

(Un)translatable Queer?, or What Is Lost and Can Be Found in Translation...

There can be no consideration of sexual politics without a critical consideration of the time of the now. [...] thinking through the problem of temporality and politics in this way may open up a different approach to cultural difference, one that eludes the claim of pluralism and intersectionality alike.

(Butler 2009: 103)

Perhaps some of the most interesting recent developments in queer studies are those books criticizing the US American bias within the discipline (e.g., Hemmings 2007; Mizielińska 2010; Downing and Gillett 2011), and a move towards embracing “non-Western”¹ geographical others (e.g., Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 2000; Altman 2001; Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002; Binnie 2004). But as much as these steps are welcomed, we should also notice the limitations of these advances, specifically the predominant focus on “post-colonial” cultures. Working with/in the geotemporal paradigm of “Central and Eastern Europe” (CEE), we feel that there is more to the “non-West” than just “post-colonial” cultures. Consequently, we want to focus this chapter on the exploration of sexual politics in CEE and ponder the queer possibilities of “queer” outside Western/American/English-speaking contexts. As such, this article remains in a dialogue, as much as it is a continuation of the volume *De-Centring Western Sexualities*, edited by Kulpa and Mizielińska (2011). In this anthology, the gathered authors assessed the current state of knowledge about sexualities outside/within the “West” by focusing on CEE

examples. In a way, the book attempted to diagnose the over-determination of queer studies and LGBT activism in Central and Eastern Europe by Western/American historical models. In doing so, although trying to show “what is local,” and how queer is different in CEE/Europe to the West/America, the book was more focused on what is *lost* in the process of differentiation/translation.

The aim of this chapter is to expand on this notion and search for what can be *found* in translation that does not exist in either cultural context. Thus we focus on what is *brought to life* through cultural permeability, exchange, influence, or simple coexistence. The chapter is composed of three parts. Firstly, we provide the reader with a theoretical framework. Secondly, we exemplify the impossibility of a simple cultural translation of “queer” (understood as the predominantly Western/American project) into CEE realities by analyzing activities of the NGO “Campaign Against Homophobia” / “Kampania Przeciw Homofobii” (CAH/KPH). Finally, we show strategies that make a productive use of the “locality” in order to mobilize the queer possibilities of activism in CEE/Poland, without necessarily attaining to Western/American narrations, by taking the example of the on-going campaign “Love Does Not Exclude.”

Temporal (Dis)junctions Revisited

It is appropriate to apply notions of porous and permeable fields of contestation, complacency, and resistance—typical ways of characterizing the relations between the “West” and “CEE”—to discourses about sexualities (e.g., Wolff 1994; Bakic-Hayden 1995; Todorova 1997; Forrester, Zaborowska, and Gapova 2004; Hammond 2004; Melegh 2006). In *De-Centring Western Sexualities*, Mizielińska and Kulpa (2011) introduced the concepts of “temporal disjunction,” “knotted temporality,” and “time of sequence vs. time of coincidence” to describe the conflation between the Western/American discourses of “progress,” “civilization,” “gay rights,” and

“secularism,” and the stigmatization of CEE as “backward,” “homophobic,” and “nationalistic.” Such Western logic assumes only one (its own) possible teleological development and uses time/temporality as one of the tools of cultural hegemony, since “time has been a most effective colonizing tool” (Adam 2004: 136; see also Fabian 2002). However, if we compare this relationship between the “West” and “CEE” to the relationship between the “West” and the “Orient,” as described in works on “homonationalism” (e.g., Petzen 2004; Puar 2007; Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem 2008; Kuntsman 2008; Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens 2010; Jivraj and de Jong 2011), we observe important differences between the discourses at play.

We argue that in Western/European discourses CEE is seen as geographically close enough to become incorporated into the universal, invisible Europeanness, but, paradoxically, sufficiently far away enough to be discursively framed as the cultural Other. However, since the “post-communist CEE” was not subject to the Western/Western European colonialization, it does not seem to create an interest within contemporary cultural studies to the same degree as the post-colonial Other’s countries do. Paradoxically, CEE is relegated to the margins of the Western self-consciousness, into the shadowy borderlands, again becoming invisible, indistinctive, and not worth attention. In the field of sexuality studies, this tendency is reflected in the number of publications on CEE regions/countries. Being located in Europe, but outside the West, has profound consequences for sexual politics within CEE. To illustrate Western conceptions of sexual politics within CEE, we created Figure 1 in the book *De-Centring Western Sexualities* (2011).

