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MAPPING SOCIAL CHANGE IN KNOWLEDGE: YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON HOMOSEXUALITY IN INDIA

Abstract

The social representations theory (SRT) is considered a theory of social change, accounting for democratic transformations in knowledge. However, its applicability in the Global South with its long history of subjugation has not been sufficiently explored. This chapter integrates the contributions of post-colonial theorists with the tools of the SRT to track changes in knowledge structures among Southern youth. In doing so, it shows the limits imposed by an enduring colonial legacy and modern cultural imperialism on Southern youths' ability to challenge hegemonic representations on their own terms. This is further illustrated by a case study on youth perspectives on homosexuality in India which utilizes data from interviews conducted in Bengaluru with three generations of middle-class families representing India's three major religions. The youths' acceptance of homosexuality compared to their elders displayed their resistance. Yet, tolerance was perceived as a Western import, revealing an East-West divide in understandings of homosexuality.

Introduction

At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance... (Nehru, 1947, as cited in Keay, 2010, pp. 503).

These words spoken by Jawaharlal Nehru on the eve of India's independence highlight India's first Prime Minister's optimism about building a nation free from its colonial legacy. However, Nehru failed to anticipate how colonial ideas would persist into independence and how India would continue to carry the baggage of colonialism. British interventions in indigenous sexuality are a prime example of this. The fluidity in sexuality that found expression in same sex acts in pre-colonial India was criminalized during British colonization (Vanita & Kidwai, 2008). Post-independence, intolerance to homosexuality¹ became associated with nationalism and homosexuality was deemed incompatible with Indian culture (Purkayastha, 2014). Thus, the British enacted law endured until 2009 when it was decriminalized by the supreme court only to be re-introduced in 2013 under religious pressure. In 2018, it was decriminalized yet again through the perseverance of activists.

¹ Regarding the use of the term homosexuality, I agree with Msibi (2011) that it is important to be mindful of its origins in the West in the late 19th century as a label with a negative connotation to pathologize those engaging in same sex acts. Likewise, the term gay also has its roots in Western activists' struggles for recognition. My position is that there is no such thing as a single homosexuality or gay identity and in this chapter, I use homosexuality as a sensibility encompassing the entire area of same-sex eroticism.

The fluctuating status of homosexuality in India suggests the circulation of different social representations on the subject. This can be linked to ongoing transformations in the Global South, particularly due to new media landscapes which have made knowledge systems more fluid. This raises questions on how such fluidity manifests in everyday constructions of knowledge among youth from the Global South who are living in an age that differs from that which their elders grew up in. With its emphasis on history and media influences in grounding everyday knowledge, the European originated Social Representations Theory (SRT) can help answer these questions. However, it is constrained by a failure to account for power and ideology in knowledge acquisition, a shortcoming that must be overcome to be relevant in Southern contexts with histories of colonization. This chapter proposes ways to capture fluidities in representations of Southern youth in a manner sensitive to their histories and contexts.

1. Social Representations: A theory of social change?

Defined by Serge Moscovici (1972), the SRT's founder, as systems of collective beliefs and practices providing a shared language for social exchange and classification of the social world, social representations are formed by social groups to make unfamiliar objects less intimidating. This occurs through the processes of anchoring and objectification. In anchoring, groups attempt to understand a new phenomenon by accommodating it into pre-existing categories of knowledge (Moscovici, 1984). This involves a comparison process in which the new phenomenon is evaluated in terms of its similarities or differences to existing knowledge. In Moscovici's (1961/2008) seminal study on representations of psychoanalysis among different segments of Parisian population, Catholic participants anchored psychoanalysis in their ritual of confession as both served to alleviate repression. In objectification, the iconic qualities of the phenomenon are highlighted, giving an abstract idea a tangible image (Moscovici, 1984). Working class populations in Moscovici's (1961/2008) study perceived psychoanalysis as a bourgeoisie luxury and objectified psychoanalysts as charlatans conning rich people out of their money. Objectification can also result in naturalization, where the image representing the object is detached from its original context and acquires a prescriptive quality by becoming taken for granted knowledge (Hakoköngäs & Sakki, 2016).

