

THE
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THE
INTIMATE

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INTIMACYA USEFUL CATEGORY OF TRANSNATIONAL
ANALYSIS*Ara Wilson***THE WORK OF INTIMACY**

Recently, feminist and queer studies of global power have turned to the concept of intimacy both as a subject and as an analytic rubric. They pair intimacy with globalization, or with its predecessors, colonialism and imperialism, or with the umbrella concepts, modernization and capitalist modernity.¹

I see three reasons for this global-intimate pairing. One reason is that global political economic conditions have profound effects on human relationships, notably by introducing and then altering sweeping divisions between realms deemed public and private. Second, as feminist and queer works insist, intimate life is not confined to the private sphere but plays a role in the presumably impersonal spheres of government and economy, which in turn regulate the intimate domain. The third reason that scholars are examining intimacy alongside globalization stems from their dissatisfaction with the established terms used to understand the relationship between these domains, alternately macro and micro, global and local, public and private.

This essay offers an overview of interpretations of intimate life in global capitalist modernity. It centers on critical approaches to the political economy of intimacy—frameworks that are designed to understand how patterns of intimacy occur in relation to social power. Accordingly, the essay emphasizes concrete descriptions that rework received interpretations of globalization, government, capitalism, and intimacy. The cases discussed include particular countries (the United States, Thailand, Australia) and studies of transnational processes that cross countries' borders.

The concept of intimacy captures deeply felt orientations and entrenched practices that make up what people consider to be their “personal” or “private” lives and their interior selves, and includes positively valued feelings like affection but also problematic feelings like fear or disgust. The works I discuss here use intimacy to describe modes of relatedness associated loosely with personal feelings or identifications, in contrast, at least officially, to formal interactions within governments, markets, or modern institutions. As readers will see, if they do not already, the meanings of intimacy in these discussions vary quite a bit. The meanings are not fixed and can often seem vague: *intimacy* is not a term of art in any field. Why, then, does this loose term hold appeal for global analysis? I reached for the term *intimacy* in my own ethnographic work on Thailand.² My mixed results led me to become interested in understanding how other scholars are using the term and why they find the rubric of intimacy productive.

My conclusion is that the term’s very lack of fixity is part of its appeal. It allows scholars to produce descriptions of the world order that do not re-create but rather scrutinize concepts that have often unwittingly perpetuated the inequality produced by governments and capital. By not building on the inherited associations of concepts associated with intimacy—concepts like family—the rubric facilitates a nondeterministic, nonreductive exploration of structures of feeling,³ public feelings,⁴ and biopolitics in relation to globalizing contexts. Used critically, the concept of intimacy facilitates the simultaneous recognition of social patterns in relationships and ideological norms about relationships. The term “intimacy” offers an appealing rubric for interpretations that undo familiar connotations about “private” life by emphasizing its historical and social situation—for example, in the everyday effects of global modernity or the inner operations of social hierarchies. The essay explores the promise of “intimacy” as an analytical, not merely descriptive, term for critical scholarship on globalization.

Collectively, much of the critical work on intimacy shows how patterns in intimate life have changed with realigned boundaries of public and private in civic life, governments, commerce, and nuclear families. As an illustration of these shifts, the essay offers the example of gated communities and shopping malls in the United States. Then I look at ways that norms about intimacy are bound up with hierarchies of race, nation, and sexuality. These examples focus on Europe’s former settler colonies that are now multicultural liberal nation-states and a substantial portion of what is called the first world. I then turn what is known as the third world or global south, emphasizing a transnational orientation to global/local relations that recognizes linkages across richer and poorer

countries (or global north and south). The rubric of “intimate economies” provides one model for thinking about global intimacy in ways that avoid a top-down image of impersonal forces “penetrating” intimate life, understood as local. The final section of the essay extrapolates from these cases the key themes informing the study of global intimacies in order to outline the emerging use of *intimacy* as a critical analytical term.

GATED INTIMACY

Wherever the title of streets and parks may rest, they have immemorially been held in trust for the use of the public and, time out of mind, have been used for purposes of assembly, communicating thoughts between citizens, and discussing public questions. Such use of the streets and public places has, from ancient times, been a part of the privileges, immunities, rights and liberties of citizens.

—1939 U.S. SUPREME COURT DECISION

The critical intimacy scholarship I discuss here places intimacy in relation to global modernity, in particular to late-twentieth-century social shifts associated with transnational capitalism. The kinds of intimacy these works consider include but go beyond conjugal couples and nuclear families. In fact, they want to recognize a form of public intimacy, the intimacy of public assembly, the kind of relations that involve “discussing public questions,” which the 1939 U.S. Supreme Court decision cited above used to argue for the right of union advocates to discuss labor rights in public. Critical explorations of global intimacies explore ideals about relatedness (particularly the ways in which race is involved in norms for intimate life); the infrastructure for intimacy; and ways people live out everyday relations.

One of the main sites for investigating modern intimacy is the United States, which surely is due to the solipsism of U.S. researchers and to U.S. global power, but which is also an understandable focus, given that the United States represents a frontier of capitalist social experimentation. The portrait that has emerged in American Studies is of privatized public intimacy. Understanding that public civic life is formed through connections that involve forms of intimacy, this work shows how changes over the past few decades have supplanted public intimacies with privatized commercial or domestic forms. (Indeed, the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which

expanded the rights of corporations to speech designed to influence elections, offers an illuminating contrast to the 1939 Court's understanding of free speech as a public good.) At the same time, valorized forms of intimacy—particularly the conjugal couple, usually heterosexual but now also homosexual—have become national symbols in ways that exclude other relationships and that reinforce racial or national hierarchies.