Before 1989, within Europe at least, there used to be two parallel geotemporalities of Western European capitalism and Eastern European state communism. In the advent of 1989, the communist time-reality collapsed and the Western one became the dominant one. For the West, however, the continuity was preserved and the “end of communism”/1989 was seen as just another event in history. For CEE, however, it was history that

had actually ended, and what we have witnessed ever since could be represented as a constant “knotting” and “looping” of time(s). When in 1989 CEE was “thrown into” Western capitalist time(s) (time of sequence), this was far from being a linear and progressively accumulative narration, which continued to unfold in the West. Rather, we use the term “time of coincidence,” in which everything happens (almost) at once. To account for the coexistence of various geocultural and geotemporal realities across the globe within sexuality studies, it is necessary to rethink the dichotomies of origin/copy and precede/proceed.

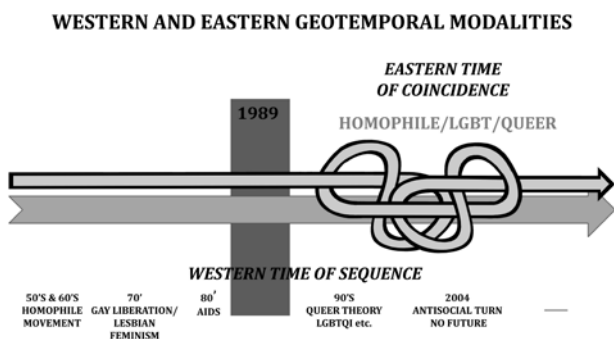


Figure 1. How we described Western/Anglo-American and CEE geotemporal discourses on sexual liberation politics (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011: 15)

The most common narrations of sexual liberation in the West/ America, within particular lesbian and gay historiographies, span the homophile days of the 1950s and 1960s, gay liberation in the 1970s, AIDS in the 1980s, and queer times in the 1990s (e.g., Jagose 1996; Blasius and Phelan 1997). These narratives were freed from their specific historical and geographic context and became narratives of sexual liberation in general. Moreover, sexual liberation became part of the Western narration of modernity. After the post-communist revolution, almost overnight, CEE was incorporated into the same historical narrative. This does not mean that there is no development or change

("waves" or "stages") in the sexual politics in CEE. The point we are making is that at least 60 years of Western/American history of sexual politics (and its narrative of modernity) are squeezed into CEE and supposed to be reworked within CEE in only a few years. This discursive framing of CEE as attaining Western/European/American modernity pressurizes the feeling of immediacy and hypervelocity of history. This "temporal (dis)junction" is not only an effect of different historical, post-World War II narratives of development in the West and the communist CEE; it is also a condition of cultural hegemony. The geotemporality of the West becomes hegemonic because it is discursively presented as supposedly more advanced, while others are framed as backward. As Mizelińska and Kulpa wrote:

Discursively, it is forcing the "Western present" as a "CEE future" to be achieved. Consequently, the "CEE present" is coerced as "past", although since 1989, the "CEE present" and "Western present" are one. Paradoxically then, "Western progressive narrative" unfolds into its own aporia. [...] Here the discourse of "homophobic CEE" is deployed to maintain the difference between "progressive and advanced West" and "transforming but not-yet-modern CEE." [...] In a sense, the West is always already "post." In this construction, whatever CEE became/is/will be, West had become/has already been/will have been. (Mizelińska and Kulpa 2011: 16–18)

We therefore argue for more assertiveness in the recognition of the "unpredicted logic of local historical narratives." It is important to look for possibilities of conceptualizing and doing sexual politics in CEE without falling into the false logic of origin/al and copy; to go beyond the diagnosis of the Western/American hegemony and CEE legitimization through referencing this hegemony. In the following paragraphs, we look at what can be found, rather than contemplate the loss, in the process of the trans-cultural translation of sexual politics and queer theories into

CEE contexts. Critically re-reading the “Let Them See Us” (2002) campaign, we argue that queering politics can mean different things in altered settings. We will address the universal question of queer alternatives to identity politics, as seen from a CEE perspective.

