

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU)		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 31 (Theology and Religious Studies)		
Title of case study: ICS31.02_ Queering Paradigms: Influence on religious, public and political debate and increased awareness of LGBT+ rights in the Cayman Islands		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2006-2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Bee Scherer	Professor in Religious and Gender Studies	01/08/2003 – 31/07/2019
Dr Leonardo J Raznovich	Principal Lecturer	01/10/2003 – 31/12/2012
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Impact was realised through <i>Queering Paradigms</i> (QP), an inclusive multi-disciplinary network, conference and book series developed as the vehicle for Scherer's 'Applied Queer Studies' approach. This approach aims to effect change by connecting queer insights to legal, political and social injustices. In 2016, QP's 7th conference (QP7) was held in the Cayman Islands, a British Overseas Territory in the Caribbean, which does not afford same sex couples with the same legal protection as non-LGBT+ residents, including the right to marry. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influenced public debate and raised wider awareness and understanding of LGBT+ rights within the Cayman Islands; • Catalysed debate on LGBT+ rights within the Christian community in the region and beyond; • Influenced political debate and played a role in the movement towards legal change in relation to recognition of same-sex marriage in the Islands. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Impact is underpinned by Scherer's examination of the relationship between queer and religion, and the potential this presents for inclusivity and furthering LGBT+ rights within religious contexts, and the development of a distinct activism centred approach to Queer Theory. The research trajectory began in 2006 with an examination of gender identity and transformation in Early Buddhist narratives, analysing their potential to support positive attitudes to LGBT+ inclusivity in contemporary Buddhism [3.1]. This led to an examination of 'Buddhist Theology' and homo- and transphobic attitudes in a contemporary neo-orthodox Buddhist movement, which analysed intersections between religion, sexuality and gender and the communalities between Tantric Buddhist philosophy and Queer Theory. Here, Queer Theory with its focus on gender, sexual ethics and sexualities, added insight into the 'tradition versus modernity' debate in a Tibetan Buddhist movement [3.2]. <i>QueerThinking Religion: Queering Religious Paradigms</i> extends this exploration of the dialogue between queer and religion and proffers a way to develop a more beneficial relationship between the two; proposing 'queer-thought religion as embodied compassion-in-action' [3.3].</p> <p>Drawing on this potential of academic scholarship to further LGBT+ rights in religious contexts, Scherer realised the necessity for 'performative scholarship as activism' that engages with non-academic activists and stakeholders. This work is a commitment to social justice and human rights advocacy and bridges the gap between elitist and highly specialist academic discourse and the concerns of local activists globally. An 'Applied Queer Studies' approach aims to challenge the conventions of religious studies as academic discipline and its undisclosed biases, arguing that there is no 'mere criticality' but that societal responsibility needs to be part of scholarly engagement [3.4]. Realised through the <i>Queering Paradigms</i> (QP) project, a network, conference and peer-reviewed book series, established in 2008, scholarly insights from Religious Studies, Theology, Gender Studies, Sociology and Queer Studies are applied to specific legal, political and social injustice. It represents a practical application of academic insights to further inclusivity and make tangible change. Conferences have been held in the UK, Australia, USA, Brazil, Ecuador, Cayman</p>		

Islands and Austria, each providing the thematic focus for an associated peer-reviewed edited collection *Queering Paradigms*. Scherer is overall series editor and has co-edited 4 volumes (I, II, VI & VII), with their applied activism-centred approach to Queer Studies outlined in the introductions of volume I and II and expanded on in a chapter in volume V [3.4]. Scherer contributed chapters to volumes III, VI and VII: *Queer as Kagyu: negotiating dissident identities* (2013) is an examination of 'queer emancipation' [3.5]; *Variant Dharma: Buddhist queers, queering Buddhisms* explores how 'Buddhist queers' are traditionally constructed by Buddhist views on non-normative sexualities and gender identities, framed in traditional Buddhist ethics and teachings on sexualities and gender variance, allowing opportunities for a queer Buddhist 'liberation theology' [3.6]. Raznovich contributed a chapter to QPI, *Recognition of Overseas Same Sex Marriages: A Matter of Equality and Sound Statutory Interpretation* (2010). This examined the legal and ethical implications associated with same sex married couples being denied the legal protection provided by marriage, with a particular focus on jurisdictions where such unions were not currently permitted [3.7].

3. References to the research

3.1 Scherer, B. (2006) 'Gender transformed and meta-gendered enlightenment: Reading Buddhist narratives as paradigms of inclusiveness.' *Revista de Estudos da Religião*, 6 (3). pp. 65-76. ISSN 1677-1222. https://www.pucsp.br/rever/rv3_2006/p_scherer.pdf Submitted RAE 2008.

