

Homonationalism

Alongside demarcation as a stable minority, growing gender conformity and the separation of gay from trans, a fourth feature of the new gay normality has been the increasing incorporation of some lesbians and gay men into the imperialist nation. Here gender identity and sexuality were still closely linked, especially for men. For centuries, masculinity has been defined in feudal and capitalist societies by a positively valued propensity for violence, whether in the military, in everyday interactions with other men, or in sublimated form in sport. Incompetence at fighting and sport, and exclusion from the military, were therefore markers of insufficiently masculine men – while atypical competence, athleticism and military careers were markers of insufficiently feminine women.

Exclusion from the military, and therefore from the ranks of full male citizens, has often been one of the last forms of discrimination to fall. It was explicitly reaffirmed, for example, when homosexuality was decriminalised in Britain in 1967 (and only lifted in 2000), and perpetuated in US President Bill Clinton's curiously contradictory 'don't ask, don't tell' policy, adopted in 1993 and only lifted in 2011. The demand to eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation in the military has been a constituent element of a new, nationalist homonormativity. This has been particularly evident in Israel, where Jewish open gay men's inclusion in the army was a marker of their incorporation into the Zionist project – understandably viewed without enthusiasm by Palestinian queers, who like other Palestinians in Israel face pervasive discrimination on the grounds of their exclusion from military service.

Jason Ritchie has recounted his discovery that each gay bar in Tel Aviv has a 'sort of checkpoint... manned by a queer agent of Israeli nationalism, whose job it was to determine who belongs in this gay/Israeli space and who does not'. More broadly, gay Israelis 'consolidate their membership in the nation' by

acting as 'gatekeepers at a metaphorical checkpoint, where queer Palestinians are inspected, policed, and occasionally admitted into the fold of Israeli gayness as "victims" of Palestinian culture' – or more often 'denied entry as excessively Arab or insufficiently "gay"'.¹⁴⁵

More generally in the twenty-first century, the instrumentalisation of lesbian/gay rights in the service of imperialist and Islamophobic ideologies, which Puar has defined as 'homonationalism', has played a crucial role in integrating lesbian/gay people into the neoliberal order.¹⁴⁶ Its upshot, or at least its intended upshot, is a 'seemingly seamless articulation of queerness with an imperial nation state'.¹⁴⁷ Particularly, but not only, in countries like the Netherlands¹⁴⁸ and Denmark, where both same-sex partnership rights and anti-immigrant racism are strongly developed, this homonationalism has been key to consolidating and taming lesbian/gay identity. More broadly, it is an integral part of the neoliberal multiculturalism that masks capitalism's reliance on regional and racial hierarchies.¹⁴⁹ More generally in Europe, sexuality has become 'the sign of the European Union's benevolence' and a justification for prejudice against non-Europeans.¹⁵⁰

145 Ritchie 2010, pp. 557, 560–1.

146 Puar 2007, pp. xxiv, 38–9.

147 Rosenberg and Villarejo, p. 10.

148 Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010; Jivraj and De Jong 2011.

149 Rosenberg and Villarejo, p. 2.

150 Ferguson and Hong 2012, p. 1060.

The Right and Homonationalism

The gay right as a whole is homonationalist. In the Cold War years, the US military had become a mainstay of racial liberalism, symbolised by Colin Powell's rise to its command, and even a certain kind of feminism, incarnated in the George W. Bush administration by Condoleezza Rice. Imperialism acquired a gender dimension, portraying women in the US as 'saviors and rescuers' of oppressed women elsewhere. Imperialist ideology has also always had a sexual dimension. The novelty is that it now has a same-sex dimension. The general orgy of patriotism in the US after 9/11 was picked up in US LGBT communities as well: 'The American flag appeared everywhere in gay spaces, in gay bars and gay gyms, and gay pride parades [featured] the pledge of allegiance, the singing of the national anthem, and floats dedicated to national unity'. Many middle-class gays and lesbians also responded to appeals to save the US by continuing to buy, 'marking this homonational consumer as an American patriot par excellence'.³⁰

Neoliberal multiculturalism also wards off, in Jodi Melamed's words, any mobilisation against the neoliberal order by 'the racialized poor ... by portraying this class as strangely susceptible to terrorist seduction'. In the words of the 2006 US National Security Strategy, 'In some democracies, some ethnic or religious groups are unable or unwilling to grasp the benefits of freedom otherwise available in society'.³¹