Polish (Dis)identifications

In the following paragraphs we analyze the difficulty in describing Polish LGBT² politics through the Western/American lens. We show how the Polish willingness and desire to identify with the Western/American (progressive) narrative of sexual politics necessarily results in failure. Secondly, we show how the Western/American models foreclose a recognition of differences in the Polish LGBT historiography. We focus on the “Campaign Against Homophobia” (CAH), the largest Polish LGBT organization, because its activism goes beyond the narrative of copying the (supposed) origin/al (the West), and can be read as transforming and undermining it. Although the CAH’s choice of strategies seems to represent various historical stages of Western/American LGBT activism, these strategies need to be understood as truly indigenous conjunctions of diverse discourses that were introduced in Poland as part of the “post-communist transformation” at the same time. Therefore, to understand them as mere derivatives is to overlook the subversive character of the local configuration of sexual politics.

Working with the concept of the “temporal disjunction,” a historical void in which CAH works, we followed Mizielińska’s categorization (see Mizielińska 2011), which shows the consequences of the “temporal disjunction” on three levels: (1) identity building, (2) stages of development, and finally (3) knowledge production. The first level is about emerging hybrid identities in CEE/Poland, and historiographical accounts of supposedly coherent sexual identities in the West/America. The second level is about a “time of coincidence” in CEE vs. sequential stages of development in

the West/America. Finally, the last level concerns the hegemony of knowledge production by Western/American queer theorists. All three levels are interconnected and cannot be understood without one another.

Hybridization of Identity

The Western/American model of the history of sexuality is a developmental narrative built on mutually dependent stages. The linear and consequential narratives produce the impression of a coherent group identity. The lack of such narratives therefore proves problematic for the construction of an LGBT group identity in Poland. Mizielińska (2011) pointed out that the post-1989 transformations in CEE pose a challenge to the continuity and cohesion of a steadily developing narration of sexual identity in the West:

Marked by this lack from the very beginning, the Polish LGBT(Q) movement tries to build its identity by taking bits and pieces from all kinds of discourses. Driven by the contemporary demand to construct an identity, the movement's activity becomes a battlefield between—as much as a cross-examination of—those sometimes randomly chosen strategies. (2011: 91)

As indicated above, the Western/American LGBT historiography presents the accumulative narrative from homophile to gay (G), and from gay to gay and lesbian (GL), influenced through lesbian feminist critique. Later, lesbian and gay (LG) were complemented by bisexuality (LGB), and then also by trans (LGBT) with the arrival of queer in the 1990s. In Poland, the 1990s were a time of proliferating discourses about sexuality and gender, which had not been present in the public sphere until then (Kliszczyński 2001; Kurpios 2003). Suddenly, Polish homosexuals, just starting to call themselves “gay,” were confronted with new terminology, like “queer”

and “LGBT.” While in the West there were debates on representation, naming, and eligibility (e.g., Gamson 1995; Beemyn and Eliason 1996; Blasius and Phelan 1997; Blasius 2001; Meyerowitz 2002), in Poland the question of a “true identity” played a significantly less important role (if any at all). We call this phenomenon “inclusion before coming-into-being”: bisexual and trans people were included from the beginning, even if only on the nominal level through the acronym. Contrary to what the acronym suggests, the first trans organization was established only in 2008, and there is still no representation for bisexuals. Indeed, this acronym has only recently become a point of criticism and the “overrepresentation” of bisexual people has been questioned (see Sowa 2009).

Although the problem of “false representation” is a serious one, it differs from the exclusive and sometimes biphobic or transphobic approaches earlier observed in the West/America (Meyerowitz 2002). Of course, these phobias are also present among Polish LGBTQ communities (Krzemiński 2009), nonetheless, the early nominal inclusion has created and influenced new ways of configuring sexual identities where the boundaries are more blurred and undefined (so to say).