3.2 Scherer, B. (2011) 'Macho Buddhism: gender and sexualities in the Diamond Way' *Religion and Gender*, 1 (1). pp. 85-103. ISSN 1878-5417. <https://repository.canterbury.ac.uk/item/86vw2/macho-buddhism-gender-and-sexualities-in-the-diamond-way> Submitted REF 2014.

3.3 Scherer, B (2017) 'QueerThinking Religion: Queering Religious Paradigms.' *Scholar & Feminist Online* 14.2 <https://repository.canterbury.ac.uk/item/8813v/queerthinking-religion-queering-religious-paradigms>

Scherer's underpinning research in relation to QP is embodied in the series and volume editorship and chapter contributions to the peer reviewed book series *Queering Paradigms* (Oxford: Peter Lang). Specifically:

3.4 Scherer, B. ed. (2010) *Queering Paradigms*. Oxford: Peter Lang. Introduction pp. 1-7. ISBN 9783039119707 [Edited book]; Scherer, B and Ball, M. eds. (2011) *Queering Paradigms II: Interrogating Agendas*. Oxford: Peter Lang. Introduction pp. 1-10. ISBN 9783034302951 [Edited book]; and Scherer, B. (2015) 'Queer scholars, activists, critics and caretakers: Notes on the genealogy, impact and aspiration of Queering Paradigms.' In: Viteri, M. and Picq, M., eds. *Queering paradigms V: Queering narratives of modernity*. Oxford: Peter Lang. pp. 321-326 ISBN 9783034319249. [Book chapter]. All CCCU on request.

3.5 Scherer, B (2013) 'Queer as Kagyu: negotiating dissident identities.' in: O'Mara, K. and Morrish, L. ed. *Queering Paradigms III: Queer Impact and Practices* Oxford Peter Lang. pp. 145-155 [Book chapter]. CCCU on request.

3.6 Scherer, B. ed. (2016) 'Queering Paradigms VI: Interventions, Ethics and Glocalities.' Oxford: Peter Lang. Introduction pp.1-11. ISBN 9781906165871. [Edited book]; including Scherer, B. (2016) 'Variant Dharma: Buddhist queers, queering Buddhisms.' pp. 253-273. [Book chapter]. CCCU on request.

3.7 Raznovich, L.J. (2010) *Recognition of Overseas Same Sex Marriages: A Matter of Equality and Sound Statutory Interpretation*. In: Scherer, B. ed. *Queering Paradigms*. Oxford: Peter Lang. pp. 123-140. ISBN 9783039119707. [Book chapter]. CCCU on request.

All outputs listed for Scherer prior to 2014 underpinned a REF 2014 impact case study, which also focused on impact associated with QP.

4. Details of the impact

Despite being a British Overseas Territory, same sex couples in the Cayman Islands (approximately 65,000 residents) do not have the same legal rights as non-LGBT+ residents, including marriage only being recognised between a man and a woman. The Cayman Human Rights Commission in written evidence to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry on the future of the UK Overseas Territories (2019), outlined a culture of 'homophobic

attitudes within sections of the legislature in the Cayman Islands and vocal sections of the community (particularly some of the churches) which 'has a potent and pernicious impact'. The Commission continued to detail a debate which took place in the Cayman Island's Legislative Assembly in 2015, where statements were made that equated homosexuality with bestiality and paedophilia, claimed that homosexuality was 'deviant behaviour', 'wicked and immoral' and a 'social and moral evil', and personal threats of violence were made towards homosexuals. Against this background, in 2016 the 7th *Queering Paradigms* conference (QP7) was held in the Cayman Islands, following local Caymanian activists approaching Scherer. The academic programme for QP7 explored queerness in the Caribbean socio-legal context, and featured high profile speakers including: Jamaican LGBT activist Maurice Tomlinson; Professor Eugenio Raúl Zaffaroni, Justice of the Inter American Court of Human Rights; and The Rt Rvd Dr. Alan Wilson (Bishop of Buckingham), who addressed the vocal Christian opposition to LGBT+ rights in the Caribbean. Raznovich, who had maintained close links with QP as a Senior Visiting Research Fellow, spoke on his own legal challenge to gain residency in the Cayman Islands based on his same sex marital status. QP7 shaped public, religious and political debate, contributed to a wider public understanding and awareness of LGBT+ rights in the Caymans, and formed part of the wider movement towards legal change in the islands.