One concrete example of the new geography of intimacy in the United States is the rise of the gated community. The names of many of these planned communities suggest roots in aristocratic estates, conveyed by Anglo-Saxon words for woods (oaks), water (creek, falls, lake), or large houses (manor)—“names that whisper exclusivity,” as *USA Today* puts it.⁶ This fantastical heritage aside, these residential arrangements represent a new mode of creating community, one that numerically represents a significant proportion of American residences.⁷ As Setha Low explains in her study of such a community, gated communities are “a response to transformations in the political economy of late-twentieth-century urban America.” She summarizes the broad trends: “Globalization and economic restructuring also weaken existing social relations. . . . Social control mechanisms, such as the police and schools, are no longer seen as effective. This breakdown in local control threatens some neighborhood residents, and the gated residential community becomes a viable and socially acceptable option.”⁸

Commentators agree that people's attraction to planned communities reflects frustration with the government's provisioning of security or services: in short, they seek solutions through private property rather than through public government. Such fears of lessened control, Low notes, are imagined through racial and class terms. Gated communities allow residents to use capitalist markets and property rights to construct a controlled mode of intimacy. Gated communities strictly regulate their space, limiting house colors, street parking, number and kinds of pets, or numbers of visitors. One woman, described in the report as a grandmother, violated policies by kissing a friend goodnight outside her house.⁹ Gated communities thus restrict the behaviors of their members in ways that bear upon their relations with other people (and animals). They also restrict the freedoms of nonmembers. These regulations put pressure on contradictions between private contract, property rights, and individual rights that have led to legal challenges in court.¹⁰

Residence associations selectively substitute private services for public services. While some of these developments build from the ground up, most convert preexisting public roads and infrastructure into private spaces, using law to authorize this transformation. Gated communities, analysts suggest, replace

public space with privatized spaces, yet still they do not entirely fund themselves: rather they draw on public resources, including fire departments or special education for children, or rely on lessened obligations to the region or nation in the form of tax breaks.¹¹ Some legal reasoning proposes that, because the residential associations wield power associated with the state—they are “virtual governments”¹²—they should be treated as statelike bodies in the law. The point here is that the changes to public allocations of security, education, land, and so forth, and the increasingly private versions of neighborhood life, represent crucial conditions for intimate life, broadly understood. The withdrawal from surrounding publics creates a separate space for local relations that are predicated on exclusivity and defined by private property. The intimacies that are prioritized in these secure residential formations are nuclear families, intraclass, and planned rather than serendipitous: they are also often racially homogenous, and often populated with white people (although a relatively high proportion of Latinos reside in gated communities as well).¹³ The conditions that enable such a withdrawal, and the desire for it, are indicative of trends in modern American intimacy.

Shopping malls also privatize the public, while being subsidized by public funds. The new trend in shopping malls, the “lifestyle mall,” recreates old-time shopping districts, with “pedestrian friendly streetscapes”¹⁴ and pseudo village greens, usually in upscale suburbs. In Columbus, Ohio, the Easton Town Center is a large mall that incorporates luxury rental apartments. It offers a fountain for toddlers' enjoyment. The planners of Easton emphasize their “philosophy of ‘place making,’ or positively impacting communities through the creation of dynamic mixed-use town centers.”¹⁵ In architecture and imagery, lifestyle shopping malls and gated communities invoke the symbolism of older forms of intimacy that were created in the public spheres of towns. Upscale stores are located in one-story “shops” lining private lanes given classic street names, like Main Street. The intended impression is that Banana Republic or Pottery Barn stores have moved into preexisting spaces downtown that formerly housed the drug store and its soda fountain, the haberdashery, or the barbershop.

Images of old-fashioned publics signal nostalgia for a world that never truly existed as imagined and are not re-created in a commercial simulacra. The Streets at Southpoint, a shopping center in Durham, North Carolina, includes bronze sculptures in the stylized realism of Norman Rockwell depicting children in various activities: playing in the decorative fountain, selling newspapers, walking a dog, or climbing a lamppost—notably, activities that would be prohibited in those very spaces of the mall today. Mall design sentimentalizes

public life while the way of life the malls enact—for example, dependence on automobiles and privatization of public land—eviscerates actual public commons. Posted signs list prohibited activities, which include political activities like campaigning¹⁶ and in particular restrict the actions of teenagers with curfews and codes for dress or conduct. These prohibitions reflect the fact that this is private space where many rights otherwise guaranteed in public spaces can be limited. Malls and gated communities exemplify commercially produced modes of selective, privatized public intimacy. Why has this privatized intimacy, defined by consumption, replaced activities oriented to neighborhoods, solidarity among workmates, ethnicity, or political parties?

The political scientist Robert D. Putnam captures changes to local relationships with the memorable image of Americans “bowling alone.”¹⁷ Bowling leagues, once prevalent, have diminished: more people bowl solo in the lanes. This quotidian example, for Putnam, is symptomatic of broader changes in people’s sense of relatedness in the United States. It conveys a widespread decrease in civic participation, whether in community centers, religious networks, or union membership. Putnam attributes these transformations to such features of modern life as residential patterns (the rise of suburbs) and commercial media (television). The erosion in public life has political consequences. It erodes a sense of group interest and dialogue about public life, substituting the discourse of national television shows or talk radio for conversations in the community. It erodes what can be thought of as public intimacy.

SETTLER INTIMACY

Gated communities, and their nostalgic constructions of family and neighborhood, illustrate a point that Elizabeth Povinelli, Lauren Berlant, and others have explored in depth: that in late-twentieth-century Western societies—Europe and its settler societies (Australia, Canada, South Africa, the United States), the evaluation of forms of intimacy is tied up with social inequalities. A valorization of the conjugal couple, in particular, operates symbolically through notions of modernity and nationality and pragmatically through law, economics, and popular culture. Public evaluations of proper forms of intimacy tend to involve racial and national associations, denigrating modes of relations that characterize first-world communities of color, indigenous populations, or non-Western societies. In this way, investments in certain forms of intimacy as emblems of liberal modernity perpetuate de facto, if not de jure, social inequality.

Moreover, as with the erosion of bowling leagues and other forms of public participation, consequential judgments about the worth of different modes of intimacy also erode the intimacy of the public sphere.

