitation of natural resources with concomitantly unequal climate impact, and from ways of restricting access. Reflecting upon diverse and intersecting *feminist* techno-imaginaries, we believe, can help us address and redress some of these shortcomings.

To this purpose, we propose to mobilise the notion of the feminist archive, as articulated by political theorist Kathi Weeks (2015), which entails retrieving visions of alternative futures that can be productively repurposed today. While often overlooked in mainstream knowledge production, these visions can function as critical examinations of our past and present. The archive on which peripheral visions of future technology design and use can draw upon undoubtedly includes feminist theory itself with its rich repository of utopian, dystopian, and ambivalent technological imaginaries, exemplified by Donna Haraway's powerful figure of the cyborg (1985/2016), Shulamith Firestone's (1970) proposal for externalising reproductive processes, echoed today by xenofeminists (Hester, 2018), or Rosi Braidotti's (2013) writings on the posthuman, to name just a few. It can certainly include feminist (science) fiction, from Begum Rokeya's (2023) imagination of a women-led society, where technology would have virtually wiped away toil and secured a peaceful cohabitation of all in harmony with the natural environment, through Octavia Butler's (2012) complex interrogation of techno-scientific alienness in her xenogenesis trilogy, to Marge Piercey's (1976) vision of a technologically enhanced utopian post-gender society Mattapoisett. But the emancipatory archive of techno-imaginaries that we wish to highlight in this Special Issue also, importantly, comprises rebellious political-aesthetic visions such as Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism, Arabofuturism, Sinofuturism, Disabled futurism, Indigenous futurism, Queer futurism, Ecotopia, etc., as well as theoretical, philosophical, political, and historical interventions. As philosopher Michèle Le Dæff has shown, while often declaratively excising imagery as the other of rational discourse, philosophical theories themselves almost always copiously deploy imagery, often to entrench socially sanctioned forms of exclusion (1980) – something that could most likely be said of theory in adjacent disciplines as well. This Special Issue thus also offers an arena for discussing how images of possible futures are deployed, or how they implicitly animate philosophical discussions and theoretical discourse about technological innovation and techno-dispositives, and especially – when seen from diverse feminist perspectives – what kinds of exclusions these imaginaries perpetuate, or alternatively, what arenas for radical social imagination they open up.

In order to reflect upon the often spatially, but especially temporally displaced object of techno-imaginaries, we took inspiration from Afrofuturist articulations of painful pasts to imagine new futures rooted in black culture and innovation (Davis, 2022), and from queer utopianism, characterised by 'a backward glance that enacts a future vision' (Muñoz, 2009: 4). According to Jussi Parikka, these peripheral futurisms or counterfuturisms prompt us to ask: 'What sort of discourses, narratives – including practices of time and futurism – are apt for a consideration of the current political moment and what forms of time can harbour any sort of liberating potential that work against the already existing times?' (2017: 2). Apart from offering feminist critiques of hegemonic or mainstream technoimaginaries, this issue thus also centres peripheral or minoritarian techno-imaginaries of the past and present that enact alternative future vistas.

Thinking about future techno-imaginaries from diverse feminist perspectives brings up a broad range of very specific questions, such as matrices of human: machine interaction, user experience, access to technology, or innovation and maintenance scenarios. It also involves thinking through techno-imaginaries and how they are activated in the context of different political paradigms of the past and the present, or in the context of utopian and dystopian visions of the future in critical theory and philosophy, literature, visual arts, music, cinema, TV, in the performing arts, on social media, and other cultural artefacts. Finally, it may involve memory work, i.e., unpacking locally or culturally specific past horizons of expectations regarding technological advances and their implications for future scenarios in various contexts, from policy to historiography and art.

By focusing on diverse social imaginaries of technological innovation, this Special Issue of Feminist Encounters on feminist techno-imaginaries thus also offers an opportunity to engage with some of the novel ways in which, technology and feminism impact one another in modern societies. As guest editors, we had the pleasure to co-create this issue with a broad range of original and inspiring feminist thinkers and doers with diverse backgrounds, and divergent feminist perspectives on techno-imaginaries and their theoretical, practical, and poetic impact. The result of this polylogue is an issue comprising nine original scientific articles, which articulate a triad of broad but distinct topics.

