

# **Book Review: *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* by Luibheid Eithne**

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## **Immigration and Body Politics**

sexuality-based discrimination has its roots deeply embedded in heteropatriarchal capitalist ideologies which continue to have contemporary meanings and manifestations. Historically and presently, gender, sexuality, and race have intersected and determined which bodies cohere with the nation-making project. Since the late nineteenth century, racialized immigrant women's sexuality was constructed as threats to nation-making and security to be managed through immigration policies. Through extensive examination of years of sexuality-based discrimination in the United States, Eithne Luibheid (2002), in the first text to examine connections between heteronormativity, sexuality, and immigration, historicizes and scrutinizes the conceptualization and operationalization of such immigration policies not merely as mechanisms that regulate sexuality but as the site where sexual identities (specifically, heterosexuality) were produced. Joseph Pugliese, also writing in 2002, similarly explores how bodies have been made to matter, by examining penal asylum in Australia. Both Luibheid and Pugliese invoke ideas of agency and resistance to the immigration apparatus whether as "picture brides" marrying to fulfill their desire for travel, lesbians being "dolloed up" to pass custom officers or refugee, or asylum seekers sewing their lips, paradoxically to give themselves a voice. Collectively, the pieces provide insight into how colonial legacies continue through the violence brought to bear on immigrant

bodies today. Pugliese's observation of the failure to attend to 'legal and ethical responsibility to offer hospitality and refuge' to asylum seekers holds significant resonance for the present moment.

Luibheid (2002) uses the five-chapter book to critically examine U.S. immigration policies, from the Page Law of 1875 which prohibited the entry of Asian prostitutes to the 1987 provision that implemented compulsory HIV testing and exclusion of persons living with HIV and seeking legal residence. Further, she explores the ways in which Chinese prostitutes were identified and excluded because of their presumed threat to whiteness; the 1920s ban of Japanese brides- with an obviously racial undertone given the widely espoused belief in the family; and the exclusion of lesbians through the case of Sara Quiroz and the role of rape in "exclusionary nationalism" (103).

Luibheid's book develops an argument about identity categories as co-constitutive, and that sexualization and racialization within the United States and at the border were toward a nation making imperative. Sexuality is at the crux of this project, both because of its ability to produce and preserve whiteness and sustain heteropatriarchal norms and because it is also what threatens to undo 'pure' heteropatriarchal whiteness; childbearing of non-white immigrants, interracial sex and homosexuality are therefore constructed as threats (that is, as potential sources of sexual and biological corruption that would ostensibly threaten the nation.) Thus Luibheid argues that the nation itself becomes gendered, women's sexuality becomes nationalized and white heterosexuality and family form prioritized. Beyond its connection to population control, Luibheid also contends that regulating sexuality also helped the state to create disciplined individuals. She writes,

*The nation is equated with the male subject position and women's sexuality is reified as the property of the male nation....as a result, heterosexuality becomes at once necessary to the state's ability to constitute and imagine itself, while simultaneously marking the site of its instability.... The Lesbian and the prostitute who fail to conform, emerge as figures that particularly threaten the nation and have to be disciplined.*

Luibheid provides a sophisticated illustration of immigration control as an operation of this 'discipline' that not only works to keep subjects out but make those within subjected. Refusal of entry and legal residence to homosexuals through relationships with U.S citizens were also ways to discipline, as "belonging" to the U.S nation would require conformity to hetero-patriarchal norms. In so doing the Immigration policies produced and cemented women's primary function as heterosexual wives and mothers. Notwithstanding the historical specificity, an argument can be made that such practices continue to shape the ways the immigrant will experience life under a lifelong network of surveillance and disciplinary relations. Particularly in the era of Trump and the moral panic brought on through the re-inscription of immigrants as threats, there is undoubtedly a growing sense of anxiety for those already on the "inside" especially those who carry those 'figurative borders' produced through sexualization and (re)racialization.