It is a commonplace to observe that with 9/11 the Arab and Islamic world supplied North American and Western European rulers with the enemy image they needed after the Cold War. This enemy image is often gendered. Examples of the sexual repression of women in different parts of the world or segments of the population are exploited ideologically as evidence of the supposedly more civilised character of imperialist countries. Campaigns to free Muslim women (with or without their participation or enthusiasm) are one obvious example. The US Feminist Majority Foundation tried to enlist Afghan women in the US war, leading the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan to condemn it as a manifestation of 'hegemonic, U.S.-centric, ego driven, corporate feminism'. There was a flurry in 2006 of condemnations of anti-gay repression in Iran – the details of the specific incidents involved were disputed among international human rights observers, though the repressive

³⁰ Puar 2007, pp. 40, 5 (citing Inderpal Grewal), 2, 43, 66–7.

³¹ Melamed 2006, pp. 16–17.

character of Iranian sexual legislation was not – just in time to provide ammunition for the US Bush administration's campaign for military intervention.³²

Condemnations of homophobic measures fall on fertile ground among LGBT people. Resentment of religious bigotry runs deep in LGBT communities, particularly among people who themselves suffered from it during their own Catholic, Protestant or Jewish upbringings. Indignation at anti-LGBT persecution by Islamic fundamentalist regimes and movements is a logical consequence of opposition to Christian bigotry. The political problem arises when people's resentment is projected away from their own context and experience, and focused on the Islamic world – as if Islam were inherently more homophobic than Christianity, a notion flatly contradicted by the preponderance of the historical evidence – especially when that resentment is manipulated to fit an imperialist agenda. The resentment can become poisonous when it is generalised to extend to all people of Muslim origin and/or Arabs, independently of any positions individuals take on LGBT issues.

The litany, 'Homosexual acts are against Islamic law' – eliding the question of what individual Muslims or groups of Muslims think or do – has been used to create a monolithic image of Muslims and Arabs. This essentialism is sometimes used to violent and even deadly effect. Anthropologist Raphael Patai's *The Arab Mind*, and especially its chapter on sexual taboos in Arab culture, served not only as the neoconservative bible on Arab behaviour, but also as a justification for forcing Iraqi prisoners to engage in same-sex acts as a way to turn them into informants. Whereas a century ago, images of pervasive Arab homosexuality served as a pretext for European colonial repression (or homosexual sex tourism), in Abu Ghraib the '(perverse) repression of the Arab prisoners [was] highlighted in order to efface the rampant hypersexual excesses of the U.S. prison guards'.³³

In the space of a decade or two, the place of sexuality in the hegemonic European and North American view of the Islamic world has been virtually flipped upside down. Today, Europe and North America are seen as bearers of sexual enlightenment – mainly women's emancipation, and to a lesser extent LGBT rights – to an Islamic world seen as benighted and backward. The issue of same-sex formations among people of Muslim origin and in the Islamic world became even more of a political and intellectual minefield after 9/11. In a bizarre twist, neoconservatives and other rightists who for decades were hostile to feminism and the lesbian/gay movement have repackaged themselves as defenders of oppressed Arab women and gays. This ideological prism seriously

32 Puar 2007, pp. 6, ix–xi.

33 Puar 2007, pp. 4, 138–9 (citing Seymour Hersh), 83–4, 94.

distorts the interpretation of Arab sexualities, as Will Roscoe and Stephen Murray have pointed out, and does no justice to the historical 'variety, distribution, and longevity of same-sex patterns in Islamic societies'.³⁴ Islamophobia masquerading as support for women's equality rears its head in the most surprising places, as in remarks by Fidel Castro – no fan of either neoliberalism or the 'war on terror' – blaming the persistence of machismo in Cuba on 'Moorish' influences via Spain.³⁵

The irony is that while the 'heteronormalisation of society was seen to be a marker of modernity in the 19th century, the exact opposite has become the case' now. Yet there is a constant: 'the "West" continues to arrogate to itself the power to define the content of modernity, to shift the goalposts of modernity... as it sees fit'.³⁶

9/11 gave the right in Europe and North America a unique opportunity to redefine itself as feminist and sexually tolerant. Military intervention in the Islamic world has been legitimated in part by portraying Muslims as 'sexually deviant – whether repressed and frustrated or polygamous and sexually excessive or both simultaneously'.³⁷ This has helped many rightists, after acting as a not especially effective brake on feminist and sexual change for half a century, to reinvent themselves in short order as defenders of Western enlightenment, women and even gays against 'Islamic fascism'. LGBT and feminist movements have been harnessed to a political project aimed at obscuring responsibility for colonialism and global inequality by focusing instead on the allegedly unique misogyny and homophobia of non-Western countries.³⁸