Hence, representations are not mental schemas confined to the parameters of our minds. The collective histories and customs loaded into them weigh down with the strength of material objects. However, humans are still conceived to be capable of reinterpreting representations or "re-presenting" (Moscovici, 1984). Thus, representations in contemporary societies are considered to have fluid qualities arising from modern communication methods and critical human nature (Moscovici, 1988). Depending on the extent to which they are shared within a society, representations can be of three types: hegemonic, emancipated and polemic. Hegemonic representations are uniform and imposing, consensually shared throughout society. Emancipated representations are created and shared by different subgroups leading to the co-existence of complementary versions of the same phenomena. Polemic representations emerge during times of conflict when groups actively disagree about a representation, leading to mutually exclusive representations held by each group (Moscovici, 1988).

Owing to the fluid nature of representations, understanding the dynamics of change has been popular among SR researchers in both the Global South and North. Studies have illustrated how old ideas are adapted when confronted with new ones through the examination of diverse phenomena including open-heart surgery in Australia (Moloney & Walker, 2000) and female politicians in Cameroon (Sakki & Salminen, 2015). In the latter, the idea of female politicians was incompatible with participants' representations of gender that anchored

women's roles to the private sphere, demonstrating how gender roles would have to be renegotiated for female politicians to be embraced in Cameroonian society.

In this growing body of literature on social representations and social change, surprisingly little attention has been dedicated to youth who are often described as agents of social change. Furthermore, although material realities are known to influence symbolic processes of representation, studies analysing changes in representations in the Global South focus largely on transformations in terms of content and structure, virtually detached from the burden of colonialism and neo-colonialism. While there has been debate about the relations between power, ideology and representations (e.g. Howarth, 2006), the discussion has not considered these issues in post-colonial contexts. Moreover, the absence of a point of comparison in most studies has resulted in a unidimensional analysis of change, neglecting its relational nature. As a result, the theory has neglected to consider how social change in knowledge in terms of resistance to hegemonic representations could manifest among youth and how these issues might differ between the Global South and North.

In addition, while studies on representations of gender and sexuality have been popular in the Global North, they are less common in the South where research has prioritized material matters such as poverty (Connell & Pearce, 2015). While these issues are important, everyday understandings of sexuality must be engaged with, particularly in countries like India where homophobia is institutionalized, showing the tangible consequences of symbolic orientations. The SRT is particularly useful in exploring such issues as its tools can shed light on cultural practices and beliefs attached to sexuality from a historical point of view. Moreover, as homosexuality is in a state of flux, the meanings associated with it likely differ between different generations who have lived through major socio-economic and political transitions. Thus, an intersectional perspective is needed to understand these potentially varying representations which the SRT is amendable to as it differentiates between representations according to their convergence across groups.

In light of the aforementioned gaps, the central question of this research is to explore how the SRT can be used to trace changes in knowledge structures among youth from the Global South, using a case study on inter-generational representations of homosexuality in India. I propose that two inter-related aspects of the SRT need further development. Firstly, the manner in which the past and the present intersect in representations demands special attention. Secondly, the conditions under which representations are transformed require elaboration as their applicability in the Global South is unclear. These theoretical contributions are discussed in Section 2 in relation to post-colonial theorists, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak to demonstrate how Southern theories can complement the SRT. These theoretical points are then considered in relation to sexuality in the Global South and my empirical study on youth perspectives on homosexuality in India.

2. Understanding continuities and fluidities in social representations

Compared to pre-modern feudal societies in Europe where centralized institutions were the authorities on knowledge and beliefs, Duveen (2001) argues that modernity is characterized by diverse centres of power, changing the way knowledge is regulated. Modern societies are thus thought to encourage a plurality of thinking owing to the simultaneous existence of different knowledge forms like science, common sense, ideology and religion, competing to meet different needs for individuals, groups and institutions (Moscovici, 1961/2008). This has provided more opportunities for critique and debate. Furthermore, as influences from other countries spread rapidly in an increasingly connected world, meanings are contested under the pressures of globalization. Far from passive receptors, people in contemporary

societies use events, science and ideology as food for thought to actively produce and communicate their representations. Moscovici (1984) thus refers to modernity as an era of social representations and modern societies as “thinking societies.”

