Forum on Rahul Rao's *Out of Time,* Part III: Hopeful Lines? – Method and Style

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Abstract: In this Forum, six scholars reflect on Rahul Rao's recent book *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality* from other geographies, themes and radical possibilities. Part III explores the way *Out of Time* traces out its argument, focusing especially on Rao's meaning-making, the care by which he makes distinctions and ambiguities, and the intimacy of his prose. In the first section, Laleh Khalili shows that generosity is key to the book's method and style. Khalili takes Rao's brief treatment of Freddie Mercury as emblematic of how *Out of Time* dwells in ambivalences and thematic echoes across its chapters. Chamon shows how disorientation remains a central question of the book, 'but not only,' since Rao also finds key ways to orient politics at the same time. In the second section, Chamon sensitively explores how Rao tries simultaneously to hold together multiple temporalities and permanences, mutations and grammars, and conviviality and oppositionality—all in order to understand how Rao's lines of prose, first lines and last lines, exist in productive tension with the sovereign lines that make international politics possible.

Key-words: method; style; ambiguity; intimacy; generosity; disorientation, sovereign lines, complicity.

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Method and Style in Rahul Rao's Out of Time

Laleh Khalili

In a recent talk, Kenyan scholar K'eguro Macharia questioned the role and meaning of method in scholarly work:

> What if above all else the goal of method is to assemble people around shareable scenes and situations? What if method is a call that gathers different people –and I mean call in the call and response tradition, not in the call for papers sense. And what if method assembles us *not* to define borders around objects and scenes and situations and archives, and *not* even to break borders between and across fields and disciplines.
> What if method calls us to assemble so we can be curious, so we can share wonder, so we can muse on possibility, so we can follow the generosity of the call –and all such calls must be generous– and so, having learned from the call to be generous, we can extend similarly generous calls?
> I am trying to think beyond 'what is your method?' to 'who is gathered by your invitation?'
> K'eguro Macharia, 2020, "7 Scenes with Aunties— (and a note on method)", Critical Aunty Studies: An Asynchronous Symposium, https://www.criticalauntystudies.com/02-enumerations

The ability to *ingather*, to call and respond, to range across and between scholarly conversations (if also fields and disciplines) is an all too rare ability, infrequently and inconsistently recognised or rewarded. When method does what Macharia wants it to do, inevitably the work produced is the richer for it, as it speaks to a broader audience, sings in a different register, invites a more plenteous way of thinking.

Here I want to reflect on the method, shape, and style of *Out of Time*, not (or not only) as a felicitous collateral effect or scaffolding for the substance of Rao's writing, but as a necessity for allowing the light and shadow of the subject to emerge. Rao's central puzzle is the varying manner in which colonialism is invoked in Ugandan and Indian narratives about same-sex desire. Whereas in Uganda, homosexuality is seen as a colonial implant, in India, Victorian anti-sodomy laws are seen to be the blight brought over by colonial officials. *Out of Time* seeks to understand the manner in which these narratives are generated, but it also examines the place of homosexuality in Britain's contemporary reckoning with its colonial imposition of sexual rules and norms in Asia and Africa. To do this, he ranges over time, geography, and complexions of power. *Out of Time* is a generous invitation for intellectual ingathering; it is personal and intimate; and it is rich with uncertainty, comfortable with ambiguity and ambivalence.

I want to begin with the generosity of Rao's writing. Rao is expansive in what he reads and whom he invokes. Legal and juridical and policy texts sit alongside social media writing, novels, films, pamphlets, parliamentary chronicles and a range of other materials. His engagement with scholarly and theoretical material is exemplary, and not only in its politics of citation which reads widely and broadly and from outside queer studies, or international relations theory, or even material having to do with India, Uganda and Britain (as, for example, in his brilliant conversation with Hortense Spillers [Rao 2020: 214]). We are often taught to approach our colleagues' texts in a gladiatorial way; we use texts as foils; as what we write "against". Some styles of criticism, some reviews of past scholarship, revel in tearing down, a sharp turn of phrase, a demolition. Rao approaches the scholarship he reads, what he criticises, what he folds in, with generosity and care. He names it, as Eve Sedgwick did, 'reparative criticism' (Rao 2020: 20). Even when he disagrees with other scholars, with tactics and strategies he is writing about, he disagrees generatively and with a sense of possibilities and the possibility of hope (as, for example, in his discussion of homosexuality, gender and Blackness in Fanon [Rao 2020: 49-51]).

The book's temporal orientation appears not only in its title and substance, but also in its approach to the material with which Rao engages, to opening vistas and taking a breath before announcing. In thinking 'less "what is to be done" than "what is being done"' (Rao 2020: 10) he seeks to look at a thing and its seeming opposite at this moment, to begin a conversation among comrades *now*, not render a future judgment. The aim of the book is to ask questions about 'how responsibility for ongoing oppressions must be apportioned between colonial and postcolonial regimes' (Rao 2020: 9). This apportioning of responsibility across time (and space) defies linear cause and effect chains, and instead generates notions of futurity, nowness, and a past that are unstable, shifting, and therefore open to reinterpretation, transformation, even combination. This means that seemingly paradoxical headings such as 'Backward Futures' can be openings into thought-shifting discussions of strategies and stories of struggle that not only challenge the standard narratives about the arrow of time, but also open up discussions about caste and class and belonging (Rao 2020: 194-199).

