Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality, and Morality in Global Perspective

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In Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality and Morality in Global Perspective, Vincanne Adams and Stacy Leigh Pigg present a series of ethnographic studies by various authors in their attempts to analyze how the implementation of sexual and reproductive health programs as part of global agendas interacts with local cultures. This book tries to portray how the practices of development projects on sexual and reproductive health as moral acts intersect with other moralities that are contested and constructed by politics, science, transnational agendas, and technologies of sexuality. The sexual and reproductive health interventions objectify sex that seems to be ‘neutral’, but in practices they have moral objectives.

This volume of science, sexuality, and morality is in conversation with Foucault’s work, as he sees that sex has been a political site in the modern state as it is a means to access both the individual and the collective body (Foucault, 1978). There is a multiplicity of discourses surround sex produced by a series of mechanisms in various institutions in which the moral theology of sex and the objectification of sex in rational discourses are practiced and create a complex network that connects one another (Foucault, 1978). Departs from this framework, this book is successful in capturing the ways in which development practices moralize sex and how the discourses on sex are articulated and contested in local contexts.

The *Sex in Development* has three sections. The first is ‘The Production of New Subjectivities’ to bring the cultural analysis of
sexuality. The second is ‘The Creation of Normativities as a Biopolitical Project’ to unfold the construction of normativities as part of biopolitics in the modern state; while the third is ‘Contestations of Liberal Humanism Forged in Sexual Identity Politics’ to examine the production of sexual subjectivities in local contexts.

The Adams and Pigg’s collection examines sex in the transnational perspective, departs from the Foucauldian perspective and Stoler’s work (1995) to examine how sex is constructed within a specific historical context and is negotiated from the perspective of post colonialism and transnational relationships. In light of the works they argue in the introduction that ‘science, medicine, and public health are idioms through which sexual matters are articulated, the relational dynamics of power and difference are often forged around contested meanings of the sexual’ (p.10). Science, medicine, and public health are the products of Western nations, which frame sexuality and translate their moral framework of sex through development projects in the Global South.

The development projects on sexual and reproductive health in developing countries serve as attempts to modernize the nation. The global indicators of sexual and reproductive health developed by international development agencies such as WHO, UNFPA, or UNAIDS are used as markers of development progress. This book shows how development programs, with scientific understood by knowledge and technologies of sex, target local communities that have their own cultural framework of sex and how the effects of the encounter in the local’s everyday lives. The book positions development as an assemblage of practices, institutional linkages, and discourses related to the social production of scientific facts. Biological sciences become important in shaping moral assumption in the modern state’s development, therefore ‘scientific facts’ are never neutral.

In the Pigg’s essay of ‘Globalizing the Facts of Life’, biological facts are used in the production of knowledge on sex through trainings of sex education in Nepal. Sex education has become an important agenda to prevent HIV/AIDS designed by public health expert as part of ‘institutional networks of internationalizing of biomedical knowledge and technology’. The sex education program targets particular groups (the ‘high risk’) determined by experts. The classifications define what the ‘normal’ and the ‘deviant’ are and justified by scientific facts. Sex is biologized through development projects. In relation to this Pigg
calls for a theoretical framework that addresses the interrelated of biology and culture in the conceptualization of sex.

Sex education programs use manuals, curricula, and guidelines which Pigg calls as ‘international template materials’ represent a neutral and universal conception of sex as well as a standardization of information and pedagogical techniques. Nevertheless, the template does not fit in the Nepali notions of sex and the reality of sex that is dynamics and shifting. In sum, Pigg’s essay shows how the globalization of biologized notions of sex operates through sex education and develops ideas of normality. Pigg also invites us to rethink the notion of ‘facts’ about sex as they need to be understood in collectivities, in a network of processes, relations, and entities of human and nonhuman actors.

How development projects construct the notion of sex and ‘normal’ sex is also illustrated in Leslie Butt’s article of ‘Sexuality, the State, and the Runaway Wives of Highland Papua, Indonesia’. Butt shows how the state’s health development project – in her case is family planning program – conveys dominant discourses of a ‘good wife’, and being ‘modern’. The family planning program is designed by the central state and it reflects how the state controls and restricts sexual relationships within marriage, which is regarded as ‘normal’ sex as part of its attempt to modernize and develop the nation. The state’s discourses on sexuality marginalize the indigenous people – the Dani – as the Other and control Dani women’s bodies to serve for the development goals. The state’s moral claims of sexuality and reproduction are promulgated by bureaucracies through the implementation of health policies and disrupted the Dani’s moral claims. Butt’s article illustrates how new technologies of sexuality such as contraceptives introduced by the state can bring impact to social and sexual relationships among indigenous people in a such remote area in highland Papua.

The ideas of ‘normal’ sex brought by the reproductive health project also operate as markers of racial differences. The Dani’s sexual practices are seen as ‘primitive’ and ‘tainted’. The racist attitudes are held by bureaucracies, health providers, and in-migrants in Papua. In sum, Butt’s essay provides how the family planning program objectifies sex as moral act that is targeted to the Dani. The Dani women’s bodies are political site of the nation’s progress and the state discourse of an ideal family and womanhood. The discourse serves as a discipli-
nary power to create the docile body of the Dani. However, Butt also shows that the ways in which Dani women challenge existing regimes of power and assert control of their sexuality and choice of partner.

Overall, this volume makes an important contribution to understand interrelationships between ‘scientifically neutral’ concepts of sex and sexuality formulated by public health experts and local constructs of sex and gender in developing societies. However, I expect this collection could provide more space for the marginal (such as the Dani) subjectivities (their narratives and experiences) in order to give a more complete picture of the contested and competing discourses on sexuality and morality in developing countries.

**DAFTAR PUSTAKA**