It is revealing in this age of social representations that most SR studies are undertaken in the Global North, highlighting how these societies are presumed to epitomise “modern thinking societies.” When the SRT has been applied to the Global South, there has been a tendency to characterize these societies as traditional (e.g. Sakki & Salminen, 2015). Eurocentric notions of modernity that conflate progress with technological and economic advances have been rightfully criticized (e.g. Bhabra, 2007). Nevertheless, regardless of whether communication technologies and participation in global economies confer modernity, they are necessary conditions for representation research, founded on the idea that access to information enables people to form and challenge representations. Given the technological advances and global economic involvement of Southern countries, these contexts should not be overlooked in representation research.

Yet, what distinguishes these countries from their Northern counterparts are their often-long histories of colonization which necessitate understanding the processes by which representations are formed and transformed in post-colonial contexts by addressing power and ideology. Howarth (2006) is among the few SR theorists to pay attention to these issues, highlighting how knowledge is never disinterested, owing to its construction by social agents with different positions and stakes in maintaining or challenging dominant representations. Thus, when considering people’s capacity to participate in producing and communicating representations, we must explore how this applies to those in the Global South who have historically been denied access to the public sphere of their countries. This raises a few questions. How is knowledge reified in Southern contexts? What possibilities exist to resist such reified knowledge and what role can youth play in this? These will be attended to in the following subsections by drawing on the work of Said and Spivak.

2.1 Amalgamation of the past and present in the reification of representations

When power enters the equation between representations and social reality, it becomes clear that what is accepted as reality depends on whose representations are reified as expert knowledge. This requires more than categorizing representations into hegemonic, emancipated and polemic to understand how certain representations attain their hegemonic status to begin with. Moscovici (1961/2008) emphasised the role of a presumably objective scientific community, called the reified universe, in disseminating knowledge that is transformed into common sense in a consensual universe. Though Moscovici reiterated that he did not consider common sense knowledge to be inferior to scientific knowledge (Moscovici & Marková, 1998), the idea of a detached scientific universe delivering its wisdom to the masses to produce what they may of it has been criticized by SRT proponents and critics alike. One important critique has been voiced by Purkhardt (1993) who argues that all knowledge whether arising from a reified or consensual universe is socially constructed and scholars, academics and scientists also employ social representations in constructing knowledge. The representations of the world informing their knowledge projects therefore might not be as objective as assumed.

Edward Said’s (1978/2016) *Orientalism* illustrates this by documenting the parallel between the rise of modern orientalist scholarship and the acquisition of vast Eastern empires by Britain and France. In unpacking the myriad ways in which the Orient, consisting of the Eastern colonies of Britain and France, was constructed by Western scholars, travel writers and policy makers, Said (1978/2016) demonstrates how visions of the Orient were informed

by a biased system of representations of what the Orient is and who Orientals are. One principle behind Orientalism was a polarizing distinction between the rational, developed and superior West and an illogical, backward, inferior East, thought to be incapable of defining itself, let alone accomplishing change. Through these constructions, domination of the East became justifiable on the grounds of “helping” it to “progress” (Said, 1978/2016). These representations were formed in the same manner as all social representations: through processes of anchoring and objectification which allowed the West to control the threat that Eastern cultures and practices allegedly presented to Western domination.

As Orientalism was produced by the West for the West, its credibility lay in claims to be reporting on actualities in parts of the world that much of its audience had never experienced. These claims were further backed by the authority of academics and governments, setting into circulation a discursive currency that spoke for the Orient. Said (1978/2016) argues that these depictions have survived to this day due to the dominance of Western media and are consumed by people of former colonies, leading to the modern orient participating in its own orientalising. Hence, Amartya Sen (2005) was not misguided in emphasizing the enduring effects of British imperialism on the societies of their colonies. When dissected through the lens of orientalism, practices and ideas that post-colonial countries might deem traditional to their societies can be found to be colonial impositions. Ideas on sexuality are a classic example of this and will be elaborated in Section 3.