Alongside the scholarly generosity that allows him to traverse disciplines and fields, Rao is also generous to several other categories of peoples who make an appearance in his book. I will note only two here. First is his discussion of the annual Namugongo pilgrimage in Uganda, where both Catholic and Anglican worshippers gather to commemorate Christians martyred by a tyrannical king who is remembered primarily as having engaged in homosexual acts. The commemorative rites Rao describes pivot around a fundamental inconsistency: that on the one hand homosexuality is alien to Ugandan culture, and on the other hand that in fact the king practiced sodomy with his courtiers (Rao 2020: 77). Rao's treatment of the religious faithful and their often confused and inconsistent melding of anticolonial sentiment, Christian piety, anti-homosexual prejudice, and the feeling of community and belonging is a model of how not to condescend to one's research interlocutors and subjects. *Out of Time* shows an openness in trying to understand the mythologies offered by this group of pilgrims as what they are, even when they are distasteful. In so doing, he beautifully contextualises the politics of memory and

history that underwrites the Ugandan government policies and discourses that target the country's homosexual population.

A second example is the book's discussion of reparations. This chapter is an act of solidarity and evocation of a kinship across formerly colonised continents. He first begins by discussing former Prime Minister David Cameron's tentative apology for colonial sodomy laws (preceded by apology to and pardon of homosexual British scientist, Alan Turing). Rao (2020: 188) writes that colonial apologies for British anti-sodomy laws 'fuel the sense of triumph and superiority vis-à-vis the object (we have progressed, they have stagnated).' He then compares these apologies with aborted 2007 Parliamentary debates on the 200th anniversary of abolition of British slave trade. Rao (2020: 188) writes, 'A striking characteristic of these debates was the frequency with which expressions of atonement for slavery, which should have been the focus of public attention, were upstaged by pride in Britain's putative leadership of the campaign for abolition.'

In comparing the context of debates around slavery and the apologies for colonial anti-sodomy laws, Rao (2020: 121) argues that 'the temporal objections to apology that were articulated so forcefully in the slavery debates have not precluded the British state from offering apologies' about criminalising homosexuality at home and in its colonies. At its core, this chapter of the book is a rousing call for, and interrogating the absence of, reparations for slavery. The book's expansive notion of solidarity feeds a vision of what it means to put together a world fractured by colonialism and slavery, to acknowledge 'the scandal of segregated struggles,' and to reintegrate sexuality and race which had been 'segregated … in the elite political imaginary' (Rao 2020: 129).

This expansive sense of solidarity is married to a grounding of the book's theoretical insights and empirical stories in the intimate. From the very first page of the foreword, this is a book that is deeply, fundamentally bound up with Rao's own experiences, without this binding ever being solipsistic or indeed ever taking over. The personal histories tend to bookend the substance of the story, and only occasionally emerge from the deeps into the book's central chapters. The book's first epigraph is a passage from Edward Said's *Orientalism* quoting Gramsci about how a critical consciousness requires an inventory of the infinity of historical traces left upon the person and body. Rao (2020: xv) then starts the book with "I came out in the autumn of 2002 after watching a production of Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9*." The foreword is about the drama of colonialism, race, gender and sexuality the play *Cloud 9* portrays, but also about Rao's (2020: xix) trajectory in coming out, in coming from India to Britain, in coming to 'reconcile a divided self.' Even more intimate is the final sentence of the Acknowledgments, where he dedicates *Out of Time* to his father whose 'love for me was total even when he was most anguished about my life choices' (Rao 2020: xii). The word 'anguish' appears in the book only once more, when Rao recounts the story of a young Ugandan man disowned by his father because of his homosexuality. Rao (2020: 105) writes,

> I find myself oddly moved by the predicament of fathers who sublimate their incomprehension of, and anguish at, the choices made

by sons into the only affects that their own gendered subjectivities seem to permit— shame, denial, anger, rejection, 'homophobia.'

But beyond a deep sense of understanding and recognition here, Rao's discussion of his positionality in Uganda opens up a vista of self-questioning that is generative to the discussion here – because of its revelation of the entaglements and dispositions of the empire. When a Ugandan priest calls him a *muzungu* (someone who roams in a field), he is 'racialised as white' and identified not only with Euro-American scholars, but also with the eighteenth-century white explorers to whom the word was first applied (Rao 2020: 31). He then follows this story by another where he explains how his connection to Uganda, but also his life trajectory, passes through the Anglican church. Rao (2020: 32) had been educated in an Anglican school in India, where as a choirboy he 'had been steeped in Anglican liturgy since before a time when anything like sexuality was remotely intelligible to me.' And thereafter he had spent some seven years in two Oxford colleges. In a footnote across an expanse of white page, Rao (2020: 32n130) winks at the reader:

> I was following a well-worn itinerary. George Uglow Pope (1820–1908), Anglican missionary and Tamil scholar, was principal of Bishop Cotton School in Bangalore before taking up a lectureship at Balliol College, Oxford.

In the same section where he outlines his position and disposition, but also elsewhere in the book, Rao's intimate life and relations flow through so much of the ethnography, the theory, the stories, the connective tissue of the book, without ever becoming about confession or self-exposition.

The final and perhaps most important theoretical/methodological choice *Out of Time* makes is to complicate, contrast, mirror all the stories Rao wants to tell and to put them in conversation with one another across time and space. The book is of two halves, the first half having to do with Uganda, the second with India. Where arguments are woven in one part of the book, they are unravelled in another. Where an argument is made at the beginning, its verity, or at least universality, is questioned at the end. This intentional politics of uncertainty, of ambivalence and ambiguity, shapes many of the book's threads of argument and prepares the ground for the openness of reading and thinking I have already discussed.