Anti-LGBT attitudes on the part of some non-white and poor people allow middle-class white gays who are drifting rightwards to pose as champions of LGBT blacks and immigrants while stigmatising other blacks and immigrants as homophobic.³⁹ In countries like the Netherlands and Denmark, right-wing forces have shown since 2001 how Islamophobia can be used to win right-wing acceptance or even hegemony in mainstream lesbian/gay organisations – unwittingly abetted by Muslim fundamentalists like Rotterdam imam Khalid El-Moumni, who in 2001 declared that Europeans who condoned same-sex marriage were 'less than pigs and dogs'.⁴⁰

In France, the immigrant suburbs of Paris and other major cities are portrayed as breeding grounds of homophobia, 'a few zones where the light of republican liberty had not yet penetrated' – mysteriously, since the media tend to focus on religious prejudice and downplay discrimination and poverty.⁴¹ The suburbs abruptly forfeited their supposed monopoly on prejudice in 2013, when mass mobilisations against same-sex marriage revealed the depth of homophobia among millions of white French people. The norm defined by gay ghettos like the Marais in Paris or the Castro in San Francisco, magnets for LGBT people in the far larger heteronormative communities around them, nonetheless works to reinforce a straight norm in the larger society, white or non-white.

34 Roscoe and Murray 1997, pp. 4–6.

35 Lumsden 1996, p. 46.

36 Rao 2012.

37 Jakobsen 2012, p. 25.

38 Cervulle and Rees-Roberts 2010, p. 144.

39 Puar 2007, pp. 28–9.

40 Herzog 2011, p. 201.

41 Cervulle and Rees-Roberts 2010, pp. 39, 141–3.

Houria Bouteldja of the French Party of the Natives of the Republic argued in 2012 and 2013, for example, that while there are same-sex practices in French immigrant neighbourhoods, they do not imply the existence of a universal gay identity. She rejected the charge that a refusal to come out is evidence of homophobia. Instead she portrayed many LGBT immigrants' choice for a cross-sex marriage, with either a straight or LGBT partner, as a legitimate act in defence of a family and community order threatened by racism in many forms. Bouteldja even refused to take a position on the 'white agenda' of same-sex marriage, declaring that unlike issues of unemployment, police harassment, discrimination and housing, 'this question does not concern me' as an immigrant. Few immigrants showed up for the big demonstrations for or against same-sex marriage, she said, because they knew that even if it passed, its impact in immigrant neighbourhoods would be minimal.²¹

Yet black and immigrant communities are not isolated islands; they are caught up (more or less for different individuals) in broader trends in the sur-

rounding societies, including sexual trends. There is therefore no single tactic for queering families that can or should be expected among all people of black or immigrant origin. In response to Bouteldja, another French person of immigrant origin, Madjid Ben Chikh, while endorsing her rejection of the 'white agenda', insisted that those like him, a 'Kinsey 6' (exclusively gay person), 'are everywhere'. He rejected the invisibility that Bouteldja would impose on him. He insisted on the necessity of gay political identity as a means of survival in a – Western – homophobic society: an identity linking him with a black gay man like James Baldwin and with LGBT Palestinians. And he called for a dialogue on a basis of mutual respect.²²

The tactics advocated by Bouteldja and Ben Chikh, respectively, each have their risks and advantages. The tactic of working within existing families and communities risks demanding too much sexual self-sacrifice. It is possible to respect the tactical decisions people make without glossing over the oppression that often contributes to their choices. The choice of women who love women to continue to have sex with men, who are sometimes abusive, may in some cases be largely determined by their poverty and economic dependency as women. A Chinese woman's statement that being open about her sexuality would make her 'a devil in people's minds' and be seen as 'failing in my obligation and responsibility as a wife, daughter and mother' may suggest that the 'harmonious family order' she sought to preserve was based in part on her own sacrifices.²³ Yet people's links to their families and communities of origin can be a source of strength, for them as individuals and in struggles for liberation. On the other hand, the tactic of claiming a public LGBT identity, though it risks cutting off blacks and immigrants from their families and ethnic communities, can be a source of strength in leading queer lives and building queer alternatives. Each person has to make this choice for him- or herself, and their different choices can ultimately lay the foundation for a powerful strategy based on a multiplicity of tactics.