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLES

An important section of the Special Issue is devoted to investigating techno-imaginaries of restructured reproductive, domestic, and care work, which have played a crucial role in feminist thinking about technological transformation. In their article "Fully Electrified Kitchen is All That a Modern Emancipated Woman Needs": The

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Feminist Techno-Utopia in the Interwar Czechoslovak Women's Magazine Eva', Michaela Fikejzová and Martin Charvát explore the emancipatory techno-imaginary portrayed in the media discourse of the Czechoslovak interwar women's magazine Eva. Discursively constructing the image of a new and emancipated woman that works outside the home, the magazine promoted the idea of emancipation through technology such as household appliances, which would rationalise (so-called) 'women's work'. The article traces an 'emancipatory scale' as a structuring element of this discourse, through which the acquisition of domestic technologies such as electric ovens, washing machines, and even automobiles symbolised progressive liberation, while simultaneously revealing how emancipation remained conditional on capitalist and patriarchal constraints. The authors demonstrate how Eva fused technodeterminism and consumerism to craft an imaginary in which domestic labour became the stage for both female advancement and deeper disciplining of the gendered body.

A critical analysis of this sort of 'productivist imperative' that permeates all forms of labour is one of the tasks of another article in this Special Issue, Yihan Lulu Wang's 'Automated Care in a Domestic Space: Reproductive Futurism in Hao Jingfang's "The Question of Love". Through a feminist reading of Hao Jingfang's science fiction story 'The Question of Love' (2017) about a motherless family and their AI caregiver, the author analyses technoimaginaries of China's post-socialist middle-class domestic space and problematises the privatisation of labour's social reproduction via techno-automation and the power relations of the non-caring subjects over the caring subjects that this entails. Wang's article exposes how the techno-automation of childcare – embodied in a male AI caregiver – functions not to alleviate care burdens but to reinforce capitalist affective regimes, transforming love into an instrument of self-optimisation and social control. By weaving together social reproduction theory, feminist affect studies, and political economy, the article critiques how middle-class domestic automation reproduces neoliberal values while masking their emotional costs. Ultimately, Wang offers a profound critique of the productivist subjectivity as well as rationalised automation of social reproductive labour underpinning these techno-futures, instead highlighting complex ideological and emotional work performed in domestic spaces.

Finally, in her article 'Archiving Labour Reconceptualisations: "Scaling Up" With Technological Means,' Maruška Nardoni curates a speculative feminist counter-archive by juxtaposing canonical texts by Silvia Federici, Donna Haraway, and Michel Serres. Rather than treating household automation or smart technologies as mere tools of relief, the article reflects on how feminist imaginaries can be 'scaled up' to redefine labour itself – domestic, affective, precarious, and research work, and even non-work. Using the concept of hyperstition, the article experiments with techno-feminist imaginaries, while simultaneously critiques both defeatist anti-tech stances and corporate techno-solutionism. Smart home devices and IoT imaginaries appear as figures surrounding broader speculations about domestic labour, automation, and feminist futurity. The article's archival method rejects linear theoretical inheritances in favour of frictional encounters between different strands of feminist thought, seeking to imagine novel socio-technical configurations for revaluing care and domestic labour in both real and imagined futures.

Another cluster of concepts that has come up as central to the Special Issue of Feminist Encounters has to do with the nexus of marginality or peripherality, care, and vulnerability. These have been explored in many articles, but perhaps most directly in the work of Lona Gaikis, Walter Lunzer, and Barbis Ruder; nate wessalowsky, Grit Marti Lange, and Sigrid Kannengiesser; and Pia Brezavšček. Gaikis, Lunzer, and Ruder's article 'Therapy-Poesis: Prosthetic Care for Damaged and Undamaged Bodies' examines prosthetics or 'alien limbs', arguing that the experience is likely to be aesthetic, rather than functional. Gaikis conveys and reflects upon her group's research in an artistic laboratorial framework that aimed to better understand the psycho-physical phantoms haunting prosthetic development. The author harnesses the project of posthuman critique (Ferrando, 2012) as a fertile methodological ground for assessing and reassembling the fractures running through what one might call our 'postprosthetic' bodies - bodies profoundly transformed by prosthetics. She proposes therapy-poesis as a technoimaginary that engages the human-machine nexus, aiming at understanding the subcutaneous, carnal rhetoric that is elemental in bridging human-machine interfaces, and at considering feeling as a central category for experiencing prosthetics, and as an underexplored concept when it comes to thinking the difference between acting artificial systems and acting living organisms - a difference that is central to domains like medical engineering. The experimental research showed how both unimpaired participants and prosthesis wearers can easily alter and change the 'natural' feeling of their individual bodies and integrate artificial body extensions (anthropomorphic and alien).