Rao (2020: 52) quotes Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie about 'the danger of a single story,' and *Out of Time*, indeed, tells the stories of Uganda and India in order to question certitudes about where and how and when homophobia is located or emerges. In the recent overturning of anti-sodomy laws in India, anti-homosexuality laws are seen as colonial impositions. In Uganda, while homosexuality may have been an indigenous quotidian and royal practice, it is now portrayed as a colonial import, more often than not by those Ugandans who themselves are adherents of other imports –Anglicanism, Catholicism and now Pentecostalism. This circularity of multiple histories, of the book's narrative folding upon itself and folding back all allow for an enriched story that does not easily lend itself to linear or universalising statements. Rao's (2020:

210) deliberate 'non-resolution of the contradictions' inherent in the postcolonial politics of sexuality opens a breathing room for closer, more compassionate readings. The argument(s) of the book demand nuance, generosity, and a toleration of ambiguity and ambivalence. 'Temporal ambivalence' (Rao 2020: 194), especially as regards the futurity of legal "backwardness" in the context of Indian caste, gender and sexuality politics is another area where easy answers and the narrative of progress (whether spatial or temporal) are avoided.

For me, *Out of Time's* brief narration of the story of rock star Freddie Mercury was emblematic of the care, warmth, generosity and the uses of ambiguity and ambivalence as method and approach in the book. Freddie Mercury, or Farrokh Bulsara, born to a Parsi family in Zanzibar in the British empire is known for his stadium rock,

> his musical range, style, versatility, composition, and showmanship. What remains consistently inexplicable is the fact that a semi-closeted queer, ambiguously racialised, HIV positive man could have become the world's greatest rock star in a decade in which any one of those identities, let alone their intersection, might have sunk another talent. (Rao 2020: 221-222)

Rao then carefully counts what may have benefited Mercury; no reductive, simplistic, or 'monocausal' explanation will do. Mercury's whitening as a Parsi, the sheer aesthetic force of his oeuvre, or migrant bootstrappism are all appraised and considered insufficient as the sole reason that could explain Mercury's 'idiosyncratic' trajectory into the stratosphere (Rao 2020: 222). Instead, near the end of a book in which law, the sweep of historical memory, and the power of political calculation have played such a dominant role, Rao (2020: 220) argues that Mercury embodies the 'desire, intimacy, affect, and movement in those everyday realms in which the state, law, and its genealogies are not overwhelming preoccupations,' a realm of freedom, however ephemeral, subterranean, or limited.

Academic writing –especially in international relations– is often a narrowly defined terrain, a circumscribed genre. Scholarly books and articles very frequently require one to situate oneself in a literature (often in adversarial ways), or to make an argument with no 'waffle,' or to banish ambiguity in favour of clear causes and effects. Bombastic arguments often receive the most attention. Rao manages to conjugate the macro-historical to the intimate, to allow for the complexity of history and for multiple –sometimes contradictory– narratives to occupy the same space. *Out of Time* gives a fair hearing to missionaries in Uganda, to activists in Britain, even to fathers who have banished their sons; but what it celebrates most sympathetically are those who are most imaginative, most receptive to desire and intimacy and movement, those whose generosity creates a 'utopian spacetime' (Rao 2020: 209) amenable for a kind of radical democracy.

Disorienting sex; orienting politics: *Out of Time*'s sovereign hopeful lines

Paulo Chamon

> Regardless of one's stance on structures and permanency, on the one hand, and agency and creative resistance, on the other, we are both more captivated by complicity and betrayal, than by the incantation of such terms as 'solidarity' or 'resistance.'
> Alina Sajed and Naeem Inayatullah (2016: 205)

> [W]hen exits close and options are cancelled our vision is suddenly sharpened and we can catch ourselves in the act of seeing.
> Henry Kariel (1977: 129)

Rahul Rao's *Out of Time* investigates the relations of sexuality and imperialism by inquiring what queer politics becomes when the aftermath of empire doesn't bring success regarding queer lives. It does so by engaging with global struggles over legislation on queer sex in three contexts: the 2014 Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA), the 2014 National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) petition against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (India's "anti-sodomy law"), and discourses of apologies for British imposition of anti-queer legislation in its colonies. The book is nothing short of awe-inspiring. I found myself astonished at the empirical and conceptual breadth of its archives, the patient nuance of its interpretations, and the clarity and pace of its storytelling. Rao investigates historical records and memorial sites; global networks of religious institutions and legislative debates; movies, social media, novels, and newspapers records. He turns to such material with dedicated calm, resisting assuming what he will find or overdetermining his reading with claims to cooptation or defiance. And he grounds his thought on a vast and interdisciplinary literature that actively binds together concepts, fields, and resources. I am left wondering how many lives one must live to achieve such feat.

By way of this painstaking work, *Out of Time* diagnoses three discourses through which struggles for the global management of queer sexualities in the aftermath of empire operate: homonationalism, homoromanticism, and homocapitalism. In different and related ways, each of these discourses attempts to stabilize the meanings of homosexuality and homophobia by connecting sexuality, space, time, nation, race, class, and empire in ways that establish specific orientations for sexual politics. 'Homonationalism' (see Puar 2007) claims openness to homosexuality as an attribute of the modern West while attributing generalized homophobia to the backward non-West. Such mapping of sexuality and civilization orients politics by authorizing Western protection from, and intervention upon, the non-West in the name of sexual freedoms. Its mirror image,

'homoromanticism,' denounces the legacies of the imposition of homophobia by the imperial West unto non-Western societies whose pre-colonial traditions regarding sex and sexuality were open and diverse. In doing so, this discourse orients both anti-imperialist grassroots and social movements making ways for forms of queer living and the State's postcolonial revanchist claim for sovereignty through a romanticized past—often the same sovereignty built upon violations of sexualities. Finally, 'homocapitalism' reads homosexual freedoms as secured by capitalism, notably when facing the failure of both homonationalism and homoromanticism to guarantee them. Reading neoliberal modernization as undoing homophobia, it orients sexual politics towards market capitalism as a site of both protection and self-realization.