Influencing public debate and raising awareness and understanding of LGBT+ rights in the Cayman Islands. The significance of the issues addressed by QP7 is given by widespread media coverage of the conference within the Caymans. Prior to the conference, The Cayman Compass and The Cayman Reporter (31 March 2016) reported on QP7's ambition to draw attention to human rights and sexuality in the region, and the Cayman News Service detailed Rt Rvd. Dr Alan Wilson's forthcoming contribution to the conference (4 April 2016). Cayman 27 (Cayman's only local TV news channel), reported on opposition to the conference from within the Cayman Island's Legislative Assembly (18 April 2016), and covered the fundraising dinner for QP7 (29 April 2016). In the week before QP7, local media attention intensified with coverage on Radio Cayman One; Cayman 27; Cayman Compass; and Cayman News Service (all 6 June 2016). The following day, QP7 was included in a report on Cayman 27 about same sex marriage, alongside comments from Raznovich, and The Cayman Compass published two articles reporting on the opposition faced by the conference. There were nearly 40 media items linked to QP7 in 2016, with the conference featuring on news channel Cayman 27 seven times between 6-16 June. The volume of comments online articles attracted was notable. The Cayman News Service averaged over 100 comments per article, articulating the polarised nature of debate on LGBT+ rights in the Caymans. [5.1]

The conference organisers were clear that all were welcome to attend, an opportunity taken by resident Velma Herod. Cayman 27 reported how 'One self-described Christian Caymanian told Cayman 27 she looked to her faith for the answer. "For years I've been hearing that this island is a God-fearing place, so why, what is the hatred, why do you hate these people, why? You cannot hate," said Velma Herod. She told Cayman 27 that discrimination against the LGBT community, and hatred of any sort, is out of step with the words of her savior. [...] Before her attendance [...] Ms. Herod said she never met an LGBT+ person. [...] Ms. Herod said she comes away from queering paradigms with a better understanding of why same sex marriage is such an important human rights issue.' [5.1]

Contributing to debate within the Christian community in the region and beyond. The conference attracted opposition from sections of the Christian community in the Cayman Islands. On 18 May 2016, an open letter was sent on behalf of the Cayman Ministers' Association and the Cayman Islands Conference of the Seventh Day Adventists to HM Governor of the Cayman Islands. They stated they were 'deeply concerned that your office has publicly been associated with the planned June 11–12, 2016 "Queering Paradigms" conference sponsored by Canterbury Christ Church University, UK [...] We are concerned that [...] [it] appears clearly to have been promoted with the objective of undermining the traditional Judeo-Christian values of the vast majority of Caymanian residents [...] Our feeling, however, is that there is an inherent conflict of interest involved when the holder of the Office of Governor appears to be supportive of a socio-ethical position that will be as divisive as those that have already polarised our legislature'. Mr V.

Arden Mclean MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), reported on the letter in the Legislative Assembly (LA) on the 6 June 2016 [5.2].

Following from this, an open letter (7 June 2016) published in the Cayman Compass from the Pastors of the Cayman Ministers Association expressed 'grave concern' over the conference 'by an entity called "Queering Paradigms" under the sponsorship of Canterbury Christ Church University in the UK'. They concluded that 'we call on the people of the Cayman Islands to stand strong in your defence of our biblical Christian position on morality and family – but to do more than stand. Express your concern to those in authority, making it clear that you also consider this recent development to be an affront to your values and the social health of our islands [...] there is a war being waged against our biblical, Christian values relating to marriage and family life.' [5.3] Coverage of QP7 also extended discussion of LGBT+ rights in the region to the wider Christian community. An article from the Cayman News Service was reposted by Anglican Mainstream on 5 April 2016, which published a further article about QP7 on 8 June 2016. The conference and the contribution being made by the Bishop of Buckingham was the subject of articles and comment on US outlets such as Episcopal Café (8 June 2016) and Juicy Ecumenism (27 June 2016), and featured on Religious Dispatches (13 June 2016), and Virtue Online (21 June 2016), who also reposted the Juicy Ecumenism article [5.1].