Paul Ricoeur’s (1992) distinction between two elements of identity, *ipse* (self) and *idem* (same),³ helps to illustrate the chaotic and porous character of Polish LGBT identities: not only is there a problem concerning the continuity over time (*idem*) but also with the differentiation from the others (*ipse*). “Inclusion before coming-into-being” under the umbrella of the LGBT acronym encourages group differentiation as “sexual minorities” (plural) against the backdrop of the majority society rather than more individualized struggles of lesbians or bisexuals or trans people with the majority (and then eventually seeking alliances with other sexual minority groups). It encourages cooperation and a mobilization instead of a fragmentation of perceived interests of supposedly separate groups.

What we have argued above can and should be interpreted as a form of “gain” from the process of translation. From the beginning,

in Poland we have observed perhaps a less identitarian approach within the LGBT movement and an avoidance of some mistakes of the Western/American LGBT movements (like the lesbian and gay split, the exclusion of transsexuals and bisexuals). As another example, we could argue that there was no “gay/straight split” (Tong 1989: 123) and that both Polish feminist and LGBT movements are more likely to perceive each other as mutual partners fighting against sexism and homophobia. And although homophobia does exist among some Polish feminist circles and Polish gays are not free from misogyny, it does not prevent both movements from cooperating. Moreover, gay and lesbian studies and queer theory are strongly present in Polish gender studies curricula, treated as obviously an element. Still, it is not clear if this queer potential has been fully acknowledged by the LGBT organizations and the LGBTQ communities. We will return to this question in the last part of this chapter.

The Question of Stages/Development

In the Western/American context, we are confronted with a relational sequencing of stages of sexual politics. Often, one stage arose as a consequence of the self-reflection and critique of mistakes and failures of previous phases. In other geotemporal contexts, such a narration does not have an equivalent, as it is marked as a very particular history of the Western/American LGBT movement. However, instead of being perceived as such, it is presented as the universal model of development. Therefore, it has an influence on the production of LGBT history in cultural contexts where Stonewall never happened (but as an effect of the hegemonic Western/American narrative, is constantly awaited/evoked in indigenous narratives). It also forecloses a full recognition of local specificity and creates the expectation for others to follow the same path.

Let us return to the previously described and depicted CEE facing the sudden (and non-sequential) appearance of complex and

historically “sequenced” Western/American discourses of sexuality (Figure 1). It happened almost “all at once.” As new terminologies like “lesbian,” “gay,” and “queer” were slowly nesting down, scholarly reflection on them was introduced at the same time. Almost from the beginning, academic reflection on sexuality (and gender) in Poland has been conducted using queer theoretical language. Indeed, queer theory coincides with the building of the LGBT movement, instead of assuming it as a critical (and starting) point of reference. As a consequence, one can (and, indeed, many did) question the need to repeat the stages of (Western/American) development. For example, we are presented here with the question of what happens if the deconstruction (or more precisely a deconstructionist queer approach) coincides with construction, and what kind of construction (of identity, of strategies) it produces as a consequence. Instead, rather than looking for the possible gains of translation, the “unpredictable logic of local narratives” was hindered, and some activists and academics expressed a longing for the repetition of the Western/American historiography as presumably the only right one.⁴

Another example comes with the growing critique of Polish queer studies as being non-adequately applied to the Polish context in terms of time (i.e., too early). In a series of coming out interviews in the LGBT magazine *Replika*, Anna Laszuk stated that “we must walk the path from Stonewall to queer theory” (Laszuk 2006: 9; our translation). In another article she articulated this opinion in an even stronger (if not provocative) voice—“A Modern Closet, or About Polish Queer” (Laszuk 2009; our translation) is a bold accusation of queer theory as weakening the Polish LGBT movement. These recent smears assume only one, namely the Western/American path of LGBT development as the universal one. They show that the cultural hegemony of Western/American narratives of sexual liberation is not only the product of “Western domination,” but is also actively perpetuated by LGBT activists in CEE/Poland. As Mariusz Kurc, editor-in-chief of *Replika*, stated in a private conversation: “I agree with Anna Laszuk, who said that one cannot jump to queer theory without coming out.”