Rao's book doesn't endeavor to either confirm or debunk the truth of these discourses, nor does it side with one against the others. Instead, it offers an *analytic* of the North-South entanglements in which these discourses are mobilized as part of the global struggles around the AHA and Section 377. Without the spatiotemporal orientation of nativism in homoromanticism, of orientalism in homonationalism, and of modernization in homocapitalism, Rao's analytic aims to unsettle the commonsense of global discussions over sexual politics and queer rights. More specifically, and importantly for this text, in doing so, *Out of Time* endeavors to '*disorient* the reader in the sense of making it impossible to answer with certainty the question of who is singularly responsible for the state of affairs that we now confront' (Rao 2020: 220, my emphasis). For the author, this *disorientation* is double-edged, standing for both an *intellectual* experience of disorder and a *vital* experience of giddiness and nausea accompanying the sudden awareness of one's contingency. In a way resonating with the call to make 'discourses that (…) seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous' (Foucault 2001: 235), *Out of Time*'s analytic troubles facile—often limited and limiting—mappings of sexuality, power, and subjectivity.

To achieve such disorientation of commonsense positions in global sexual politics, *Out of Time* unravels three conceptual moves. First, a critique of dichotomies of local and global, West and Rest, oppressor and oppressed, through the analysis of the frictions making for queer struggles in the aftermath of empire. With this, Rao *disorients* the lines used to deny the intermeshing of world processes and to attribute responsibility by clearly opposing victims to perpetrators. Second, a critique of the additive conception of intersectionality through which sexuality, gender, nation, race, caste, and class are conceived as separate entities to be added up. By showing, instead, how 'queer' *mutates into* (that is, come to stand as a metonymy for) race, imperialism, anti-imperialism, or nationalism in different contexts, Rao *disorients* the topographic imagery pegging liberation onto the expansion of representation. Third, a critique of the purported timeliness of both liberal and critical literature affirming either the past, the present, or the future as the proper orientation for queer politics. By taking seriously the multiple temporalities (or heterotemporality) constituting global sexual politics, Rao *disorients* claims privileging the recovery of a past, the affirmation of the present, or the search for a better future as the proper temporal orientation for queer struggles. Instead, he inquires into the multiple ways queer lives can be 'out of time'—in the form of imposed exclusion but

also affirmed refusal to be of the times. Through these three moves, *Out of Time* troubles the lines making for both sexual and international politics: those between inside/outside and self/other, between past/present/future orientation, and between categories of oppression. Since modern politics as we know it is oriented through just such lines of discrimination (Walker 2009; 2006), we should expect intellectual confusion and existential giddiness at their troubling. Without clear coordinates about victims and perpetrators, about past, present or future orientation, and without a determinate political category on which to rely for demands of political inclusion, there are troubles on the horizon.

And yet, as I reflect on the book, I find myself in awe of its achievements, but not giddy, not nauseated, not disoriented. Indeed, I feel quite oriented, even guided, and certainly hopeful of the prospects for a liberatory sexual politics. How to make sense of this apparent mismatch between at least one of the book's aims and a reader's reaction? Beyond dismissals in terms of an idiosyncrasy of the latter or a failure of the former, how can this mismatch help us think with *Out of Time*?

At a closer look, there might be no reason for surprise in this: disorientation is only half the story of *Out of Time*. Another voice runs through the book, a voice whose aim is less to disorient than to orient—or, at least, to parse out possibilities emerging from giddiness. Rao makes the coexistence of these voices explicit, stating that he wants to navigate the tension between 'a suspicion of liberation' and 'a politics of reparation and indeed hope.' He asks: 'what sorts of time travel can postcolonial queers undertake that might be both "robust and ethical"?'—i.e., at once the nuance of 'scrupulous scholarship' and the orientation to 'queer liberation' (Rao 2020: 20).

As such, each of the above conceptual moves is accompanied by a counterpoint. First, laying out his approach to heterotemporality in the global space, Rao notes that giving too much to heterogeneity might fall into voluntarism, while giving too much to stability reifies the present. Thus, he calls for grasping *permanences*, that is, 'the temporal, processual, and relational character of place, while paying attention to the politics of its attempted stabilisation' (Rao 2020: 49). Disorientation, yes, but not only. Second, although queer mutates differently in each scene—showing the heterogeneity of postcolonial sexual politics—, the set of mutations making for a context reveals the 'foundational political grammars of the states and social institutions in which queer difference struggles to make space for itself,' that is, 'the originary and ongoing violence in which these institutions were forged and are reproduced' (Rao 2020: 9-10). *Grammars* give us the stability of foundations and origins, stabilized grounds in relation to which we can orient our politics. Therefore, and third, alongside the conviviality of power entangling oppressor and oppressed in a shared grammar of queerness, Rao orients our politics towards *oppositionality*. Despite a nod towards the critique of queer allegiance to anti-normativity, queer politics is ultimately defined as the task of 'distinguish[ing] between "norms and conventions that permit people to breathe, to desire, to love, and to live, and those norms and conventions that restrict or eviscerate the conditions of life itself"' (Butler 2004, quoted in Rao 2020: 30).[1] Here, politics (and critique) demarcates between the sustaining and the debilitating, the enabling and the constraining, clarifying norms

within a binary framework. And as queer mutates into other institutions and ideologies, 'being queer means fighting about [all] these issues all the time' (Warner 1993, quoted in Rao 2020: 27; the brackets are Rao's addition).[2]

In sum, although *Out of Time* starts us out by disorienting commonsense discourses on global sexual politics through frictions, mutations, and multiple temporalities, it reveals a more tensioned project that also involves the permanence of grammars whose foundational violence is opposed as one distinguishes the enabling from the constraining. This tension is played out in each chapter, as Rao moves between contexts and struggles, from imperialism and neo-imperialism in Uganda, to the legacies of imperial slavery and queerphobia in the UK, to modernization and caste violence in India. Each time Rao carefully reveals the multidimensional connections constituting a particular set of 'mutations' of queer—how it metonymically stands for different positions—, drawing how the resulting grammar both enables and constrains queer politics. And each time, having identified a foundational violence reproduced in that grammar, he dramatically concludes his analysis with an invocation orienting us towards oppositionality.