Moving away from care and vulnerability as embodied practices, and toward their digital emanations, nate wessalowsky, Grit Marti Lange, and Sigrid Kannengiesser's article 'A Feminist Critique of Cybersecurity: Technofeminist Imaginaries of Vulnerability and Care' explores techno-imaginaries of vulnerability and care in cyberspace, and more specifically in the context of cybersecurity. The authors argue for the need for a paradigm shift away from the prevailing negative and paranoid perception of cybersecurity as 'freedom from threat', which is tied to the epistemological act of 'othering' and its entanglement in the gendered and intersectional production of cyber-insecurities. Instead, looking at cybersecurity through the lens of techno-feminist critique, the authors conclude that extant, nation-state centred notions of cybersecurity fail to recognise how cyberspace replicates

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analogue domination over women and non-binary people. As an alternative, the authors envision techno-feminist imaginaries based on care that not only introduce alternative perspectives on user identities and diverse methods of securing oneself, others, technologies, and various forms of techno-human connection, but that also embody a set of different norms that underpin these visions.

The preoccupation with positionality, intersubjectivity, and care is also a red thread running through Pia Brezavšček's paper – 'A Manifesto for Yugofuturism: Maska's tools and strategies for imagining possible (feminist) futures inspired by regional pasts.' Engaging with the growing archive of insights from artists and writers gathered around the non-governmental performing arts production and publishing house Maska from Slovenia, Brezavšček fleshes out the key dimensions of Yugofuturism as a concept, a movement, and a series of artistic projects. Outlining Yugofuturism as marked by a distinct generational, post-Yugoslav perspective, Brezavšček aligns it with other neofuturist movements, especially Afrofuturism, that strive to create space for possible future where these are difficult to imagine from hegemonic perspectives. Yugofuturism thus emerges as an open-ended and fluid techno-imaginary wherein future fabulation takes into consideration peripheral aspects of the technological aspects of contemporary being-in-the-world. Relying on technology as a means to embrace loss and failure – as well as utopian visions of progress – Yugofuturism is thus outlined as a creative strategy that employs historically and geographically specific past potentialities and fictions to construct a future world based on solidarity and care.

A third set of articles from our Special Issue are engaged in proposing *epistemological shifts* by introducing diverse feminist techno-imaginaries into fields such as environmental science and sustainability, technology design, and ocean science. Sophie van Balen's article 'Breathable Futures. Breath as Feminist and Decolonial Imagination in Heating and Polluted Worlds' mobilises Luce Irigaray's account of the forgetting of air to explore why it is so difficult to imagine futures otherwise than through dreams of maximisation, solution, and (fair) distribution, even in environmental discourses on sustainability. To conceive of a way out of current atmospheric troubles (e.g., climate change, air(borne) pollution, 'silent' skies), Van Balen proposes to rethink subjectivity alongside three (techno-)imaginaries: intoxication, allyship, and (be)coming alive. These propose open-ended struggles for breathability in shifting, more-than-human coalitions.

Meanwhile, in his article 'The Need for Diffraction in STEM-fields: An Ethical Feminist Consideration of the Concept of Gender scripting', Felix Grewe takes a critical look at gender scripting in technology design: the process of development, manufacturing and marketing that ensures that technologies are given a targeted gender-specific imprint, leading to exclusions in user behaviour that disadvantage users who do not conform to prevailing patriarchal norms of gender. As a corrective, the author proposes introducing Karen Barad's notion of diffraction as a feminist techno imaginary into STEM-fields and engineering. A phenomenon originally articulated in the field of quantum physics, according to Grewe diffraction could point the way towards recognising and thus replacing outdated patriarchal structures in science and research and contribute a model of inclusion of feminist imaginations and intersectional practices into the research, development, manufacturing, and commercialisation of technical products.

Finally, Stephanie Jordan's and Jennifer Lieberman's article 'Coalition Science: Bridging Imaginaries Between Collocated Communities in the Polar Oceans' is based on ethnographic research of polar ocean science that proposes significant feminist epistemic-ethical shifts in how ocean science could be conducted – designed, funded, carried out, presented. These proposals are informed by a specific research context: that of polar ocean science, where results depend upon often complex negotiations among various stakeholders, from sometimes dislocated ocean scientists and indigenous communities to non-human life inhabiting the ocean and the ocean itself with its environmental events. Based on the research conducted, the authors propose a shift towards a framework of coalition-building with various stakeholders. The latter has the potential of fostering the production of what they call knowledge-with, and not just knowledge-about: knowledge that takes seriously the interests and the authorial contributions, of what they call 'lay experts', such as local communities and interest groups. When it comes to the issue of infrastructure and sustainability, the authors powerfully advocate for what we could call a revaluation of scientific values, a move away from fetishism of the new and towards appreciating, caring for, and mending what one already has: maintenance, instead of a constant drive to innovation.

