

QUERYING (SEXUAL) CITIZENSHIPS: EDITORIAL

What is the worth of dignity of human beings in their gendered and sexualized bodies in post-socialist eastern European countries where most people still struggle against the exigencies of poverty, unemployment, endemic corruption, authoritarian governments, crime, violence, and as in the case of the former Yugoslavia, the ravages of recent wars (Weeks 1998: 39)? Can we calculate the daily horror of those *queer* children, unable to locate themselves in the “public, heterosexual, historically masculine curricular space” (Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh 2004: 153), nor in the formulaic daily reenacting of heteronormativity in Eastern European schoolyards and hallways, and who are subjected to a daily barrage of insults, bullying and beatings aimed at politically immobilizing them and rendering them visible as the Other (Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh 2004: 153)? Can we imagine what it is like to be virtually imprisoned in one’s own home on a daily basis, being afraid that one’s failed performance of masculinity will be used as a target for bestial beatings by neo-fascists gangs on one’s way to the metro? Can we understand the devastation inflicted on those “single” women living with other “single” women, being the first ones to be sacked when a South-Eastern European business or factory goes down, because they do not have a “traditional” family to support?

These are some of the questions and images of suffering, pain, and oppression, only truly grieved and understood by other *queer* bodies, that spring to mind when I hear many people on the Left in Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere, more or less openly grumbling about the culturalist turn of the European (and North American) Left (Rorty 1998), “of which sexual politics [and citizenship] can be seen as a critical part, which neglects the needs of [the majority] of the population for...social reform[s]” (Weeks 1998: 40) to address mass poverty and unemployment, corruption, violence, crime and a general and heightened sense of dislocation and societal insecurity (Gallup 2009). Without, in any way, taking away from the importance of acknowledging and fighting against all (old) forms of domination and exploitation, I am occasionally stung, but not surprised, by the lack of generosity and sympathy among many left-wingers for the daily

and systemic injustices that lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transsexuals suffer in the name of compulsory heterosexuality. “The accumulative effect of the repetition of the narrative of heterosexuality as an ideal coupling” (Ahmed 2004: 145) shapes not only what “it is possible for bodies to do, even if it does not contain what it is possible to be” (Ahmed 2004: 145), but it forms the very limit of the imagination of what politics should be about. For many, both on the Right and Left in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the new forms of fissures, tensions, struggles and the emergence of new forms of sexual politics and sexual identities (Weeks 1998: 40) are nothing but a fashionable export of the affluent West and North, concocted in the heads of their progressive gay activists and postmodern intellectuals, without any “grassroots energy behind them” (Weeks 1998: 40) in the countries of the region.

For those in the region marked as *sexually different*, sexual citizenship – the heterogeneous set of economic, legal, social, cultural and political practices aimed at achieving basic political recognition from the political community (of the nation) and the nation-state that there are other ways of *equally valid* intimate and sexual coupling (democratization of relationships); that there are new sexual subjectivities and political identities that spring from them; and that there are other, non-heterosexual, stories about personal and sexual life that the wider political community needs to understand and appreciate (Weeks 1998: 39) – is a matter of vital political importance, if not survival. It is for this reasons, we decided to launch *Sextures* with an inaugural issue dedicated to issues of sexual citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

Two of our essays, Shannon Woodcock’s “Gay Pride as Violent Containment in Romania: A Brave New Europe,” and Irene Dioli’s “Back to a Nostalgic Future – The Queeroslav Utopia” are critical examinations of the concept of gay pride festival used as a “Western” sexual citizenship tool to increase visibility of new sexual subjectivities and stories in the public sphere in the Balkans. They both show that using “western” yardsticks to measure the nature and effectiveness of grassroots gay, lesbian or queer activism in the Balkans leads to misreading the situation on the ground. Woodcock and Dioli perceptively note the traps of what Woodcock calls the “ngo-ization of [gay] rights”, where funding from international western donors for projects in the area of sexual citizenship are pinned to creating quantifiable sexual identity groups and activists who are required not only to adopt a certain set of administrative and managerial practices commonly practiced by Western NGOs, but also to perform sexual politics and identities in exactly the same ways as they were (are) performed, with a fairly good degree of

success, in Western Europe, Northern America, and Australia and New Zealand. The pressure coming from “western” LGBTQ organizations for South-Eastern European LGBTQ to organise spectacularly visible Western-style gay pride festivals shows blindness for the history and nature of homophobia, and the far more forceful policing of “norms of decency”, in these societies that are still much more traditional today than any of the Western societies were at the eve of their witnessing the first gay pride festivals almost thirty years ago. This blindness coupled with the same conditionality principles that frame the flow of funds from the EU headquarters in Brussels to the newest EU members and EU official candidate-countries, and aspiring countries, feed resentment among LGBTQ activists in the Balkans about the neo-colonialist attitudes of their Western donors.

The particular value of Woodcock’s essay is in her very lucid analysis of the Romanian state’s re-appropriation of the European discourse on human rights within Romanian hegemonic discourse, which blends heteronormativity and nationalism. This discursive blending allows the Romanian state to curtail LGBTQ people’s basic rights to freedom of movement, expression and physical safety during the Gay Pride Romania festivals between 2005-2007 - that took place in completely corralled, cordoned, and thus rendered almost invisible, public spaces in Bucharest - while making a rhetorical claim to “Romanian adherence to European values of freedom of expression” and “non-violent” tolerance. Like in many other countries in the world, the Romanian “state bestows tolerance on gay subjects on the condition that they remain invisible in the public sphere” (Woodcock, p.7 in the PDF version of the paper). For Woodcock, “intolerance” and “tolerance” of queers in Romania, as expressed by the Romanian state-sanctioned neo-fascist violence against queers and the police “protection” offered to queers from these same neo-fascists at Gay Pride Romania festivals, are just cynical modalities of entrenched homophobia, representing a continuity between tolerant and intolerant homophobia. Implicitly, Woodcock questions the value of tolerance as a political strategy in gaining sexual citizenship rights, since tolerance is a strategy of domination presented here as a form of formal legal, empty and private egalitarianism in the Romanian nationalist re-appropriation of the liberal European “human rights” discourse (see also Wemyss 2006: 227-7). As Wemyss notes, “calling for tolerance rather than questioning the power of those who tolerate contributes to the further reproduction of those power relationships” (2006: 227).