For instance, in Chapter 4, Rao turns to discourses of remorse and atonement for the imposition of anti-queer laws in former colonies coming from both Conservative and Labor officials in the UK as well as from London-based transnational LGBT organizations. Reading them alongside the lack of such discourses in parliamentary debates on the bicentenary of the abolition of slave trade in the Empire, he traces how 'racism *structures the terrain* on which homophobia installs itself [in the UK]' (Rao 2020: 129, my emphasis). Such mutation of 'queer' into 'whiteness' reveals a grammar founded on the separation of race and sexuality that grounds the separation of a queerphobic British past from a queer-conscious British present by disavowing contemporary racism and the legacies of chattel slavery. Rao thus concludes the chapter invoking the specter of the Queer Atlantic—the queer intimacies of the enslaved haunting the foundational separation of race and sexuality—to orient our politics towards realizing 'the *futility*, but also the *scandal*, of segregated struggles against [racism and queerphobia]' (Rao 2020: 135, my emphases).

Similarly, Chapter 2 starts out disorienting attempts to settle the relation between sexuality and location in terms of homonationalism and homoromanticism in the context of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in Uganda. It closes with Rao invoking the realization of generalized queer unsafety in the aftermath of the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando—and the vigils of solidarity by kuchus[3] in Kampala—to orient our politics towards a 'more egalitarian solidarity' (Rao 2020: 74). Chapter 3 engages the centrality of martyrdom to the Ugandan national myth and disorients attempts by State officials, churches, researchers, and activists to fix the relation between sexuality and the nation through religious idioms. Despite the uncertainty stemming from his analytic, Rao closes his chapter on the hope that such idioms might provide 'especially fertile soil in which the blood of martyrs might water the seeds of new churches' (Rao 2020: 106). Chapter 5 disorients the homocapitalist association of queerness and modernization by revealing the ambiguities surrounding queer politics, international institutions of global capitalism, and Neopentecostal churches in the struggles over anti-queer laws in Uganda.

Rao then turns to a cinematic text, *Papilio Buddha*, which 'illuminates the *necessity* of a queer investment in anti-capitalist and anti-caste struggles (…) by embodying their intersections in its protagonists' (Rao 2020: 172, my emphasis). Finally, in Chapter 6, after disorienting the relationship between queerness, caste, and nation in India in the context of trans persons' struggles for recognition as 'socially and educationally backward' citizens—giving them access to affirmative action policies in public employment and education—, Rao invokes the 'capaciousness and irreducible ambivalence [of border figures] as *prerequisites* for the constitutional morality that is not yet here' (Rao 2020: 212, my emphasis).

I believe it is these orienting invocations, these hopeful last lines, that assured that, despite Rao's disorienting analytics, I concluded *Out of Time* grounded rather than giddy, oriented rather than not. It would undoubtedly be unfair not to note the careful use of 'maybes' and 'mights' in these lines: Rao knows he cannot fully affirm the orientation he nonetheless *cannot not* claim. The double negation invites us to pause. The explicit coexistence of these voices should stop us from reading the tension of orientation and disorientation I have been pointing out as the author's idiosyncratic 'flinching,' as if a more resolute stance or a more careful reading (if such thing was possible) would have taken us farther. No. *Out of Time* is all the more provocative for walking the tight rope of orientation and disorientation in queer struggles and queer theorizing. Indeed, I'm rather convinced that we cannot do away with either of these moments: displacing what we think we know and redrawing what we might become.

And yet, these moments can be held together, related, and played out in different ways. But we get little about *how* that navigation works in *Out of Time*. *How*, precisely, does Rao hold together a suspicion of liberation and a politics of queer liberation? How, in doing so, does he move from disorientation to better 'solidarity,' to 'futility,' to 'necessity,' to 'pre-requisites'? And, most of all, what can we learn by following the path from disorientation to orientation instead of trying to correct or improve this procedure? The rest of this text endeavors to address these questions.

To do so, I return to the conceptual tensions above—multiple temporalities and permanences; mutations and grammars; conviviality and oppositionality. Instead of affirming their truth or falsity, or offering alternative concepts, I inquire into their conditions of possibility and, so to speak, into the shadow they cast. Specifically, I propose that Rao's hopeful *last* lines are predicated upon sovereign *first* ones—that is, lines authorizing an authoritative politics—, notably those demarcating the contours of a grammar in order to ground its foundations, and those separating the desire for liberation from other desires in order to situate an oppositional politics out of the conviviality of power. I do so not to condemn these lines, nor to alleviate their weight upon us, but to try and catch ourselves in the act of navigating with his (dis)orienting compass. Unwilling to read the shadows cast by Rao's first lines upon his last ones as moments to be corrected, I instead take up Cynthia Weber's (2016a) call for a conversation with the problem of sovereign lines in critical international relations theory as a path to diagnosing and sustaining the tensions revealed here in terms closer to 'complicity and betrayal' than 'permanence and

resistance.' It is a matter of no small irony that, in doing this, I cannot but repeat *Out of Time*'s own hopeful last lines[4].

