

THE CANADIAN WAR ON QUEERS: NATIONAL SECURITY AS SEXUAL REGULATION

Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile
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The project of Patrizia Gentile and Gary Kinsman in *The Canadian War on Queers* is to “challenge current Canadian historiography.” The authors aim to make visible and provide a “more accurate” account of the social and historical context in Canada during the latter half of the twentieth century. Specifically Gentile and Kinsman take up the state-sanctioned war on queers in Canada, commencing with the Cold War era. Engaging a methodology of *sociology from below*, Gentile and Kinsman prioritize the narratives and words of people affected by national security regimes as opposed to privileging official security documents. The authors openly state that their work purposefully incorporates large quotes of narrative in efforts to “disrupt the master narrative of heterosexual hegemonic mainstream Canadian history by placing the social experiences (including the resistance) of queers at the centre of [their] analysis.”

The Canadian War on Queers is based on interviews with ten lesbians, and thirty-six gay and bisexual men. The book takes the reader through a myriad of experiences, ranging from personal accounts from individuals who were expelled from the military and RCMP, to high-level security jobs within the government. The authors also make a point of addressing the narratives of individuals who were outside of governmental agencies to illustrate the ways in which state-sanctioned surveillance and repression interacted with queer communities. Gentile and Kinsman address these narratives not only

to expose the ways in which queer communities were placed under surveillance, blackmailed, and placed into a position of vulnerability under the guise of state and military safety, but they also illustrate the multiple ways that queer communities acted subversively under state security regimes. Gentile and Kinsman contribute to the small body of work that reframes the position of queers within Canadian security regimes and history by drawing attention to distorted official Canadian Cold War historiography, and illustrate how this history has “shaped the experiences of gay men, lesbian, and others during this period.”

In an effort to create a more holistic understanding of the Canadian state-sanctioned war on queers, Gentile and Kinsman examine the interactions between queer communities and state and military operations. The book opens with an examination of the Cold War era of national security campaigns and sweeping elimination of gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees in the 1950s and 1960s. Moving in chronological order, Gentile and Kinsman take up the 1970s as a burgeoning era for the Canadian lesbian and gay movement. Here, the authors explore the investigation into gay and lesbian liberation organizations. Finally, they take up the 1980s and 1990s, and interrogate the limits of human rights discourses and advances.

Gentile and Kinsman engage these eras and the ways in which queer communities have come in contact with state-sanctioned oppression. In the Cold War era, Gentile and Kinsman draw attention to the fact that the homosexual security scare of the 1950s and 1960s was indeed created and perpetuated by repressive laws enacted by the Canadian government, which outlawed homosexual sex during this period. As they trace the path of Canadian history and the impacts on queers, they cite the 1985 decision to incorporate sexuality as a protected class into the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a complicated achievement. According to

Gentile and Kinsman, incorporating queer rights into a legal framework detracts from other political forms of organizing. They acknowledge many forms of discrimination that cannot be stopped through a legal framework. Instead, they recognize that though queers have gained legal representation, there are still many others who live under harsh restriction for a myriad of reasons.

The Canadian War on Queers approaches history as political, making narratives and experiences politically relevant today. Implicating the past within the contemporary radical queer movement highlights present day security regimes and struggles while contextualizing them within a significant past. This overtly political project brings forward some important histories. Still, Gentile and Kinsman do not adequately engage a more explicit intersectional framework. Instead, this particular history of the Canadian war on queers continues to focus on specific types of Canadian queers. While Gentile and Kinsman link this work to contemporary security regimes, their analysis in some ways falls short by focusing largely on queers within government; the authors limit their analysis to certain populations that are often over-represented in scholarship. This book is an important intervention into mainstream studies of Canadian historiography. Future works could push further by focusing on the different modes of queer resistance happening during the Cold War security regimes.

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