A cardinal example of the interconnection of race, nation, and intimacy is miscegenation law, an interconnection that was reformulated, not ended, with its dismantling in the United States by the Supreme Court decision in *Loving v. Virginia*. With the end of most formal regulations of individual consensual intimacy, evaluations of relationships remain bound up with racial and national inequality. Robyn Wiegman’s essay “Intimate Publics: Race, Property, and Personhood” considers the ways that kinship relations are adjudicated in a U.S. context where biotechnology, formal racial equality, and liberal economics present a new terrain of family formation. Contract relations, which mediate “between the seemingly private world of personal affect, intimacy, and reproduction and the public realm of social exchange,” take on greater weight in establishing legitimate kinship relations.¹⁸ Reproductive technologies like surrogacy or in vitro fertilization rely on contracts to navigate new modes of reproduction and kinship, but at times the outcomes of reproductive technology are legally contested, particularly when they involve an interracial set of participants. Many court decisions betray “class, race, and heterosexual assumptions about ‘proper’ maternity and ‘good’ family that coalesce in the naturalization of the white patriarchal nuclear family as the state’s normative ideal.”¹⁹ These contestations over kinship cannot be reduced to one axis of race or gender, Wiegman argues; rather she emphasizes a plurality, noting that decisions about kinship in complicated reproductive scenarios are informed by multiple histories of racialization (including histories of immigration and whiteness), sex/gender regimes, and economic operations (class, property, and contract).²⁰

Also exploring discourses of relationships in American neoliberal modernity, Lauren Berlant’s work offers a highly influential framework for critical approaches to intimacy. Berlant excavates interpretations of modern intimacy in the United States, particularly the privileged place of married heterosexuality in conceptions of America. She suggests that “a virulent form of revitalized national heterosexuality,” one “that is complexly white and middle class,”²¹ has become the anointed emblem of U.S. citizenship: “A nationalist ideology of marriage and the couple is now a central vehicle for the privatization of citizenship: first, via moralized issues around privacy, sex, and reproduction that serve as alibis for white racism and patriarchal power; but also in the discourse of a United States that is . . . an effect of the private citizen’s acts.”²²

Berlant argues that such privileging privatizes civic life and erodes public intimacy. Narrating civic life through celebrations of married, reproductive, heterosexual intimate lives perpetuates “a fantasy that private life is the real in contrast to collective life.”²³ Prioritizing family in this way therefore “supports disinvesting in cultural, collective forms of personhood while promoting an image of the legitimate, authentic individual situated in the spaces of intimate privacy.”²⁴ The legitimate forms of intimacy are normative domestic life—mainly heterosexual, but in some areas homosexual as well—and/or bonding through shared references to Hollywood stars, television shows, or top-40 music. Civic life becomes reduced to the couple or the television viewer.

Elizabeth Povinelli’s iconoclastic project *The Empire of Love* explores contrasting evaluations of intimacy in the United States and Australia. In these settler societies, she says, intimate relations are categorized according to their creation through social inheritance or individual choice, a criteria that also maps onto racial identities. Studying an intentional group known as radical families, who are associated with modern life, and Australian aborigines, who are associated with tradition, Povinelli shows how the assumptions about intimacy in settler states has material consequences.²⁵ Like Berlant, she sees whiteness and racialization as central to official differentiations of intimacy in these liberal multicultural states.

Echoing Michel Foucault,²⁶ Povinelli writes that “the intimate couple is a key transfer point between, on the one hand, liberal imaginaries of contractual economies, politics, and sociality, and, on the other, liberal forms of power in the contemporary world.”²⁷ For Povinelli, the conjugal couple—for example, husband and wife—is a node connecting liberal beliefs to resource distribution. That is, couples formed through choice receive more benefits from state and economy, while “traditional” relations receive less. This uneven distribution of resources to different populations in turn contradicts the liberal principles of individual freedom or egalitarianism championed by settler societies.

Povinelli argues that liberal societies map global intimacy according to criteria of individual freedom, social constraints, and contract. The achievement of individual choice in intimate love is located in the West in this symbolic map, although in ways that are balanced with respect for social constraints. Excessive constraint from families or tradition is located in non-Western cultures. This map of intimacy recreates the territorial, temporal, and civilizational otherness of the global south.²⁸

These approaches to intimacy share characteristics that mark an analytical use of the concept of intimacy. Influenced by queer theory, they investigate the

ways that heterosexuality acts as a norm governing social life (that is, heteronormativity). Critical studies of intimacy also consider the ways that race, gender, and nation operate together rather than as separate social arenas, just as they show how social life is divided into public and private domains rather than assume those divisions as given.²⁹ The feminist and queer lens in these works enriches the historical sociological account of the erosion of the infrastructure for public life by adding attention not only to race, sex, and gender, but also to the ideological and affective dimensions of altered conditions for intimacy.

TRANSNATIONAL INTIMACY

Using the United States or Australia or Europe to discuss global intimacy would be disappointing if it intended these Western powers to stand in for the world—that is, to suggest that it portrays the cutting edge of intimacy that other regions will follow. The descriptions of intimacy presented here do not intend the United States to represent but to illustrate how political economic changes involve intimacy. They therefore understand U.S. social patterns within a transnational frame that includes the aftermath of colonial empires and slave economies and attends to broad shifts associated with the global economy and international relations. These shifts include the globalization of manufacturing from the (partially) unionized global north to the (mostly) nonunionized global south. The functions of the state have been rearranged, with much of state provisioning reassigned to corporations (subcontracted military services) or nonprofits, including religious institutions, and in general reducing the government’s role in channeling national resources to mitigate the uneven effects of a capitalist economy or historical inequality. Such transformations changed livelihoods, communities, and allegiances, altering the conditions for and the norms about intimacy felt with fellow citizens but also with kin, neighbors, and friends.

Many scholars, particularly in the United States, prefer the concept of transnational to the concept of global or international.³⁰ The turn to transnational analysis was sparked empirically by pronounced changes in political economy, social formation, and cultural currents worldwide. The post-1970 period of “globalization” has intensified zones that supersede yet rely on nations—for instance, migration flows, multinational corporations, human rights networks, security apparatus, and the European Union. Conventionally, discussions of sex and gender systems have often used the nation-state as the unit of analysis (often

implicitly, as with much U.S.-based work that fails to register the specificities of the American location). Transnational analysis considers how national borders are established and reinforced as well as how various flows cross them. The mainstream concept of the international can obscure ways that local life is affected by phenomena that are not confined to the nation state. Scholars who are more skeptical about taking national sovereignty as a given in descriptions of global phenomenon use the term *transnational* to convey an image of the world made up of flows that transverse national boundaries.