In taking the multiple temporalities of global politics seriously, Rao is more aware than most of the fraught terrain he is engaging (see Rao 2019). Indeed, notwithstanding the forcefulness of Hutchings' (2008) argument against reading world politics as organized by a determinate and unified time—whether a common progressive path, a conception of 'the present' with sharp limits of inclusion, or the privileged temporal perspective of the theorist—, critics have noted that too much goes without saying in her normative affirmation of temporal contingency and heterogeneity. Indeed, Hom's allied critique argues that it assumes lines of demarcation— 'silent orders'—that write off subaltern struggles organized in terms of progress or for which the uncertainty of contingency might be less politically sensible than the affirmation of collective will—often in the State (Hom 2018: 325; Hom; Steele 2016: 200). Others have highlighted lines excluding instances where power operate through contingency (Çakivilik 2016: 239) or how heterogeneity might rely on disavowed forms of unity (Bartelson 2001; 2014). Responding to this diagnosis, Hom (2018: 329) affirms the need to construct and perhaps limit political temporalities past disorientation, urging scholars to systematically analyze multiple temporalities towards 'a more synoptic (if never total) view of the temporal dynamics of global politics.' As the parenthesis let out, however, remaining skeptic of temporal homogenization, Hom sustains the need for plurality as a recessive voice. It is not difficult to read Rao's recourse to 'permanence' and 'grammar' as veering towards a 'synoptic (if never total)' analysis of sexual politics. As noted, disorientation is only half the story of *Out of Time.*

But beyond questions of the better disposition to be taken between permanency and agency, of the proper measure of a sustained tension, we might point to another conclusion. Like the clear orientation resulting from reading world politics in terms of a determinate and unified time, the disorientation of multiple temporalities is also predicated upon drawing (and disavowing) lines discriminating political subjects and processes. Rao's *last* (hopeful) lines must be predicated on some *first* lines. Indeed, as I have proposed elsewhere (Chamon 2018; see also Mercier; Chamon 2020), critical theorization of time, riven between heterotemporality (with permanences) and its (never total) synopsis, tend to disavow the problem of sovereignty—i.e., the problem of first lines and foundations authorizing an authoritative politics. If such is the shadow of temporal (dis)orientation, how does it tower over *Out of Time*? In other words, which lines are drawn so that disorientation and orientation might coexist? And how do these first lines inform the movement from such coexistence to the political orientation of Rao's last lines?

One such set of demarcations transpires in the tension between Rao's concepts of *mutations* and *grammars*. Here, Rao opposes the commonsense interpretation of 'intersectionality' that reads categories such as race, gender, and class as 'axes of oppression' which cross in specific instances like roads in an intersection (such as the lives of black women). As many have noted, this reinforces the tendency to separate analyses, since the axes appear as having no relation prior to their crossing. Rao's concept of *mutation* aims to avoid such separation: instead of the addition of separate axes, a metonymic process

through which 'queer' comes to stand for different categories within specific grammars, thus becoming a metonymy for whiteness, the nation, or modernity. Rao attributes this insight to Ambedkar's conception of caste, in which there is no distinction between the practices aimed at guaranteeing endogamy (the means to caste) and caste (the end of endogamy). In Rao's terms, instead of caste intersecting with gender, co-constituting gender, or being the ground of gender, the grammar of the regime of caste in India repeats the foundational violence in which 'caste *is* the regulation of gender, which *is* caste' (Rao 2020: 15, emphases in the original).

Working through a similar issue—how to conceptualize the relation of gender and class—Arruzza (2014; 2015a; 2015b) responds to what she reads as the substitution of unidirectional determination by the 'ceaseless play of different kinds of social relations'—a position she attributes to Butler's early work. To her, although such 'ceaseless play of social relations' escapes the problem of class reductionism, it does so at the cost of 'the very idea of determination becom[ing] meaningless' and, with it, periodization and historicity (Arruzza 2015a: 30-1; see also Inayatullah; Blaney 2016)—a series to which we might add 'necessity,' as it appears in *Out of Time*. To avoid both unidirectional determination and ceaseless play, Arruzza turns to what she calls *concrete historical/social* formations as providing her with both determinacy and historicity: within a particular concrete formation, one differentiated from others, determinate relations can be drawn. Although both positions (reductionism and contingency) are notably overstated, they allow her to pursue a middle ground of sorts[5]. As she clarifies: 'my claims are more robust than simply stating that in a total social formation something 'is connected to something else.' However, my claim is weaker than arguing that capitalist accumulation organizes other social hierarchies according to a single logic' (Arruzza 2015b: 8).

I am convinced that Rao *does not* affirm a 'ceaseless play of different social relations'—nor a reductionist *logic* of capitalism for that matter. Again, it is not correction that I am after. Instead, it is precisely *how* and *why* he avoids such affirmations which I believe reverberates with Arruzza's similar aim. Thus, I venture that Rao's grammar offer a middle ground of sorts— 'synoptic (if never total),' indeed. Although queer mutates into other categories, these mutations reveal 'not only the versatility and plasticity of queerness but also (…) the foundational grammars of the states and social institutions in which queer difference struggles to make space for itself' (Rao 2020: 15-16). As such, since queer *mutates*, there is *no necessary relation* between, say, queer and race—another set of mutations, another grammar, another relation. And yet, insofar as mutations lead to foundational grammars, there is *some determinacy*—enough, indeed, to lay claim to futility, necessity, and pre-requisites in *Out of Time* last lines.