But we must remember that this “jump” has already happened, hence they also argue for the universality of the Western/American discourse as global and original. Moreover, these voices insist that Poland should move back and perhaps start all over again in a given Western/American manner. Their short-sighted criticism does not reckon that for the past ten years in Poland, queer theory has already changed the way sexuality and gender are perceived and theorized (even by the activists themselves, as we show in the next part of the chapter). In consequence, such voices contribute to the (re)production of CEE as the West’s retarded Other.

The Question of Knowledge Production and Transmission

The universality of the Western/American history of the LGBT movement is also vastly presumed in many books on sexual politics. On the one hand, there are books that represent this “universal knowledge” and have already become “canonical.”⁵ Unfortunately, a major shortcoming of these books is their lack of reflection on the foundation of their own theorizing and on the role of the West/US America in shaping the academic discourse. This lack of reflexion (and reference) conceals the fact that their theory production is only relevant for a specific geotemporality.

Secondly, under the headings of “global” or “international/transnational,” there are publications that reproduce the unequal hierarchy of knowledge production and interests.⁶ Thirdly, there is a large collection of books (e.g., Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 2000; Hawley 2001; Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002; Gopinath 2005; Boellstorff 2005) referring to postcolonial countries and to questioning dominant (Western/American) assumptions about same-sex desires and their articulations. Still, in this recent move in queer studies the search for plurality seems constrained to the exploration of the West/America vs. “Orient” dichotomy and does not take into account the ambivalent position of so far unexamined regions of CEE.

As a consequence of this hegemonic Western knowledge (re-)production, we deal with the assumption that queer theory should look the same everywhere, a presumption shared not only by Western scholars, but also by many scholars in CEE, as was pointed out above (see Laszuk 2009). In an interview given by Samuel Nowak, LGBT activist and scholar, he accused Polish queer theorists of repeating the mistakes of Western/American theory production. He states: "Queer theory—particularly in Poland, but not only—has a paralyzing effect. Its reluctance to institutional and legal solutions harms those in whose names it speaks, the non-heterosexual people" (Nowak 2010; our translation). He refers to Judith Butler as a queer icon in Poland and to her book on hate speech (1997). Although admitting its important contribution to the debate, he remains skeptical about the book's critique of hate speech regulations, and arguing against such critique, he insists on the need for regulations in the Polish context. However, he does not recognize that should Butler have lived in Poland, she could have had a completely different (context-influenced) opinion. He neither accounts for the variety of existing voices within Polish queer studies circles nor for the current work of many scholars to whom he refers in a sweeping manner as "Polish queer theory."

Here, again, we would like to underline the temporal aspect of Nowak's critique, as it exemplifies a reproduction of the hegemonic position of US queer theory. The price of this move is the strengthening of the notion of the "delayed" yet "too early" status of Polish queer theory. In this way, as too late and too early at the same time, Polish queer theory exists in an ambivalent position both for Polish activists and academics as well as for Western scholars who perceive it as a derivate of the original and do not fully recognize its particularity. If the Other is perceived as a kind of the same but "delayed/retarded," there is only little interest in studying it.

The assumption of teleological development as universal and ultimate supports the hegemonic position of Western/American queer theory and sexuality studies, and in consequence,

(re)produces knowledge that does not recognize its own particularity or the heterogeneity of other models. This is visible in the expectations (on both sides, as we have shown) that the “retarded Other” will follow the same teleological line as the West in the search for local equivalences of the “original/universal” events/concepts, instead of investing in local narratives, recognizing their particularity, plurality, and heterogeneity, and then building sexual theory/politics that are not exclusive and self-explicatory.

Discrepancy? Schizophrenia? Queer? CAH Activism in Poland

In this part, we would like to look closely at the activism of the Campaign Against Homophobia (CAH) and to show the failure of the Western/American “sexuality studies apparatus” when it is applied to “non-Western” geographical *loci*. In doing so we would like to point out that due to “temporal disjunctions,” it is impossible and in fact futile to determine what kind of activism (identitarian or queer) it is, and in which “stage” of development CAH situates itself or could be situated in.