Rethinking national and global domains has implications for thinking about intimate realms. The increase in links across countries suggests that intimate life takes place through flows and sites that cross national borders—for example, through sex tourism or the dispersal of family members in different countries. Such rethinking has stimulated reflection on the relations between queer life and the reinforcing or crossing of national borders.³¹ Extending these insights back in time, scholars have reconsidered intimate life in the emergence of states, nations, and empires.³² Intimacy, therefore, offers a basis for rethinking national and transnational phenomena.

Ann Stoler's body of work has helped shape this direction. Her work insists that colonial regimes operated intimately—that is, that they affected sexual desire, child rearing, and family life. The intimate domain was central to colonial rule. European families living in the colonies were anxious about how to raise their children—nurtured by native nannies and playmates—as Europeans. Intimate life was a weak link in the precarious reproduction of European identities and the racial justification of colonial rule.³³ Stoler's historical analysis has influenced other historical studies³⁴ as well as research on contemporary investments in intimacy. Contemporary studies explore how facets of modernity, neoliberalism, and capitalism shape prevailing conceptions of intimacy and, vice versa, how ideals for intimate life are intricate components of global political economy.

Neville Hoad's book *African Intimacies* explores the problems of applying the concept of sexuality to the non-Western world, particularly in a region subject to the sexualizing and racial gaze of Europe. His point is not only that words describing sexuality, such as "gay," are culturally specific and should not be imposed on other societies, but that sexuality itself as way to categorize people was developed in Europe and had political uses. The use of sexuality to describe African societies, then, cannot be separated from ongoing histories of European imperialism because it involved codifying African sexuality as an object for discussion, evaluation, and regulation.³⁵ Hoad's analysis embeds modes

of relatedness within contexts of global powers, notably colonial and ongoing imperial forces of Europe and the United States, and views knowledge about intimacy as itself part of that broader context.

INTIMATE ECONOMIES

Cultural studies of the politics of intimacy, like those of Berlant, have focused especially on "the rhetorics, laws, ethics and ideologies of the hegemonic public sphere."³⁶ Others have extended this critical analysis of global intimacy by exploring intimacy in conjunction with the economy, particularly the effects of transnational capitalism around the world.

In hegemonic understandings, by which I mean those emerging through Western-dominated versions of modernity, the intimate and economic are different realms. Common sense understands the intimate realm to be *non-economic*, or at least nonproductive: part of what defines the values of family, romance, and friendship is their stark difference from market values (a distinction that attributes masculinity to the market sphere and femininity to the domestic sphere). (These intimacies are also often conceived as nonstate and nonpolitical.) To continue with the generalization, this deep logic expects the private nuclear family to buffer the cold marketplace by offering its workers the sustenance of human relations motivated by affection, not instrumentality. And often they do.

Modern economies depend on these divisions, in fact. The mark of modern retail and service industries is the removal of signs of workers' personal life: you should not see where workers take their meals in a modern establishment. As the New Zealand feminist advocate Marilyn Waring has noted, a national economy is measured in terms of productivity according to market exchange (even illegal economies can be counted), while the work and exchanges that people do in intimate, nonmarket contexts is not counted.³⁷

The notion that market forms are nonintimate, generic, and potentially universal presents one of the most powerful and effective discourses worldwide. This hegemonic view—enduring even after bubble economies burst dramatically—discourages inquiries into the interaction of capitalism and intimacy. Virtually by definition, capitalism is seen as external and impersonal, at least in the West. Fast-food chains, airport terminals, and shopping malls have become seemingly neutral backdrops in the first world, although in the third world they are marked as an incursion of Western modernity, for better or worse.

Neoclassical economics holds that capitalist economic forms offer a neutral vehicle for diverse peoples to realize security, happiness, and democracy; markets realize people's desires without radically altering what orthodox theories of modernity consider to be intimate life: notably heterosexual couples, nuclear families, and domestic realms that, by definition, are separated from capitalist economies (except through consumption).

The models for economically developing third-world countries known as modernization theory followed much of this logic. To achieve capitalist modernity, modernization theory called for separating intimate relations like kinship from (wage) work and governance. One example would be the shift from family farm to agro-business. In retail, it manifests as the evolution from shophouse to department store. The shophouse was a prevalent business form in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a two- to three-story building where a family lived, made or processed goods, and sold them—that is, it combined production, distribution, and consumption, economic functions that were ideally to be separated in a “modernizing” economy. Typically it was not home to a nuclear family: rather, multiple generations and hired hands typically lived and worked together. As capitalism “penetrates” local society, it disaggregates practices that traditionally have been comingled into different spheres: state, market, and domestic.³⁸ Family owners do not live in a department store. Modern businesses hire wage-labor, which belongs to the formal market economy, ideally separated from the “public” sphere of government. Activities associated with kin and community—activities that had been intertwined with economic operations of the shophouse or family farm—become relegated to the domestic realm of households, a “private” domain whose ideal economic roles are confined to savings and consumption.³⁹ Major policies for development in the third world thus intended to rearrange intimate functions and locate them in a private, nonpolitical realm. At the same time, Amy Lind’s queer critique of the development industry argues that it prioritizes “the heterosexual household as the foundation of family reproduction and survival” and sees this version of intimacy as the key to growing a nation’s economy.⁴⁰

Denaturalizing the universality of capitalism, therefore, involves advancing an alternate vision of the nexus of intimacy and the global economy. Contrasting approaches to the economy insist that it is not separate from intimate life but is implicated in social relations and identities. These approaches take various forms in feminist theory, queer theory, cultural anthropology, human geography, and heterodox economics, including Marxism. In these frameworks, economic systems are social and cultural processes that affect, and are shaped by, intimate relations.⁴¹