Again, beyond issues of how to properly balance determinacy and contingency, mutations and necessities, I want to turn to the lines conditioning this middle ground. Arguably, the above discussion reveals the close relation between, on the one hand, the limits in space and/or time demarcating a concrete formation or grammar, and, on the other, the distinction between the necessary and the futile. Put differently, however one goes about navigating this tension, it remains predicated on the return of sovereign lines tracing the contours of a grammar and separating the foundational from the rest. Where/

when does one grammar (or social formation) end and the other start? When does a mutation take place within the terms of that grammar (social formation) and when does it challenge its foundations? I venture those lines allow Rao to hold on to a simultaneous suspicion and affirmation of queer liberation. More importantly, they allow him to veer his navigation towards the hopeful last lines orienting the politics of *Out of Time*. We might, nonetheless, ponder over the mutations and swerves—the political entanglements and possibilities—being erased, made futile or external, for disorientation to turn into orientation.

That said, even if we were to take the external and internal demarcations of a grammar for granted—say, coupling them to 'state or social institutions'—, we would still have to assume that the existence of an oppositional possibility—born of generalized unsafety or impossible positions in a grammar—is tantamount to an orientation towards that possibility. Indeed, such equivalence echoes Foucault's own analytic of power, which often equates the existence of a space for freedom to the subjects' desire for it (Brown 1995; Hutchings 1999, chapter 4). I turn to this tension to clarify Rao's second set of assumptions, now around his engagement with conviviality.

As he was theorizing the productivity of power, Foucault (1978) resorted to two different terms to characterize, on the one hand, power, and, on the other, resistance[6]. Although the relationship between them is posited as fully immanent—'[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault 1978: 95)—, a residual distinction persisted, one through which his most normative voice speaks. Looking at the legacy of that distinction, Abu-Lughod (1990) noticed a growing romanticization of resistance as always signaling failings of power. Instead, she proposes we turn to resistance as a diagnosis of power rather than as its counterpoint. In doing so, however, Abu-Lughod herself persisted in affirming the self-evidence of a set of practice as 'resistance,' not 'power' (Mahmood 2005).

Mahmood (2005) argues that this demarcation of 'resistance' is closely tied to the dual nature of feminist theory as both analytical and political project—or, in Rao's term, as scholarship that is both scrupulous and oriented towards liberation. Such dual nature all too often leads one to assume the universality of the desire for freedom and, therefore, to reduce agency to the subversion of norms—a disposition we find in Rao's above quotation of Butler defining the task of 'queer politics.' Indeed, this assumption—which Mahmood also finds in Butler's early work—shies away from her own elaboration of regulatory power as offering the conditions for subjects to emerge, whether those conditions are made concrete in the form of identification, exclusion, or opposition (Butler 2004).

We might thus substitute Freud's fundamental insight that 'people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them' (Freud 1957: 244) for the assumption of a fundamental desire for liberation. In doing so, we would attend to 'bodies, knowledges, and subjectivities whose trajectories do not follow the entelechy of liberatory politics' (Mahmood 2005: 14) and in which agency might be embodied outside of the melodramatic register associated with sovereignty

(Berlant 2011). Here, I would highlight modes of subjectivation which instead of orienting one towards liberation, not only lead to different orientations, but stretch the very metaphor of 'orientation' beyond its limits. Subjectivities that emerge turned on themselves, attached to their own subordination (Butler 1997; Benjamin 1988). Subjectivities that emerge attached to scenes of hope that offer compromised condition of existence (Berlant 2011). Subjectivities that emerge attached to inflicting violence upon others, whether in the register of cruelty or tragedy (Kotef 2019). Or, simply, subjectivities attached to whatever object is available since, as Berlant notes, desire has 'bad eyesight': it is practical, taking whatever traction it can get rather than orienting itself towards a final solution (Berlant 2014: 253).

From this perspective, it seems rather problematic to assume that subjects (should) desire liberation from constraining norms and adherence to enabling ones. Furthermore, to state that 'as much as some respond to the experience of being queer or queered with proud gestures of defiance and ownership, others wish to conform, to stay out of trouble, to keep heads below parapets' (Rao 2020: 30) might only evade the question. 'Conforming' and 'staying out of trouble' might still sidestep the more troubling insights brought up by the subjectivities above. As such, the assumption of a desire for liberation—and, with it, the lines separating power from resistance, liberation from other desires—traverses *Out of Time*, moving its navigation from disorientation to hope, from queer conviviality to the oppositionality of queer politics. Despite caveats and nuances, it is still the possibility of that desire that orients us, and its necessity that sustains each chapter's last, hopeful, lines—oblivious to the worlds formed in its shadow.

At the end of *Out of Time*, Rao notes that the entanglements between cores and peripheries he has unraveled left out the lateral frictions between peripheral locations that also make for queer lives in the postcolonial world. Attuned to those limits, he invites our imagination to consider the displacements that would come from such analysis—for instance, away from the empire of sexuality and from the realms of State and law and towards desires and intimacies articulated in realms of everyday life. I have been proposing here that a different set of entanglements have also been left out: those that would more properly fit within the realm of 'complicity and betrayal' of my epigraph. Entanglements between what is enabling and what is constraining, between analysis and limits, liberation and sovereign lines of discrimination, subordination and agency. Rao's assumptions around grammars and desire at once sustain his careful work to disorient our relation to 'queer' and bring back (disavowed) lines of demarcation to orient his politics—and ours.

We might surmise from this that a more thorough analysis—one including an analytic of desire and a theorization of the tension of 'scrupulous scholarship' and 'reparation and hope'—could complement *Out of Time*. These welcome additions, like those of South-South entanglements, would then specify and extend the analysis into new terrains, including towards realms where queer politics is embodied in forms that we may find egregious (Weber 2016b). There are, without a doubt, provocative displacements that can come from this further sharpening of our analytical skills—displacements made possible and imaginable thanks to the monumental work done by *Out of Time*.

