



China's 'Money Boys' and HIV for the Greater Good: The Queer Body and Necropolitics

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Minireview

The struggles of China's money boys—who are men who sell sex to other men—illustrate how the multi-layered stigma they experience acts as a form of necropolitical power and an instrument of the state's biological citizenship. One unintended side effect of this state power in China is the subsequent reluctance by medical professionals to care for gay men who are living with HIV. Data elicited from self-described money boys and physicians who specialize in the treatment of HIV provides evidence that the necro power of stigma is routinely exercised upon the bodies of gay sex workers. Through the exercise and imposition of state sanctioned stigma, China's health system excludes gay sex workers through biopolitical surveillance measures as part of a wider necropolitical project that creates death instead of promoting the conditions that might preserve life. Public health priorities demand that the cultured scripts of gendered Chinese citizenship must reevaluate the marking of the body of the money boy as a non-entity, a non-human and a living 'dead body.'

Keywords: Necropolitics; Stigma; Money Boys; China; Homosexuality; HIV; Biopolitics

Introduction

In studies of migration, the death worlds that irregular migrants are exposed to as a result of biopolitical measures of control have received attention from scholars of geography who have used the term 'necropolitics' to describe the male sex workers who are living with underprivileged situation [1,2] argue that untold numbers of migrants who enter spaces illegally are subjected to social death when they are ushered into conditions that deny them autonomy. Biopolitical measures of control with respect to the money boys who are living in HIV instead construct them as diseased and criminal. [3] argue that stigma-based political inaction toward migrants also results in death. This death is created by the dialectic unity between the "bio" and "necro" and between biometric control and inaction by the state. In China, male sex workers, sometimes called [insert Chinese language term] or 'money boys', who migrate to from the countryside to the city for work find themselves subject to conditions that prevent life from flourishing. Many subsist in their trade by paying bribes because they are not entitled to hukou [household registration system] or formal residence in the city,

which is in itself a form of biopolitical control of the rural poor. In bringing the queer to the necropolitical, [4] argue that queer necropolitics, "carefully recovers, against totalizing gestures and deeply reactionary and colonizing projects of 'giving voice,' 'queer' as a marker for a different ontology and a radical rethinking of how queer politics and capacities might be resuscitated in the context of structural violence." Such insight bridges the gap between the biopolitical and necropolitical aspects of migration and the existing literature on patients who are living with HIV accessing healthcare. There is much emphasis on multi-layered stigma and how ignorance about lesbian, gay and transgendered patients on the part of medical professionals raises mortality rates [5-8]. Surprisingly, the concept of necropolitics has not been popularly used to explain how the biopolitical mechanisms of stigma create necropolitical 'death worlds' of spaces. That said, biologically inferior people can safely 'let [them] die', which works against the purpose of health care systems, which is to treat conditions for those are living with HIV. Written from an East Asian perspective and based on field work in China, this work explores how necropolitics

intersects between stigma and the homosexual body carrying HIV. In late-modern times when stigma is weaponized [9], the issue of how such stigma creates conditions for death in an occupational and public health setting demands critical attention. Healthcare workers struggle with the risk of infection and this impacts their own behavior toward infected patients. Under these circumstances, the homosexual body with HIV is tacitly marked by the health service as a non-human or dead body that is still alive. Such stigma operationally treats the body of the living person as pathogenic and one that is composite, abject and undeserving of life. There is merit in understanding how stigma works on the bodies of those that necropolitical power deems are deserving of death. This article establishes the body of male sex workers, that is, MB, as the object of inquiry.

The multi-layered forms of externalized stigma experienced by individuals in China show that stigma cannot be analytically distinguished from the deeply rooted culture of face (*mianzi*) and image. Marriages between men and women are always about gaining the approval of one's parents as well as being validated by one's social groups. The Chinese culture emphasizes the kinship system and does not support or accept homosexuality [10]. In short, the stigma attached to gay men, sex workers and others with HIV in China goes so far as to reduce them to non-persons, non-humans and non-entities. This reveals to us the extent by which Chinese culture dictates what the health system identifies as individuals who are threats to the biological and moral fabric of society. [11] state that necropolitics reduces people with non-conforming sexualities to non-humans. The Communist State's health system stigmatizes homosexuality and deters high-risk individuals from even attempting access to healthcare in China.

Where the state-sanctioned stigma of biopolitical control of the homosexual body is reduced to a non-human/non-entity status, there exists a necropolitical power that subjugates the homosexual body to conditions of death. This raises several important questions. How does being gay in China expose one to distinct risks arising from stigma that expose them to death? How does the socialist state's healthcare system treat the bodies of homosexual men MBs as non-living entities who are the 'living dead'? This work examines how gender, sexuality and state-led stigma intersect to create problematic situations with homosexual communities as living dead in China.

The relationship between underprivileged MBs and the Communist medical system exercise of using necropolitical power to destine homosexual bodies to death-particularly those who are living with HIV-can now be better understood. Necropolitics explains how the bodies of MBs diagnosed with HIV are marked as either already dead or alive but of little consequence. Under these

conditions the national health system's culture of stigma that fails to reduce HIV infections is one that celebrates the deaths of MBs as a form of sovereign power. The framework of queer necropolitics explains how HIV stigma in China encourages drug use which in turn exposes gay male prostitutes to early death through HIV and other STIs.

By operationalizing the concept of necropolitics we understand the conditions of death to which the marginalized are predisposed. Gay, rural migrants in urban China become the 'living dead', forced to live in queer necropolises that actively resist the heterosexual dominant order. This culture reinforces heteronormativity over the gentrified urban gay communities. Data was collected from 86 healthy MBs, 15 MBs who were living with HIV, 12 HIV clinical doctors, and 12 NGOs staffs. This article was based upon a three-year project, by using ethnographic field notes taken over more than three years of ethnographic research, from May 2015 to August 2018. In the case of the MBs, their homosexuality makes their bodies' vessels of potential HIV infection which subjugates them to death. Both the felt and enacted stigma restricts their access to healthcare, facilitating necropolitical outcomes of being a positive carrier of HIV/AIDS and destined to die.

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