Classical anthropology emphasized that kinship has economic functions, particularly in societies considered technologically primitive and without a state. More recent ethnographic studies have demonstrated how global capitalism is made from social relationships, including intimate relationships—that is, that the formal, public “economy” depends on and is inextricable from the realm considered, in modern sensibilities, “private.” Indeed, modern capitalist markets emerged in and through class, gender, and ethnic relations, relations that are defined and sustained through different forms of intimacy. Studies of women factory workers have shown how kinship and gender are woven into the frontier of industrial modernity in Southeast Asia, for example.⁴²

In my ethnography of Bangkok, I proposed the term *intimate economies* as a rubric for analyzing the ways that intimate and economic life, presumed separate, in practice overlap. Intimate life (for example, relations associated with gender, sexuality, or ethnicity) crosses into the “public” sphere of markets and jobs, while those public realms profoundly affect people’s “private” interactions and self-conceptions. Numerous works demonstrate how the public sphere of state and markets affects intimate life in locations around the world. The efforts to demonstrate the converse, how intimacy shapes the public sphere (or globalization) have increased. Magdalena Villarreal, for example, argues that social relations are involved in “the processes of negotiation and creation of value” itself. Studying rural Mexico, she sees “social resources as currencies which are situationally attributed exchange value.”⁴³ For example, the interpretation of a customer’s relations with the shopkeeper and others in the community determines whether or not he receives credit or what he pays for goods. Through this Latin American example, Villarreal inverts the model of market exchange penetrating economies of affection by demonstrating how social life produces literal market values.

An ethnographic understanding of the interaction between intimate life and the global economy also requires recognizing that there is not just one economic form but a plurality of economic modes that inform local life. “Capitalism’s others,” as J. K. Gibson-Graham put it, include the economies of affection, also known as kin economy, folk economy, or moral economy.⁴⁴ Much of canonical cultural anthropology has been dedicated to elaborating the patterns, categories, and roles that define systems of exchange other than the capitalist market system. Classical studies on kinship, for example, chronicle the rules and regulations governing the exchange of wealth, resources, and women as wives among groups. Indeed, the exchange of women has been seen as foundational to culture and society itself.⁴⁵ In Thailand, the practice and ideal of exchange organizes a

number of relationships: parent-child (including children's, especially daughters', indebtedness to parents), senior-junior, husband-wife (and her family), laity-monkhood, human-spirit world, and friendship. Different economic systems structure intimacy differently. Moral economies and economies of affection are not (generally) guided by extracting profit, technically speaking, although families may accumulate great wealth. Rather, their aim is to reproduce intimacy with the human and spiritual world.⁴⁶

Capitalism differs from its economic others precisely in how it involves intimate relations. A common observation of third-world economies or "traditional societies" is that their markets and states are deeply intertwined with kinship and ethnicity, an arrangement that has been called an "economy of affection." Even with capitalist development, economies of affection continue to exist. Modernization theories read these as (problematic) cultural survivals that are obstacles to the separation of public and private realms—that is, modernization theory evaluates societies in relation to how much intimate life is kept apart from economic or government functions. Other interpretations see such admixed systems as typical of colonial and postcolonial cultures and not at all out of keeping with capitalism as usual.⁴⁷ Take the phenomenon labeled "crony capitalism" in third-world societies. Nepotistic business practice presents an example of economies of affection changing and thriving within capitalist development.⁴⁸

As only one mode of organizing provisioning or material transactions (albeit an aggressive one), capitalism necessarily interacts with other systems of organizing work and exchange. Modernization theory sees the mix of intimate life with nonmarket economies as a backward economic form that needs to be supplanted by capitalist markets in order to progress.⁴⁹

Many progressive critics of capitalist development value economies of affection positively. Nonmarket, nonstate versions of public intimacy can be the basis for challenging exploitation. When capitalist development imposes more impersonal relations in public life, people assert the legitimacy of their precapitalist modes of public intimacies. The term *moral economy* was coined to convey the ways that noncapitalist expectations about public sociality have been a source of resistance to capitalist developments.⁵⁰ In a similar vein, Aihwa Ong interprets the outbursts of spirit possessions in Southeast Asian factories as an embodied critique of the dehumanized relations entailed in industrial manufacturing.⁵¹

The attempt to reconstitute "traditional" intimate life can lay claim to a return to authentic origins. The ways that traditions for intimacy are interpreted

or lived out are by-products of modern life. As such, they often reflect hierarchical evaluations of good and bad modes of intimacy. Thai heterosexual relations have transformed markedly in relation to twentieth-century political economic forces. Migration from China to Siam-Thailand changed from mainly single male sojourners to married couples; the bride gift from a groom to the bride and family underwent enormous inflation; courtship became more erotic and oriented to dating couples; and the suburban nuclear family has become an emblem of modern citizenship.⁵² The heterosexual couple has come to prominence in recent years, in social space granted to male-female dating and in representations of families that center more on the husband-wife pair. Despite the modernity of this version of heterosexuality, this form of intimacy has been rendered as authentic and traditional, while the apparent modernity of homosexual intimacy—as *gay* or *tom* or *dee* identities—renders them less authentic, less "Thai," and linked with materialist values associated with capitalist modernity: selfishness and a lack of control.⁵³ The *kathoey*—a term that commonly refers to male-to-female transgender individuals or transsexuals (or to transgenderism in general)—is a figure of long-standing history in Thai society: yet the *kathoey* has never become emblematic of Thai tradition in official discourse. What counts as traditional forms of intimacy, in other words, is both selective and defined in and by the present.

The heterosexualization of society presents a typical pattern. Modern versions of heterosexuality, indelibly shaped by Western modernity (for example, in the white wedding format or the concept of heterosexuality as psychologically normal) are embraced as manifestations of tradition in many societies, while homosexual intimacies, even when forms of same-sex sexuality had been integrated in historical practice, are rejected as foreign. One example is the state homophobia found in Africa in Zimbabwe, Uganda, and other countries, which assert tradition but are the product of colonial rule, market disruption, and globalizing, U.S.-politicized religious campaigns.⁵⁴ The point is that celebrations of traditional ways of life as sources of resistance to global capitalism often overlook the ways that moral economies are not only moral but moralistic and exclusionary as well.