It is therefore necessary to understand change in relation to the oppressive past and present of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Such a perspective fits well with SRT tools of anchoring and objectification which can shed light on the historical and cultural roots of categories imparting meanings to representations (Wagner et al, 1999). Hence, when the SRT is implemented in the Global South, it is paramount to consider how orientalist representations have influenced post-colonial subjects’ representations of themselves and phenomena around them. This in turn raises issues regarding the extent to which people, particularly youth from the Global South can resist certain hegemonic representations which will be explored in the following subsection.

2.2 Transforming knowledge: potential for resistance in the Global South

Resistance to dominant ideas has always been central to the SRT. Moscovici (1961/2008) recognized the relationship between the stock of categories accessible to social groups and their ability to blend them into new combinations through creative thinking. The theory thus considers common people active agents as opposed to victims of hegemonic thought. However, Howarth (2006) argues that transformation in representations can only occur when individuals unite as a community to develop ways of resisting dominant representations perceived harmful to their collective identity. Even in stating these conditions, Howarth (2006) acknowledged that they need refinement.

Returning to Said’s (1978/2016) argument, the internalization of Orientalist binaries between Eastern traditionality and Western modernity by post-colonial subjects can produce an identity crisis that is often overcome by perpetuating the same binaries. This involves either resisting representations deemed Western by preserving supposed national traditions or resisting representations considered regressive, synonymous with the East and its traditions. In Southern countries with histories of colonization, youth are presumed to enjoy more freedom of thought compared to their elders who lived under a colonial system. From an SRT perspective, these young people could be considered more capable of resisting hegemonic representations as their increased access to a plurality of information allows meanings to be contested.

However, a danger of Southern youth replicating the aforementioned binaries exists because orientalist ideas still dominate both Western and indigenous media. This leads to the dilemma introduced by Gayatri Spivak (1988) in her seminal text, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Drawing on the example of the British colonizers’ abolition of the Indian practice of sati (Hindu widows displaying their loyalty to their deceased husbands by jumping into the latter’s funeral pyres), Spivak argues that this put Indian women in a powerless position, where they had to choose between a barbaric indigenous practice or succumbing to a foreign power who used this practice as an excuse to justify comparable forms of subjugation and violence. These circumstances rendered the subaltern voiceless, annulling the possibility of true resistance emerging from the consciousness of their identity, as both women and Indians, being threatened by two oppressive forces. Spivak (1988) also highlights how the British colonizers’ efforts to create a loyal colonial population in India resulted in the formation of an indigenous elite serving colonial interests by convincing their fellow countrymen that these interests were also theirs. Thus, even representatives of subjugated groups that have the seeming ability to speak often act in ways that preserve the power of the hegemon to generate discourse.

In light of this hypothesis, while resistance to hegemonic representations in the Global South might be possible, it should be questioned whose interests are served by these transformations and what forces generate them. Is it an empowered youth challenging representation from the inside through debate and activism or a passive group of neo-colonial subjects buying the colonial myth that the only way for the Global South to progress is by mimicking Western models of liberation in the same manner that they consume Western commodities and culture? With the latter, there is a risk of the colonial hierarchy being replicated in a trendy new cloak. These issues will be further explored through a discussion on sexuality in the Global South followed by an empirical study on youth perspectives on homosexuality in India.

It is also worth asking *which* youth are implicated in the discussion considered above. Young people are not a homogenous category, particularly in countries like India with tremendous diversity along social, economic, religious and political lines. Due to a digital divide, resulting in differences in internet access between rural and urban populations, genders and classes, it is possible that this discussion is more relevant to youth from an urban middle-class background. Accordingly, the case study in section 4 focuses on this demographic. Yet, as Lewis (2011) argues, information circulating on the internet is infiltrating even the most isolated areas across Africa and it is likely that the same is happening in India, so caution is needed in making assumptions that could perpetuate stereotypes about youth with varied backgrounds.