Dioli picks up on some of these themes by looking at the troubled history of gay pride festivals throughout the former Yugoslavia, marred by state sanctioned violence against marchers and a myriad of forceful homophobic reactions of state and local authorities dressed up as administrative obstacles. After a brief overview of different gay pride festivals in many of the different countries of the former Yugoslavia, Dioli focuses on the imaginative translation of (Western) queer activism and theory by the members of the Queer Beograd Collective, who managed to find in the Serbian word *kvar*, a local phonetic, semantic and linguistic equivalent to the English language *queer*, meaning a malfunction in the machine of “capitalism, nationalism, racism, militarism, sexism and homophobia” (Dioli, p.8).

Tiffany Jones in her essay titled “The Queer Joys of Sexless Marriage: Coupled Citizenship’s Hot Bed!” offers a well-researched comparative, comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of how different European countries deal legally with the issue of recognition of non-traditional, non-heterosexual, forms of coupling and relationship, including the recognition of same-sex partnerships and same-sex marriage. She examines the recent tectonic shifts in the marriage legislative landscape of Europe through the frame of queer theory. Imaginatively and playfully deploying Judith Butler’s concepts of *overplay*, *transference* and *erasure*, Jones interrogates the potential for queer disruption of the heterosexual matrix within how coupled (sexual) citizenship has been legally framed in different European countries. Jones pays particular attention to Norway’s and Sweden’s recent legal sanctioning of sexless marriage, “open to any couple, regardless of their sex” (Jones, p.12) and how this model of legal coupling opens up to various queer projects. Her essay offers a fresh new take on the debates about “gay marriage.”

Alexander Lambevski in his longer paper titled “Emotions, Belonging and the Microsociology of Venal Border Crossings: Encountering the Macedonian State as a Flexible Queer Citizen-Cowboy” interrogates issues of the emotional experience of flexible citizenship, belonging, migration, corruption, border crossings and sexuality from inside. Blending microsociological, ethnographic, biographical, and phenomenological methods, Lambevski provides an analytical and theoretical framework for studying the everyday practice, and emotional experience, of citizenship in the microworld of ordinary people – the world of everyday real face-to-face encounters between citizens and state officials. Through a part/whole analysis and analysis of nested contexts, he relates moment-by-moment elements of the speech, behaviour, feelings and implied meanings

he observed during his own border crossing at Skopje Airport in December 2007 to the larger institutional context of Macedonian Customs, Macedonian society and the Macedonian nation, and uses this material to explore Macedonia's ambivalence about its (queer) flexible citizens. For Lambevski, the painstaking analysis of the words, gestures, and implied meanings that take place between various actors in the localized contexts of everyday social situations, coupled with astute observations about the emotions arising as a result from the uneven distribution of power and status in what he calls micro-dramas of citizenship, prepare the theoretical and analytical ground for an empowering and ongoing micropolitics of resistance that leads to understanding the actual emotional dynamic underpinning the willing or unwilling collaboration between the dominated and the dominant.

While not denying the usefulness of the concept of belonging for studying the complex relationships between citizenship as a political participation, identity, entitlement/duty and emotional attachment at a macro level, Lambevski shifts our perceptual gears and argues for the urgent need to provide microsociological translations not only of the concept of belonging, but of many other fundamental concepts in classical republican, liberal and communitarian theories of citizenship like "legitimacy," "recognition," "acknowledgement," "values," "ideals," "loyalty," and "allegiance" that deal with social life at a macro-level of such abstraction and aggregation that is very difficult to see how they relate and resonate with real people in ordinary situations. The same goes with many of the fundamental macro-concepts in difference-centred - feminist, lesbian and gay, multicultural, or inclusive - citizenship theories like "patriarchy," "racism," "late capitalism" or "heterosexism." He argues that these concepts are largely used in a reified way, since generally "they are not related, point for point," (Scheff 1990: 187) to the microworld of ordinary people, the world of everyday real face-to-face encounters, real social situations and ordinary discourse. In this way, "they serve to mystify rather than empower" (Scheff 1990: 187) people to confront disenfranchisement where they ordinarily experience it.

This inaugural issue of *Sextures* shows the variety of approaches and perspectives to such a complex subject as sexual citizenship. I concur with Tiffany Jones that it is difficult to meaningfully summarise the various aspects of this new phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, or to predict new research agendas or political trends in this area in the near future, since there is a "sense that it has only just begun" (Jones, p. 13). Notwithstanding the old social justice agenda of the old left, major

global forces are “transforming [sexual and intimate] relationships and opening up new possibilities that are affecting people in the emerging economies [of Central and South-Eastern Europe] as well as becoming focal concerns of people in the metropolitan [“western”] countries” (Weeks 1998: 40). Dealing with issues of sexual citizenship, situated dialectically “between the global and local,...and the universal and particular” (Weeks 1998: 40), is important if we want to understand why “issues around sexuality have become so important for so many people, and how they fit in to a developing life politics concerned with how we should live” (Weeks 1998: 40). I hope this inaugural issue of *Sextures* makes a modest contribution to developing that understanding.

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