The study of global intimacies has methodological dimensions. To study global intimacies, where do you look? Many studies of the effects of globalization on intimate spheres look to family and village life, sites understood to be penetrated by global capitalism, while others focus on expressions of same-sex sexuality or transgender identity. Another ethnographic approach targets the sites of capitalist modernity itself, arguing that the interplay of global markets

and intimate life should be studied *within* public sites themselves. As Berlant says, "Institutions not usually associated with feeling can be read as institutions of intimacy."⁵⁵ Applying Berlant to the global economy, the banal, deliberately generic, modern sites of corporate capitalism—fast-food franchises, airports, stock market trading floors, or shopping malls—might be recognized not only as signs of eroding intimacy, but as significant stages for intimate life as it plays out in the present. Indeed, by now, more intimate life transpires in Thailand's shopping malls than in its Buddhist temples.⁵⁶ Thick descriptions of quotidian public culture illuminate the intimate dimensions of global modernity.

INTIMATE REPLACEMENTS

The term *intimacy* commonly provides a synonym for a concept of proximate, close relations, often connected with the interior and the personal: sexual and romantic relations; "local," microlevel, or proximate relations; "private life"; embodied life;⁵⁷ or psychological dimensions. The critical use of intimacy as an analytical term draws on this set of meanings but in ways that critique prevailing conceptions of globalization, governments, and personal life. In so doing, these studies attempt to provide conceptual depictions of the intimate nature of states, economies, and globalization. In her germinal 1988 essay, "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis," Joan Scott argues that gender is useful as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power."⁵⁸ The emergence of *intimacy* as a term common to critical scholarship suggests that it offers another way to signify relations of power, a way that subsumes, or differs from, available critical concepts like gender or sexuality.

The proliferation of the category of intimacy reflects dissatisfaction with inherited terms and the theories behind them. Therefore, one way to understand what intimacy is doing in transnational analysis is to identify what intimacy is *not*.⁵⁹ The use of intimacy aims to avoid replicating problems identified in mainstream and radical depictions of social life. Such concepts include identity, kinship, and the public/private divide. The turn to intimacy speaks to scholars' desire for a flexible term that allows new descriptions that do not reify nation, identity, family, or related categorical units. In this way, identity is a placeholder defined as much in negative terms—what the author does not want her description to do—as by any delimited content.

In prevalent analyses of modernization, intimacy offers a convenient term for demarcating familiar distinctions between public/private and local/global.

"Intimate," in these meanings, contrasts the authenticity of local life with external impositions, usually understood as modern, Western, or capitalist. However critical the intent of these discussions, their writing presupposes that intimacy belongs to the local level or the private sphere. Given that the domestic and private realm is glossed as feminine in the culture of Western modernity, these uses of *intimate* have gendered connotations that often remain unexamined in accounts of family or community life in a context of globalization.

The critical scholarship I have described counters the understanding of intimate as a private, local realm that until recently was cordoned off from broader forces. It does not position intimacy as a private realm in the conventional sense of "private." Instead, this vein of critical global analysis deconstructs the separation of "the economy" from family, home, or private life. Some of the work focuses on public intimacy: "modes of attachment that make persons public and collective and that make collective scenes intimate spaces."⁶⁰ Feminist scholars examining the public/private divide have shown how this divide, and the gendered associations with each side, resulted from economic, political, and intellectual influences.⁶¹ Capitalist modernity, including its theories, produced the commonsense view that the private, domestic, and feminine sphere is nonproductive and economically irrelevant. At the same time, this separation constituted modernity. As Berlant puts it, "Liberal society was founded on the migration of intimacy expectations between the public and the domestic."⁶² The analysis of intimate economies, for another example, denaturalizes market economies by showing they intermix with intimate life.

For critical scholarship, *intimacy* facilitates analyses that incorporate reflections not only about mainstream concepts but also about terms that emerged through radical theory. In feminist and queer studies, the use of intimacy replaces the rubric of identity and the mandates of identity politics. As Povinelli insists of her work, "This book is not interested in the study of identities so much as it is interested in the social matrix out of which these identities and their divisions emerge."⁶³ Intimacy emphasizes relationality. Povinelli and other feminist and queer scholars employ intimacy to discuss identity in terms of relationship, presenting gender, race, and sexuality as inextricable from, and realized through, relays of power. They do so in ways that incorporate criticisms of Marxist interpretations that reduced social relations to economics; studies of sociality continue to grapple with ways to recognize the force of political economic contexts without that economic reductionism. More obviously, the turn to intimacy in its erotic meanings results from the way that sexuality, as a domain of knowledge, has been problematized. Specifically, Michel Foucault argued

that the modern category of sexuality—as a real phenomenon to be measured, known, and felt—rather than liberating people has been a significant way to subject them to modern social power. Clearly, this critical use of intimacy does not mean scholars eschew gender or sexuality as categories of analysis that illuminate relations of power, in the words of Joan Scott. The examples above depend on the analysis of queer politics, heteronormative mandates, women's bodies, sex/gender regimes, and the “white patriarchal nuclear family,” in Wiegman's terms.⁶⁴ In particular, scholarship on globalization (such as that found in this volume) continues to demonstrate the raw and subtle ways that gender is involved in transnational processes, a commitment manifest in my own research. But the increasing use of intimacy flags shared desires for rubrics encompassing or sidestepping the specific meanings of gender and sexuality. *Intimacy*, as an unfixed but legible term, works to cover an open-ended array of relations (rather than assuming the couple or family);⁶⁵ to avoid assigning identities based on relationship (for example, gay identity based on same-sex practices); and to investigate relationships alongside their categorizations (for example, both experienced family relations and the evaluations of proper kinship).