3. A social representations approach to sexuality in the Global South

From the previous section, it is clear that transformations in everyday knowledge in post-colonial contexts should be analysed with close attention to power and ideology. This is particularly relevant to representation research on sexualities in post-colonial countries owing to colonial interventions in indigenous sexualities that have lasting effects on how sexualities are conceptualized in these contexts. Tamale (2011) and Msibi (2011) have discussed how African leaders justify homophobia on the grounds that homosexuality goes against African religions and culture. However, when unpacked, “African” religions usually refer to Islam and Christianity, which are not indigenous (Msibi, 2011)

Additionally, what appears to constitute “African” culture can often be traced to colonial assumptions perceiving Africans to be ruled by “natural” or biological instincts, resulting in a

denial that same-sex practices could exist in the continent (Lewis, 2011). Such ideas remained influential in post-colonial nation building that tied citizenship to reproductive sexual roles. Hence, what is understood as African culture has evidently been constructed by colonial authorities and maintained by African patriarchy with a vested interest in preserving gender binaries purportedly threatened by homosexuality (Tamale, 2011). Wieringa's (2012) comparative study in India and Indonesia also found institutionalized heteronormativity to be an overarching theme. From an SRT approach, it is possible to deconstruct how these indigenous Southern sexualities have been anchored in moral scripts and gender binaries that emphasize the importance of reproductive roles. However, without a post-colonial perspective, we would fail to arrive at the colonial source of these binaries that view heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality as an import.

As much as the SRT can benefit from a post-colonial perspective, it also has the potential to contribute to existing literature by expanding the focus beyond colonial origins of homophobia to analysing the possibility of social changes in understandings of homosexuality. Furthermore, as Tamale (2011) argues, even if homosexuality went against indigenous African culture, culture is not static but re-negotiable. This requires an awareness of hegemonic representations which the SRT can provide. For instance, various African activists, inspired by a 1994 United Nations conference in Cairo, attempted to contest the tabooed status of homosexuality in their cultures by reconceptualizing sexuality as a human rights issue (Tamale, 2011). However, the close link between an allegedly universal human rights corpus and Western liberal democracy resulted in their appeals for accepting homosexuality in human rights terms to perpetuate representations of homosexuality as Western and alien (Tamale, 2011). Thus, for transformations in everyday understandings of homosexuality to occur, activists must understand underlying representations to avoid replicating colonial binaries. Combining the SRT with a post-colonial perspective could enable the understanding of local meanings of sexualities in post-colonial contexts while also revealing the origins of these meanings. These ideas are applied in Section 4 through a qualitative study that traces changing representations of homosexuality across young people, their parents and grandparents.

4. Youth perspectives on homosexuality in India: A case study

Similar to the histories of homosexuality in African contexts, the intersection of pre-colonial tolerance to homosexuality in India with colonial repression, post-colonial nationalist purges of alternative sexualities and modern human rights discourse suggests that representations of homosexuality in India are fluctuating. An intersectional perspective is needed to understand these fluidities as research suggests that the internalization of cultural norms can differ across ages and religions among other categories (Wieringa, 2012). To track these changes in knowledge structures, semi-structured interviews were conducted in India's cosmopolitan IT capital, Bengaluru, between October-December 2016 with eighteen people from six urban middle-class families representing the major religions of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Two families representing each of these three religions were chosen, with a member from each generation participating in individual interviews. The average age of young participants was 24, the middle generation 51 and the oldest generation 77.

Participants were recruited through purposive snowballing to fulfil the study's specific objectives. All but three participants were women. A more balanced gender distribution would have been desirable, but the study's criteria limited available participants. Ethics of confidentiality, informed consent and non-deception were ensured by anonymising identity-revealing information and providing participants with an information and consent sheet explaining the research and terms of participation. Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of

thematic analysis was utilized to code the transcribed material. Conducted manually, the coding was grounded in the data during the initial stage. After reviewing the codes, themes and sub-themes, tools of the SRT (anchoring and objectification) led the next phase of analysis. In the final phase, findings were framed according to similarities and differences between the three generations to map changes in knowledge, presented in Table 1.