But to end on this note might too easily allow us to move away from *Out of Time* with the sense that we face an incomplete book. Of course, like everything else, it is. But, like any great work of thought, *Out of Time* is best read as being incomplete not due to an oversight, but for brushing on the impossibilities of our world. As such, I prefer to end by expressing that *Out of Time* is not missing something we can add to it to make it better, but that, in its awe-inspiring excellence, it allows us 'to catch ourselves in the act of seeing.'

Coda—disorienting politics; orienting critique?

In her analysis of global sexual politics, Weber (2016a: 12) calls for a conversation between transnational queer theory and critical international relations theory. Rao, a sympathetic reader, remains 'less persuaded by Weber's claims about what 'transnational/ global queer studies' might learn from IR,' since 'the conservatism of the latter threatens to evacuate the radical potential of the former' (Rao 2018: 146-7). Notwithstanding Weber (2016b) owning up to her call as a disciplinary strategy, I would insist on its theoretical and political relevance. Not because a conversation with IR adds to our radical potential—it might not—, but for what it can reveal about such potential. Indeed, at its best—and why aim for anything less?—international politics is *a theory of first and last lines*, that is, of the sovereign lines marking where and when politics can begin and where and when it must end for something else to begin (Walker 1993; 2009). In other words, international politics offers a diagnosis of the need for lines of origins, lines of development, and lines of last instance through which politics becomes possible. Weber's lesson might then be that international politics still has something to say about the conditions of the freedoms we desire—a topic on which we might find queer and feminist theories to be allied companions to, rather than dismissive of, international relations. Indeed, one conclusion we can draw from the above discussions is that desire, including the desire for liberation, is both much more regulated and much less organized than is often assumed. Thus, more than an analytical addition, attention to 'complicity and betrayal' might provoke us to think about our own political aims—as nuanced as we can make them be.

At its best, then, a conversation between international relations and queer theorizing might lead us to contemplate some of the conditions of possibility of our understandings of politics and, most of all, of the problems, difficulties, and vagaries of those conditions. Such insight is disorienting not because it gets rid of lines and grounds, nor mainly because it tells us that lines and grounds are not where and when we expected them to be, but because it shows them to be where we would expect them not to. If that is indeed the case, then the lines orienting Rao's navigations in *Out of Time* are not only responsible for casting a shadow over worlds of mutations and attachments that remain excluded from our view—a shadow we might be able to lift could we find ways to further sharpen our insights. They are also responsible for giving us a political world we can recognize *as political* in the first place.

Seeing ourselves in this conundrum, we should shed no tears for Rao's lines—first or last. Not, at least, unless we can bring ourselves to shed them for our political hopes as well.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   [Note by Chamon] Likewise, Rao states that postcolonial critique cannot avoid 'the messy critical task of determining how responsibility for ongoing oppressions must be apportioned between colonial and postcolonial regimes' (Rao 2020: 9). Elsewhere but in a similar vein, Rao suggests the need to grapple not only with the criteria distinguishing between living 'out of time' as an imposed domination and as a proclaimed liberation, but also with the conditions for transforming the former into the latter (Rao 2019: 308).

2   [Note by Chamon] Again, despite nods to the contested nature of this definition, Rao raises such caveat mainly to distinguish this radical view of queer politics from 'a more single-issue oriented liberal LGBT politics that seeks inclusion within, rather than the deconstruction of, hegemonic structures of state, nation, and market' (Rao 2020: 27).

3   [Note by Chamon] Rao (2020: 29-30) points to 'kuchu' ('same,' in Swahili) as an umbrella signifier for sex and gender nonconformity in Uganda which invites both identification and disidentification—in ways not unsimilar to 'queer' in other contexts.

4   [Note by Chamon] I thank Maria Thereza Dumas and an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to this mimicking moment at the dusk of this text.

5   [Note by Chamon] I am thus more interested in her responses against a fully contingent or fully logical reading of intersectionality (my terms, not hers) than in whether those approaches are in fact present where she sees them—or in *Out of Time*.

6   [Note by Chamon] I am thankful to Jimmy Klausen for pointing me towards the literature to expand that initial insight in Brown. Much of this is presented with greater precision and sharpness in Guzzini and Klausen (forthcoming).

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Fórum *Out of Time*, de Rahul Rao, Parte III: Linhas de esperança? – Método e estilo

Resumo: Neste Fórum, seis acadêmicos refletem sobre o recente livro de Rahul Rao, Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality, a partir de outras geografias, temas e possibilidades radicais. A Parte III explora a maneira como Out of Time traça seu argumento, concentrando-se especialmente na criação de sentido de Rao, no cuidado com que ele faz distinções e ambiguidades e na intimidade de sua prosa. Na primeira seção, Laleh Khalili mostra que a generosidade é fundamental para o método e o estilo do livro. Khalili considera o breve tratamento dado por Rao a Freddie Mercury como emblemático de como Out of Time se detém em ambivalências e ecos temáticos em seus capítulos. Chamon mostra como a desorientação continua sendo uma questão central do livro, "mas não apenas", já que Rao também encontra maneiras importantes de orientar a política ao mesmo tempo. Na segunda seção, Chamon explora com sensibilidade como Rao tenta, ao mesmo tempo, manter juntas múltiplas temporalidades e permanências, mutações e gramáticas, convívio e oposição - tudo para entender como as linhas de prosa de Rao, as primeiras e as últimas linhas, existem em tensão produtiva com as linhas soberanas que tornam possível a política internacional.

Palavras-chave: método; estilo; ambiguidade; intimidade; generosidade; desorientação, linhas soberanas, cumplicidade.