Influence on political debate and contribution to a move towards legal change. QP7 was a catalyst for further debate in the Cayman Island's Legislative Assembly (LA), documented in the Island's Official Hansard Report and the media. Cayman 27 reported that Anthony S. Eden, a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), had claimed in relation to QP7 that 'Cayman's way of life is at risk' and 'urged community members to stand up for the country's traditional values.' (18 April 2016) [5.1] On 2 June 2016 in the LA, Eden referred to the conference and his meeting (alongside 8 of his colleagues) with the Executive of the Pastors of the Cayman Ministers' Association and with Pastors of the Seventh Day Adventists Faith 'to express our concerns of foreign elements seeming to want us to change our marriage law and Constitution to allow same sex marriage or unions (or whatever they want to call it).' [5.4] On 3 June 2016, Opposition Leader W. McKeeva Bush referenced QP7 whilst speaking in the LA criticising what he saw as the position of the Governor of the Cayman Islands, 'I ponder why it is the Governor is taking her precious time to give credence and stir up more controversy of opening now the LGBT conference. The churches in this country are now going to have to stand in the gap [...] I do hope that Her Majesty's representative in this country will think a little bit about the desires of the vast majority of the people of these Islands.' Bush concluded by raising the issue of a referendum on same sex unions. [5.5] Premier Alden McLaughlin responded to these comments by ruling out a referendum and noting, 'we have a Bill of Rights that is part of our Constitution, which expressly prohibits discrimination on a range of issues, including, as the case law has interpreted the section, sexual orientation. And we are also bound by the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights which is in similar terms'. [5.6] Further evidence of debate related to QP7 is given by the conference featuring in the Cayman Human Rights Commission Annual Report (2016) which stated that it 'highlighted the stigma and discrimination that the LGBT+ community are faced with on a regular basis.' [5.7]

QP7 formed part of the wider movement towards legal change in the Cayman Islands. Conference attendee Gerardo Ochoa-Vargas described it as a 'watershed event' for the island [5.8]; one of the local organisers of QP7, Olivia Connelly, commented that it was a 'way to continue to build on the momentum' that had been developing in the Cayman Islands for LGBT+ rights [5.1], and Raznovich described QP7 as 'a milestone for change in the Cayman Islands' [5.8]. Following QP7, in July 2016, Raznovich won his legal battle to be granted residency in the Caymans based on his same sex marital status and continued campaigning for further legal change. In March 2019 following a lawsuit filed by a Caymanian-British same sex couple, the Cayman's Grand Court granted the couple the right to marry. The Court of Appeal later reversed the decision but specified that the territory should offer unions which had a 'legal status equivalent to marriage.' The resulting Domestic Partnership Bill was narrowly defeated in the Legislative Assembly in July 2020. In August 2020 the UK Government made a rare intervention into Cayman Islands politics, as they were left 'with no option but to act to uphold the law.' Renamed the Civil Partnership Bill, the bill

was assented into law in September 2020, enabling same sex couple to enter into a legally recognised union in the Cayman Islands. This, alongside 11 additional pieces of legislation, also provided access to other rights enjoyed by married couples in the Caymans, previously unavailable to the LGBT+ community. **[5.8]**

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Portfolio of media coverage for QP7.

5.2 Cayman Islands Legislative Assembly, Official Hansard Report Electronic Version, 2016/17 Session, 6 June 2016, 5th Sitting of the 1st Meeting.

<http://www.legislativeassembly.ky/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/12418462.PDF> Contribution of V. Arden Mclean p.163.

5.3 Open letter from the Cayman Ministers Association published in the Cayman Compass (7 June 2016) <https://www.caymancompass.com/2016/06/07/ministers-oppose-lgbt-event/>

5.4 Cayman Islands Legislative Assembly, Official Hansard Report Electronic Version, 2016/17 Session, 2 June 2016, 3rd Sitting of the 1st Meeting.

<http://www.legislativeassembly.ky/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/12388333.PDF> Contribution of Anthony S. Eden pp 102-103 and

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2172&v=1a4nsw9BLuk at 1:11:24

5.5 Cayman Islands Legislative Assembly, Official Hansard Report Electronic Version, 2016/17 Session, 3 June 2016, 4th Sitting of the 1st Meeting.

<http://www.legislativeassembly.ky/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/12388338.PDF> Contribution of W. McKeeva Bush pp 120-121 and

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=XdnRuQGAbus at 24:33.

5.6 Cayman Islands Legislative Assembly, Official Hansard Report Electronic Version, 2016/17 Session, 10 June 2016, 8th Sitting of the 1st Meeting.

<http://www.legislativeassembly.ky/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/12418468.PDF> Contribution of Premier Alden McLaughlin p. 306.

5.7 Cayman Island Human Rights Commission Annual Report 2016.

http://www.humanrightscommission.ky/upimages/publicationdoc/HumanRightsCommission2016AnnualReport_270317_1490903641_1490903641.pdf (pp.15-16).

5.8 PDF of comment from Gerardo Ochoa-Vargas and Raznovich, and collated press related to legal developments in the Cayman Islands since 2016.