Table 1: An intergenerational comparison of anchors and objectifications of homosexuality

| <i>Generation</i> | Anchor | Objectification |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Older and Middle generation</i> | <i>Heterosexuality</i> | <i>Imbalance</i> |
| <i>Younger generation</i> | <i>Heterosexuality</i> | <i>Basic needs</i> |

As table 1 demonstrates, all generations understood homosexuality vis-à-vis heterosexuality. From an SRT approach, this suggests that representations of homosexuality are anchored in heterosexuality. This anchoring had different consequences across generations. Older and middle generation participants emphasized differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals, perceiving heterosexuality as ideal. These differences mainly pertained to the functions of sex. Heterosexual sex was perceived to be directed towards procreation and considered natural while gay sex did not serve a procreative purpose and was considered unnatural. Older Hindu participants considered such biological gender roles as integral to Indian culture while older Muslim and Christian participants saw these roles as sanctioned by their religions:

Extract 1

I (Interviewer)- So what would your reservations about homosexuality be?

MM (Muslim mother)- Religion has a major factor to play- Christianity, Islam, they all believe it's not the ideal because you know, man and woman have been paired together because of the purpose of procreation and you know, enlarging your family.

An anchoring process is visible in this extract where MM compares homosexuality to heterosexuality and objectifies it as imbalanced in relation to what she perceives to be a complementary pairing of men and women. Contrastingly, youth participants, regardless of religion, highlighted similarities between homosexuals and heterosexuals by emphasizing that all humans, regardless of sexual orientation have basic human rights such as freedom of choice and expression:

Extract 2

CD (Christian daughter)- It is terrible that someone can take someone's sexual orientation and say no that is wrong. That's like saying you like your tea with milk and I like mine without milk and then you ban tea without milk but I am lactose intolerant.

CD uses the metaphor of a basic need such as food to objectify sexual orientation as a matter of taste. Just as people can eat certain foods and are allergic to others, homosexuals are thought to only be able to satisfy their libido with people of the same sex and should have that freedom. Thus, compared to their elders, all youth participants accepted homosexuality, displaying their resistance and agency and suggesting an optimistic future for homosexuality in India. Among these youth, the hegemonic representation of homosexuality as unnatural to Indian cultures and religions that preserve beliefs about the procreative purpose of sex is yielding to polemic representations that consider homosexuality a legitimate alternative to heterosexuality. The SRT's tools of anchoring and objectification provide tangible ways to compare meanings given to homosexuality across generations and religions, highlighting fluidities in everyday knowledge.

However, in line with the arguments presented in Section 2 and 3, young people often saw their acceptance of homosexuality as a Western import while their elders rejected it for precisely this reason. This appeared to stem from the legacy of colonialism, entwined with perceptions of what being Indian currently means:

Extract 3

I- Why should homosexuality be decriminalized?

MS (Muslim son)- Because it sends a message not only to Indians but to the rest of the world that we are modern and open-minded as a community.

The above extract shows MS emphasizing the need for decriminalization, not for the sake of equal rights for gays but to change India's image as a backward country. This perceived binary between the East and West caused some conflict for some older participants:

Extract 4

I- Where do you think the law criminalizing homosexuality comes from?

CG1 (Christian grandmother)- From the backward Indian classes.

I- Actually the British imposed that law on us when they colonised India but it has been retained here.

CG1- Here they are very uneducated...But in Britain, they are very modern.

To contextualize this extract, CG1 was highly disapproving of homosexuality, constantly referring to her age to justify her homophobia and perceiving it as common among her generation. However, she seemed to be aware that among her socio-economic class, tolerant representations of homosexuality are gaining popularity. While she cannot identify with these representations, she did not want to position herself as belonging to what she saw as an illiterate class of Indians, perceived to be behind the criminalization of homosexuality, despite me highlighting the law's British origins. This created a tension within her representation of homosexuality where her age and class intersected in conflicting ways. To resolve this contradiction, CG1 asserted that values in India and Britain were different, exempting India from having the same standards which would threaten the family life she saw the country being founded upon. Such incompatibilities between old and new sources of knowledge are inherent to the gradual process of transforming representations owing to people's multiple and sometimes clashing identity categories, reiterating the importance of intersectionality in SRT research.

The polarisations between the modern West and regressive India visible above show how the burden of colonialism weighs on Indians who associate Britain and the West with liberalism although the reality of colonial India was one of repression. The chasm between the East and West has been widened by the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party. While globalization is encouraged in pursuit of neo-liberal economic policies, lifestyles perceived Western are rejected by championing a return to the country's supposed Hindu origins. This limited institutional view of what it means to be Indian restricted the youths' ability to include their progressive representations of homosexuality within their national identity. They thus saw their tolerance to be based on Western values.