21 Bouteldja 2012.

22 Ben Chikh 2013.

23 Chou 2000, p. 201.

LGBT people of black, immigrant and Muslim origin have been organising in a number of countries to assert their dignity and demand visibility and inclusion. The French multiracial LGBT organisation Kelma was founded in 1997 with the aim of creating 'a mixed space, beyond the dictatorship of looks, cash or skin colour'.¹⁰⁰ Stigmatisation has greatly complicated the struggles of European LGBT Muslims, who have been increasingly visible in the twenty-first century, for example, in the Dutch foundation Yoesuf, German immigrant dance parties and the British soap opera *EastEnders*. They face the joint insistence of Islamophobes and Muslim fundamentalists that their very existence is a contradiction in terms.¹⁰¹

Queers on the radical left have increasingly made solidarity with LGBT blacks and immigrants a priority. In Denmark in 2010, for example, the Queer Committee of the anti-capitalist Red-Green Alliance disassociated itself from that year's Pride march, which it said was being used to provide LGBT cover to Islamophobia. Much more visibly, Judith Butler generated international shock waves in 2010 by refusing the Civil Courage Prize offered to her by the Berlin Christopher Street Day Committee. 'The host organizations refuse to understand antiracist policies as an essential part of their work', Butler said; 'I must distance myself from this complicity with racism, including anti-Muslim

racism'. Rightfully, she said, the award should go to LGBT immigrant groups that were mobilising in Berlin's Transgeniale (Alternative Pride).¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Cervulle and Rees-Roberts 2010, pp. 130–2.

¹⁰¹ Herzog 2011, p. 203.

¹⁰² Schulman 2012, pp. 115, 128–9.

An equally contradictory dynamic has been at work in newly capitalist Eastern Europe. Sexual repression was far from uniform under the former Stalinist regimes: Poland had never criminalised homosexuality; Hungary and Czechoslovakia had decriminalised it in 1961, East Germany in 1968 (a year before West Germany). But none of these countries had ever known anything like the extensive Western European gay commercial scene or community organisations. The restoration of capitalism in the 1990s made their development possible, in neoliberal conditions of rapidly increasing inequality. The European Union and its member states also funded a new gay civil society in its own homonormative image and increasingly put direct political pressure on Eastern European governments to model their legislation on a Western European homonormative pattern. In the cynical words of LGBT rights activist Scott Long, Eastern European governments see the EU as 'a rich eccentric uncle' whose 'every crotchet must be humored', even if this means improving the treatment of 'homosexuals or other nonexistent creatures'.⁹⁸

This has brought many benefits to Eastern European LGBT people. At the same time, it has helped reactionary nationalists like the Polish Catholic right, who are homophobic for many reasons, to manipulate popular resentment of the arrogant West to promote anti-LGBT campaigns. LGBT marches have been banned in countries including Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Russia and Serbia, or violently attacked by the far right, often with police connivance, where they have been officially permitted.⁹⁹ Well-intentioned Western European solidarity can sometimes backfire and reinforce the alien image of Eastern

European LGBT people. The first Moscow Pride in 2006, for example, consisted of 'a handful of Russians supported by foreign elected officials and gay activists'.¹⁰⁰ At least one Russian LGBT leader has warned that calls to boycott Russia to protest the 2013 law against 'gay propaganda' risk having the same effect of fuelling repression.¹⁰¹

98 Herzog 2011, pp. 184–5.

99 Moriarty 2007, p. 7.

100 Cervulle and Rees-Roberts 2010, pp. 36–7.

101 Alekseyev 2013.

Gender and sexuality also serve as markers between Western and Eastern Europe. Catholic and Orthodox churches and political currents linked to them have capitalised on resentments among Eastern Europeans of the consequences of capitalist restoration and neoliberal inequality, with LGBT people as favoured targets. In this climate, violence against Eastern European lesbian/gay pride events has been partly the work of neo-fascist groups who believe that the EU is 'run by "fags"'.¹⁴

12 Long 2013.

13 Kaoma 2012, pp. 1, 3.

14 Herzog 2011, pp. 190-1.

Achieving a truly queer world will also require creating a new kind of internationalism, one that not only confronts imperial military and economic power, but also resists the ways imperialism distorts our conceptions of gender and sexuality. Queers today live in a global world, bound to each other by the transnational flow of images and artefacts, transnational tourism and the sex trade, and the migration of queer bodies across continents. Yet homonationalism restricts 'true' lesbian/gay identity to a privilege of a minority of 'normal', largely white and middle-class men and women in the imperialist countries. Global and anti-racist solidarity is needed to shatter the barriers that homonationalism has erected. Then a global challenge to heteronormativity and homonormativity can be integrated into a global movement against capitalism, creating the potential for a world where neither state boundaries nor skin colour nor religious background get in the way of an erotic culture binding together the planet.