With its rich array of contributions, this Special Issue of Feminist Encounters is a testament to the inevitable tensions inherent to the topic of feminist techno-imaginaries. These span from the gushing gulf between emancipatory techno-imaginaries and the realities of global gendered and racialised divisions of labour in techniquistries; to the complicated relationship between feminism and technology that historically spanned fear and suspicion of extending domination over female and feminised bodies (cf. Wajcman, 2007; Haraway, 1985/2016), and hope that technological innovation could be a tool of gender justice. Grappling with feminist techno-imaginaries also involves acknowledging and embracing the tension between the need to critically rethink humanist intellectual traditions, and to incorporate awareness, consideration and analysis of non-human processes, structures, and actors. As feminist, queer, critical race, decolonial, and crip theorists have aptly argued, technology, despite its many emancipatory potentials, is often not (or not yet) a tool for progressive politics, but is fraught with

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histories of inequalities, paths not taken, and voices silenced in the processes of building our current technolandscapes (Star, 1991; Gilbert, 2010; Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019).

Despite these theoretical and political tensions, the engagements of feminist, queer and other aforementioned approaches with technology are also pivotal in offering critical analyses and ways of imagining, producing, and using technologies differently, as contributions to this Special Issue also demonstrate. If the (techno-)imaginary can be productive of the social, following the premise with which we started work on this Special Issue, then it is our hope that the latter will make a contribution towards transforming historically stabilised forms of meaning, especially shared understandings of what technology can do and how it can transform our social worlds to emancipatory ends. By taking a second look at past and present techno-scientific imaginaries and practices from a peripheral, feminist and otherwise critical-emancipatory lens, we hope that this Special Issue may also function as an encouragement to all, to continue to participate in imagining technology and social reality otherwise.

GENERAL ARTICLES

'Gendering Education and Organisation: The Women's Reform Movement in India', by Mimansa Bharti, is an archival study of the 'educational experiment' of the late nineteenth century in India that opened a route for a generation of women to organise themselves as leaders in the movement. She shows that women participated actively in the movement and that the trajectory of this is essential to understand how the movement impacted the grass-roots recipients. This is a departure from analysing the movement from the perspective of the male and British perspective. In doing this she 'deviates from nationalist and oriental historiography that excluded them of rightful claims based on conservatisms of different, but overlapping kinds'.

In '(En)Queering "Prakriti": Decolonial Ecofeminism and Lesbian Subjectivity in Out! Stories from the New Queer India', Chhandita Das and Priyanka Tripathi explore ways in which queer ecofeminism functions as a decolonising approach to advance lesbian subjectivity and solidarity. They have selected short stories from Out! Stories from the New Queer India (2012) for textual analysis from this perspective, through critiquing 'Prakriti (i.e., Nature) as a dissident source of Shakti (i.e., Power) for queer lives'. They emphasise the urgency of revisiting lesbian subjectivity and solidarity in the light of the political and religious controversy around the recent decline of the demand for legalising same-sex marriage by the Indian Supreme Court.

Deborah N. Simorangkir's article, 'Dating Violence Among University Students in Indonesia: Help-Seeking Communication Strategies and Barriers to Disclosure', presents context for Indonesia's rise in dating violence in the last 5 years. Her study is a response to the Indonesian Ministry of Education's regulation for violence prevention and management in higher education institutions. Her statistical study is designed to identify the prevalence of dating violence among university students in Indonesia and to document their strategies to communicate their need for help, both formally and informally.

Finally, Yuri Felix Chavez-Luque and Anyela Y Smith Q discuss the implementation of a feminist self-advocacy programme in Peru to achieve changes in ambivalent sexism in mothers with children with disabilities, of medium and low socioeconomic level in their article, 'Impact of Feminist Self-Advocacy on Ambivalent Sexism in Mothers of Children with Disabilities, a Mixed Study'. Their mixed-method study aims to analyse the participants' lived experiences during and after a workshop. The workshop's aim was to promote equal treatment between men and women in an underserved community.