These "Western values" were attributed to their exposure to Western entertainment, social media and studying abroad in Western countries. Thus in youth participants' representations, the Spivakian idea of the subalterns' inability to speak manifested as they did not see opposing intolerance towards homosexuality as a liberation from the country's colonial past and the skewed sense of indigenous history it produced, but merely as a need to emulate the exemplary model of the "enlightened West".

Under such circumstances, even when emancipatory targets are seemingly achieved by young people, their agency should be problematized, as it appears dependent on subservience to Western hegemony. In Spivak's (1988) example of sati, despite the many national movements to abolish the practice which succeeded particularly in Muslim ruled parts of India, credit for its abolition went entirely to the British, which strengthened their justification to embark further on a civilising mission. In the case of homosexuality, credit for liberal representations among Indian youth is given to the West, despite the irony of history that institutional criminalization was a British import. Thus, the findings of this research support the thesis that orientalist representations influence knowledge construction across the generations in this study.

5. Conclusion: Consequences of knowledge transformation

Amartya Sen (2005) has argued that when scrutinising the value of an idea, the extent to which it is modern is irrelevant as the only meaningful aspect is how it affects peoples' lives. Noble as this thought is, it fails to address the inextricable association of modernity with the West and backwardness with the East. As this research demonstrates, representations of youth towards homosexuality are transforming, influenced by new media landscapes and the new ideas they bring. While this has made the youth more tolerant, which can be seen as positive change by ushering in more acceptance for homosexuality in future generations, the influence of the West in driving these changes cannot be minimized owing to the oppressive history linked to these ties. As Western thought and representations still have immense global influence, the possibility of colonialism in an era of fluid modernity should not be dismissed as colonial structures continue manifesting in the neo-colonial era. Just like the elders of the youth in my research opposed homosexuality using the language of their colonizers, young people accept it today, using vocabulary they consider having learnt from the West. Thus, while discussing the fluidity of knowledge in our age of modernity, we cannot become impervious to how the past and present intersect in social representations and how resistance and transformation are taking place in ways serving Western interests and a small educated urban indigenous elite.

As Connell (2014) emphasizes, analysing colonialism raises problems about knowledge itself since the knowledge structures of the global metropole do not usually accommodate such analyses with ease. Consequently, intellectual projects must reconstruct knowledge arising from colonialism and decolonization. This chapter shows that the SRT is suitable for this task

as its emphasis on the historical roots of meaning making lends itself well to an explicitly post-colonial analysis. In relation to sexuality studies in the Global South, this research expands the existing focus on colonial origins of homophobia to illustrate how acceptance of homosexuality among Southern youth also has neo-colonial implications. Additionally, it confirms what scholarship on African sexualities has emphasized (Msibi, 2011; Tamale, 2011): the need for indigenous activists to promote representations of homosexuality that break binaries between heterosexuality as an indigenous norm and homosexuality as an import. Targeting these messages to young people and their elders in India could garner more acceptance for homosexuality in ways consistent with national belonging.

However, broad generalizations are discouraged owing to the limited participants in this qualitative work. Even within the urban middle class in India, representations could be more stratified along religious, gender and caste lines than this study suggests and the implications of a neo-colonial hegemony on youth representations could differ depending on which section of youth is researched. Thus, more research is needed that uses the theoretical and methodological insights provided in this chapter by combining the SRT with Southern theory and an intergenerational methodology to gain clarity on the extent to which the theses considered here can be further generalized. Despite its limitations, one of the most pressing implications of this essay is the need for the deconstruction of modernity from its link to the West so that emancipatory transformations occurring in the Global South are not simply considered the result of implementing Western ideas. For Southern youth to truly become empowered agents of change, history must be taught in ways that emphasize the ability of people from the Global South to produce revolutionary ideas to transform their societies as the rich intellectual history in many of these civilizations amply demonstrates (Sen, 2005). Only then can transformation in knowledge live up to the democratic and heterodox ideals that the use of the term fluid modernities implies.

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