For anthropology, intimacy joins other efforts to escape the weighty associations that adhere in concepts of kinship. The ethnographic use of intimacy resonates with the concept of relatedness parlayed by new kinship studies.⁶⁶ The use of relatedness “in opposition to, or alongside, ‘kinship’” flags an intent to discover, rather than assume, which modes of relatedness given peoples find salient and to displace the biological/social binary of kinship concepts.⁶⁷

That intimacy is *not* these particular received concepts, but is also not some other clearly delineated referent, suggests that *intimate* is serving as a placeholder in critical analyses of global life. For now, intimacy allows analysts to look at relational life—including the feelings and acts that comprise it, in relation to political and economic regimes—in conventional sociological terms and to consider both micro and macro levels, although of course the critical study of intimacy eschews this neat division. The term *intimacy* is intended to resist ideological reifications of family, sexuality, or community—that is, to avoid recreating forms of knowledge that perpetuate global inequality. As a placeholder, intimacy allows critical accounts of colonial empire or capitalist modernity because it is a flexible, provisional reference that emphasizes linkages across what are understood to be distinct realms, scales, or bodies. Whether an analytical concept or a placeholder, the critical study of intimacy provides a useful category in the transnational analysis of power.

NOTES

1. Twentieth-century versions of state socialism, such as Maoist regimes, also attempted to choreograph intimacy in order to generate new socialist subjects. Socialist intimacy may be read as a form of modernity, and there is a growing body of fascinating work on intimate relations under command economies of China, the Soviet Union, Cuba, and other socialist countries. However, my emphasis in this exploration of the global political economy of intimacy remains on global capitalism and, for the most part, states organized by liberal political traditions.
2. Ara Wilson, *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok*. Although this essay makes use of field research on Thailand that has spanned more than two decades, it is concerned with analytical more than properly ethnographic questions.
3. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.
4. Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Pellegrini, eds., *Public Sentiments. Se@F Online* 2, no. 1 (2003). <http://www.barnard.columbia.edu/sfonline/ps/intro.htm> (accessed 11 November 2009).
5. *Hague v. CIO*, 307 U.S. 496, 515 (1939). In the case, when labor organizers were denied a permit for a public discussion of the National Labor Relations Act, they challenged the Jersey City ordinance requiring permits for public meetings.
6. Haya El Nasser, “Gated Communities More Popular, and Not Just for the Rich,” *USA TODAY*, 15 December 2002. usatoday.com (accessed 20 August 2010). A partial list of names for gated communities in one county in Florida includes: Harbour [*sic*] Lake Estates; Sunset Lakes; Monarch Lakes; Silver Isles; Silver Falls; Somerset; Windsor Palms.
7. Sven Bislev, “Privatization of Security as a Governance Problem: Gated Communities in the San Diego Region,” *Alternatives* 29, no. 5 (2004): 599–618; Edward James Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America*.
8. Setha M. Low, *Behind the Gates*.
9. David J. Kennedy, “Residential Associations as State Actors: Regulating the Impact of Gated Communities on Nonmembers,” *The Yale Law Journal* 105, no. 3 (December 1995): 763.
10. Kennedy, “Residential Associations.”
11. For the way that private gated communities are subsidized by the public weal, see Andrew Stark, “America, the Gated?” *WQ (The Wilson Quarterly)* 22, no. 1 (1998): 58–79.
12. Kennedy “Residential Associations,” 778.
13. Kennedy, “Residential Associations.”
14. Easton Town Center, “About Us,” <http://eastontowncenter.com/AboutUs.aspx> (accessed 20 August 2010).
15. *Ibid.*
16. In 1976 the Supreme Court found that there is no federal constitutional right to free speech in shopping malls. *Hudgens v. NLRB*, 424 U.S. 507 (1976).
17. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
18. Robyn Wiegman, “Intimate Publics,” 860.
19. *Ibid.*, 863.

20. Ibid., 861.
21. Lauren Gail Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*.
22. Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," 282.
23. Berlant, "Intimacy," 283.
24. Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, 210.
25. Povinelli recasts the tension expressed in political theory between individual freedom, which she terms the "autological," and society's constraints, expressed, e.g., in kinship or tradition, which she calls the "genealogical." Her book deconstructs the differential evaluations of these modes of intimacy, identifying "which forms of intimate dependency count as freedom and which count as undue social constraint; which forms of intimacy involve moral judgment rather than mere choice; and which forms of intimate sociality distribute life and material goods and evoke moral certainty." Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love*, 3.
26. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 103.
27. Memorably, Povinelli writes: "If you want to locate the hegemonic home of liberal logics and aspirations, look to love in settler societies." Povinelli, *The Empire of Love*, 17.
28. Povinelli's book is a sustained critique of Anthony Giddens's writing about intimacy: Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*. Giddens proposes that intimacy based on choice, romantic love, and egalitarian relations emerged within European modernity. It represents a kind of progress of human freedom and also a check on the instrumental values of the market. For Giddens, the development of romantic conjugal love as the organizing mode for private life is a democratization of human relations. Povinelli's work criticizes Giddens's Eurocentrism, his progress narrative, and his optimistic take on modernity and liberal democracy. As a transnational analysis, her approach insists on placing the intimacy characteristic of liberal democracies in a frame that includes the effects of colonialism, racism, and uneven distribution of resources or value across populations.
29. See, e.g., Wiegman, "Intimate Publics."
30. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies*; Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*.
31. Examples that reflect on the relation of the queer life to national or global scales include: Tom Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago*; Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas*; Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*; Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*.
32. See, e.g., Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Rayna Rapp Reiter, "Gender and Class: An Archaeology of Knowledge Concerning the Origins of the State," *Dialectical Anthropology* 2, no. 4 (1977): 309-16; Victoria Wohl, *Intimate Commerce*.
33. Ann Laura Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power"; Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire*; Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*.
34. Examples of critical historical work on intimacy include: Nayan Shah, "Adjudicating Intimacies on U.S. Frontiers." Lisa Lowe has deconstructed European and North American notions of intimacy, arguing that colonialism and slavery produced intimacies