BOOK REVIEWS

Our book reviews in this issue cover a variety of topics. First, Anukriti Dixit reviews *Gender, Sexuality and Social Justice: Unpacking Dominant Development and Policy Discourses* (authors Silke Heumann and Camilo Antillón Najlis). Dixit describes this book as 'an example of the networks they [the authors] have fostered'. Essentially, to politicise development, the book questions 'binary logics around the categories developing/developed, West/non-West or even of global North and South' and embraces 'a wide variety of analysis, set in vastly different social, economic, geographic contexts'. The first of its three sections shows 'nuanced aspects of sexual agency, reproductive roles, racial, classed and ageist hierarchies that position women in fixed subject positions'. The second addresses development-related policy concerns, looking at a variety of sectors and contexts. The final section concerns migrants in various European contexts through the lenses of gender, sexuality and race.

In her analysis of *Islamic Feminism: Hermeneutics and Activism* (author Mulki Al-Sharmani), Melek Kaymaz Mert describes the book as an analysis of Islamic feminism hermeneutics, concentrating on the work of academics who 'reside and work in both the Global North and South, in Canada, Egypt, Morocco, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States'. As a result, the viewpoints of these scholars are 'from various linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds'. The combination of their approaches demonstrate their interactions with the *Qur'an*

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and other schools of Islamic interpretation. The two main themes in the book are reconstruction and deconstruction. This approach leads to new perspectives on 'more significant and fundamental theological and ethical issues in Islamic scriptures', as well as a range of interpretations of texts in support of an Islamically-rooted idea of gender equality idea. Dixit explains how this shows the role of grassroots activities to promote socially relevant feminism and activism. Not only does the author trace the genealogy of Islamic feminism, but she includes the work of younger generation of feminists and lay women.

In his review of *The Mysticism of Ordinary Life: Theology, Philosophy, and Feminism* (author Andrew Prevot), Carlos Piccone-Camere has chosen a book about christianity 'with particular emphasis on Roman Catholic thought and the spiritual traditions of Black and African American communities'. Piccone-Camere discusses Prevot's novel approach to mysticism as well as his gender-aware methodologies. For example, Prevot finds that mystic events 'are deeply personal and inherently political, shaped by and shaping the social and cultural contexts in which they occur'. Mysticism is reconfigured as being something that is part of everyday life and the lives of people considered marginal, instead of only accessible to certain theologians, and therefore, 'can serve as a powerful lens through which to examine issues of identity, power, and social justice'.

Next, Muneeb Ul Lateef Banday discusses Fire Dreams: Making Black Feminist Liberation in the South (authors Laura McTighe and Women With A Vision) in terms of producing alternative knowledges, in this case 'collaborative knowledge production to analyse and resist racial capitalism' and obtain justice for marginalised communities. The South discussed here is the southern parts of the United States. The book details different grassroots approaches to intersectionality. Banday analyses the solidarity discussed in the book in terms of its relation to similar projects in other countries.

Charlie Yi Zhang's review Sexuality and Gender Diversity Rights in Southeast Asia (author Anthony J. Langlois) analyses a book that seeks to explore a pragmatic response called 'rights politics' to study 'the initiatives undertaken by sexual minorities, gender non-conforming groups, and their advocates to broaden the scope of legal entitlements'. This is a decolonising approach that moves away the liberal framework often employed in western scholarship 'that centralises rights as a universal model'. Zhang describes the book as well-organised structure, and showing 'historical perspectives alongside contemporary information'. The book's engagement with a range of stakeholders at multiple levels makes it 'a valuable resource for students, activists, and policymakers interested in comprehending the intersection of human rights, gender, and sexuality within the context of the ASEAN and beyond'.

Our last review for this issue, Siufung Law's review of *Inside the Circle: Queer Culture and Activism in Northwest China* (author Casey James Miller), considers Miller's twelve years of ethnographic fieldwork on queer culture and activism in Xi'an, China. A central question in the book is, 'What does it mean to be queer in northwest China?'. The book reminds readers that the lens through which one studies a culture matters, especially taking into account one's own cultural background. Miller shows that the life stories gay and lesbian activists in postsocialist China are multifaceted, and that 'the moral landscape of northwest China that challenges a postsocialist turn toward individualism and privatisation of marriage and family'. Furthermore, he 'contextualises Chinese queer notions of personhood through active political engagement and a commitment to moral obligations' beyond 'the Western understanding of the individualistic self, emphasising collectivism and relationality shaped by Confucian ideals of filial piety and the ethical value of self-sacrifice'.

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