Despite such a tragic history of oppressing and dispossessing some bodies, the U.S has managed to position itself as a "moral authority" in the world. Its stakes in the United Nations and the perceived investment in human rights, particularly in the third world, have been repeatedly cited as indicators of its benevolence. In fact countries like Jamaica have been argued

to have buckled under international pressure and allowed for the “importation of queerness” from spaces such as the U.S as a way to maintain its relationship to the “superpower.” This claim presents an interesting contradiction, given Luibheid’s observation that the U.S has both produced such identities ( and the related phobias and panic that continue as colonial legacies) as part of racial capitalism, and is now seeking to disassociate itself from barbarianism and uncivilization; and yet, the U.S. has instead emphasized its “benevolence” and presented itself as a place where the oppressed can come for hospitality and refuge. Scores of Jamaicans who identify as members of the LGBT community continue to make asylum claims to the US; and in cases of deportation, have used the likelihood of experiencing homophobic violence on their return to Jamaica as a way to stay the deportation cases (JFLAG, 2017).

Much of the sophisticated attempts to conceal the sexualization and racialization of immigrant bodies have come mainly undone through the Trump presidency as Trump perhaps unwittingly increased the visibility and awareness of white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal, hegemonic masculinity. His re-articulation and positioning of immigrants as threats and his recent announcement to narrow the definition of gender (as binary) to restore American society is likely what Luibheid points to as surveillance at the border leading to surveillance within the nation given the imbrication of racialization and sexualization. If one considers that the INS policy in 1980, which allowed the entry of homosexual immigrants, happened at the same time that the Refugee Act was passed, it might become clear that the contemporary re-emergence of panic around immigration and gender non-conformity is not coincidental.

*Entry Denied* is useful for the ways it connects sexuality to other axes of power and brings together research on sexuality and immigration; It shows how by policing sexuality,

immigration officials construct a corporeal model of desirable subjectivity. It also critiques the ways that scholars have engaged in discursive violence by naturalizing identities and offers itself as a practical way to resist becoming complicit in disciplining and subjecting immigrants and persons who dare to trans\* the boundaries of constructed gender norms.

Joseph Pugliese also offers valuable insight into the “embodied and located sites of violence within the corpus of the Australian nation.” Through “Penal Asylum: Refugees, Ethics, Hospitality,” Pugliese troubles us and forces those complicit in these acts of violence to figuratively bear witness to the depth of the violation against immigrant bodies. Grounding his arguments in Levinasian ethics, Pugliese exposes contradictions in the Australian Government’s commitment to offering hospitality and refuge. Pugliese is intentional in his description of the refugee response as “penal asylum.” This oxymoron is meant to illustrate that while the function of asylum is to provide relief across scales and sites, it is that very same process that inflicts violence on the bodies of immigrants. This violence is so severe that immigrants inflict violence to their person both as a means of expressing futility and “voicing” their dissent. This self-affliction was no less violent and no less resistant than the many revolts and uprisings enacted by slaves toward “freedom.” The refugees in Australia were under a regime darkly reminiscent of slavery: forced into captivity that wrested them of any legal protection; unable to mount effective outward resistance; resigned to hunger strikes and lip sewing as their only exercise of agency; and perceived as barbarous as though they had attacked like caged beasts. These epithets mark the failure of reason in the face of your corporeal sacrifice, even as they provide the rationale to continue the deployment of institutionalized violence against you (pp. 18)

Pugliese also raises a salient point that connects to the (im)possibility of (reversed) racism- that people of color can somehow undo white supremacy- in his discussion of relations of power and the Prime Minister's assertion that immigrants were attempting to blackmail and 'hold the nation hostage' by sewing their lips. Racism, like blackmail and hostage situations, presupposes an imbalance of power where the disempowered freedom is only possible through concessions dictated by the powerful. The immigrants were already dispossessed and were fleeing various oppressions in their home countries and had no power that could be mobilized for blackmail. The Prime Minister's characterization of their resistance exemplifies how contemporary governments in western society play the victims, create moral panic through the construction of immigrants as a threat to civilization, fashioning an inescapable cycle of both discursive and material violence.

It would be interesting to further interrogate the appropriation of the sewing of lips as fashion in Pugliese piece as an example of the ways racialized bodies are commodified and fetishized, their cultural sites appropriated and their features made exotic bodies historically deemed acceptable and normal.

### **Other References**

JFLAG. 2017. Country Report on Violence Against LGBT Persons. (unpublished).

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[http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol1no1\\_2002/pugliese.html](http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol1no1_2002/pugliese.html)