- among the subjugated that, while denigrated, underwrote the possibilities for a liberal European understanding of intimacy: Lisa Lowe, "The Intimacies of Four Continents."
35. Neville Hoad, *African Intimacies*.
36. Berlant, "Intimacy," 283.
37. Marilyn Waring, *If Women Counted*.
38. Linda Nicholson offers a model for analyzing public/private formation under capitalist economies: Linda Nicholson, "Feminism and Marx." See also Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.
39. See, e.g., Wilson, *Intimate Economies*.
40. Amy Lind, "Governing Intimacy, Struggling for Sexual Rights." Also see Kate Bedford's discussion of ways that World Bank policies concerning the family target racialized and poor men as problems for realizing family functions that will promote economic growth: Kate Bedford, *Developing Partnerships*.
41. Canonical anthropology defines the "economy" as systems of production, distribution, and consumption, a definition that recognizes that societies have been arranged by different economic principles, not all of them governed by a market logic, such as the ways kinship shapes the gendered division of labor, and such as work and exchange associated with a feminized domestic sphere and not officially tallied as in standard economic measurements. Feminist economists have defined the economy as the system for provisioning society: Drucilla K. Barker and Susan Feiner, *Liberating Economics*.
42. Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*; Mary Beth Mills, *Thai Women in the Global Labor Force*; Carla Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy*; Lisa Rofel, "Qualities of Desire."
43. Magdalena Villareal, "Cashing Identities in the Non-material World of Money."
44. E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*.
45. Paul Bohannon, "The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy"; Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*; Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women."
46. The idiom and mechanism for many, if not most, relationships in Thailand is exchange. Prominently, the relationship between the monastic order and the laity is depicted as one of exchange. Householders (mainly women) provide the daily sustenance to monks, who act as "fields of merit," providing the opportunity to accumulate merit (which is calculated quite materially in terms of a store or amount of substance). The enactment and definition of many Thai social identities, such as a woman's position as "nurturer" or the relations of seniors to juniors, can also be understood as an orientation framed in terms of debt and exchange. Anyone can incur debt to a guardian or one who has offered significant aid and instruction (e.g., teachers), and all children are born indebted, but male and female children have different prospects for repaying that debt.
47. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
48. Nepotism reflects the place of close ethnic and family networks in business, while graft represents locally calibrated expectations of exchange. But here the model of economic interaction is illuminating: crony capitalism and routine graft are generated through local codes interacting with, and being distorted by, capitalism, specifically by global finance.

- Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics*. (It is also worth remembering the corrupt operations of heralded companies within the United States, memorably Enron, Worldcom, and Bernie Madoff's enterprise, among other infamous examples.)
49. One example of modernization theory's view of local economies as constraints on development is Göran Hydén, *No Shortcuts to Progress*.
 50. On the moral economy, see E. P. Thompson's landmark work—e.g., the discussion of the term in *Customs in Common*. Also see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*. For the ways capitalism changes the social codes of the market in Europe, see Polanyi, *Great Transformation*. The "moral economy" does not mean a "natural economy" that is unchanging and apart from a market economy.
 51. Ong, *Spirits of Resistance*.
 52. See Wilson, *Intimate Economies*, chapter 3.
 53. See Megan Sinnott, *Toms and Dees*.
 54. Hoad, *African Intimacies*; Jeff Sharlet, "White Man's Burden."
 55. Berlant, "Intimacy," 283.
 56. Especially the intimate life of women, who are excluded from being ordained as monks and allowed only an inferior, spiritually ineffective role glossed as nuns. Given that women have long predominated in the vernacular markets in Thailand, the market sphere is pivotal to the female gender and women's intimate lives. See Wilson, *Intimate Economies*.
 57. Andrea Whittaker's able ethnographic study is an example of this use of intimacy as associated with feminine bodies in particular: Andrea Whittaker, *Intimate Knowledge*.
 58. Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis."
 59. In my discussion of intimacy as an analytical category, I am indebted in particular to feminist discussions of investments in particular terms or knowledge objects, such as those of Clare Hemmings and Robyn Wiegman. See, e.g., Clare Hemmings, "Invoking Affect"; Wiegman, "Intimate Publics." For an overview of feminist understandings of global intimacy, see G. Pratt and V. Rosner, "Introduction: The Global and the Intimate" and Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner, in the introduction to this volume.
 60. Berlant, "Intimacy."
 61. On women's rights and the public/private divide, see Donna Sullivan, "The Public/Private Distinction in International Human Rights Law."
 62. Berlant "Intimacy," 284.
 63. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love*, 4.
 64. Wiegman, "Intimate Publics."
 65. E.g., scholars in the United Kingdom in particular have turned to the rubric of citizenship to discuss intimacy. In his book *Telling Sexual Stories*, Ken Plummer uses the term "intimate citizenship" in a discussion centered on the increasing power of narratives in defining sexual experience and sexual politics in the United Kingdom: Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*. See also Jeffrey Weeks, "The Sexual Citizen"; Phil Hubbard, "Sex Zones"; David Bell and Jon Binnie, *The Sexual Citizen*. These works emphasize the het-

- eronormativity of civic life and also the struggles of queer, gay, and lesbian communities to claim public space and state recognition.
66. Janet Carsten, *Cultures of Relatedness; After Kinship*.
 67. Carsten, *Cultures of Relatedness*.

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2

IN THE INTERESTS OF TASTE AND PLACE ECONOMIES OF ATTACHMENT

Elsbeth Probyn

EATING INTO THE GLOBAL

There is perhaps no area where the global inserts itself more into the intimate lives of people than in the realms of food production and consumption. While the worldwide circulation of food and people has been speeded up in a spectacular fashion through global technology and logistics, food has long traveled and connected very different peoples and lands. Whether it be in the Roman Empire, which circulated different crops and foodstuffs, or in the spice trade that brought Asia, India, and Europe into close contact, or the slave routes of sugar and other alimentary commodities, foodways have long been a privileged way for the proximities of place and taste to intertwine. As the economic historian Harold Innis argued in the 1920s and 1930s, staples such as fish were integral to the development of the economic world as we know it. Innis's classic thesis on the cod fisheries of the Canadian Maritimes demonstrated the far-reaching effects of one staples economy.¹ The Grand Banks of Newfoundland became a battleground between the Old World powers: "Cod from Newfoundland was the lever by which she [England] wrested her share of the riches of the New World from Spain."² In Innis's terms, food staples caused empires to rise and fall as their routes rearranged the political and economic face of the world.

The role of food has continued to be the site through which global politics are played out in local ways. The field of food, understood in Pierre Bourdieu's sense as a field of forces and a field of struggles can be seen as a minefield, which pits gender, globalization, and class privilege.³ In the past thirty years, enhanced