On the one hand, CAH promotes queer studies by offering courses to Polish students and has a queer sub-group (CAH Q). On the other hand, CAH deploys an identitarian approach focused on coming out actions and on a critique of queer theory/theorists in Poland (as presented in its publication *Replika*, discussed above).

Figure 2 represents what a “temporal disjunction” and an “all-at-once” logic look like when we focus more closely on LGBT activism in Poland. If we were to classify this activism and situate it on the (Western/American) geotemporal scale, it would make little sense, as it is impossible to decide if CAH values identitarian or queer politics more. Thus, insisting on a model of different “stages” does not recognize that queer potentiality is a result of the context, rather than of a universal content or of applying

certain strategies (as will be shown in the next part when we refer to the recent “Love Does Not Exclude” campaign).

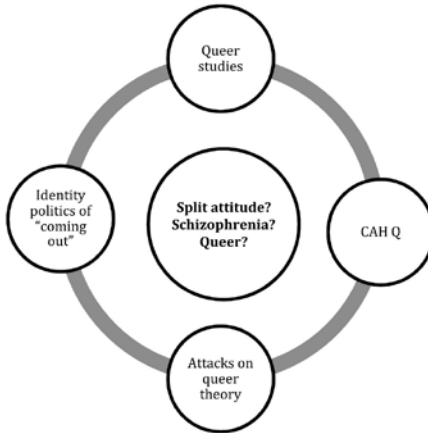


Figure 2. *Schizophrenia or queer? CAH activism in Poland*

Here we would like to briefly describe two self-contradictory angles of CAH’s forms of activism: one that is identitarian (i.e., the campaign “Let Them See Us”) and one that is queer-friendly (i.e., the promotion of queer studies). The campaign “Let Them See Us” initiated the main line of CAH politics, based on the strong assumption of the necessity of revealing one’s identity (coupled with CAH’s promotion of coming out as, presumably, the only successful form of mainstream politics). It was hailed as the most important event in Polish LGBT history and perceived as such by some Polish academics (Sypniewski and Warkocki 2004: 14) and on a popular community website (*homiki.pl* 2011). The whole project started in the autumn of 2002. It consisted of an exhibition of thirty portraits of gay and lesbian couples, all of them holding hands in a winter scenery. The pictures, exhibited in art galleries in Warsaw, Kraków, Gdańsk, and Sosnowiec, were only part of the project, which also involved an outdoor poster campaign as well as an information campaign. The project, seemingly so innocent, generated a heated discussion about gay and lesbian rights and

public visibility, revealing a great deal of prejudice. Posters were quickly destroyed, some galleries cancelled agreements and refused to host the exhibition.

The whole campaign seems identitarian, using Western/American “gay is good” and “we are everywhere” approaches of the 1960s and 1970s (Blasius and Phelan 1997). Posters depicted young, good-looking, well-dressed “masculine gays” and “feminine lesbians.” The campaign later witnessed criticism for this normalized and normative approach to the representation of non-normative sexuality (e.g., Kochanowski 2007; Majka 2008). But in the mainstream press the whole action was perceived as very provocative, making us wonder whether it had a “queer” face after all (as the interpretation of effects also depends on the context). Because the campaign politicized the issue of LGBT rights in Poland, it broke the social discourse of silenced Otherness that is based on marginalization and invisibility in the public (Ritz 2002). The campaign did not show homosexuals as the popular imaginary would have it (i.e., as “perverts”), hence after all it worked as the Foucauldian “incitement to discourse” (1998), provoking a discussion on the nature of the public and national (physical and imagined) space, rather than homosexuality *per se*. Consequently, we argue that what can be perceived as an exemplification of a purely identitarian approach can have its queer twist (Mizielińska 2011: 89).

The success of the campaign shaped the direction of the politics of CAH for the next decade. After that, CAH conducted several other coming out projects, like publishing coming out stories on a community website⁷, organizing “The Day of Coming Out” in 2009, publishing a series of coming out interviews in *Replika*, recently collected in the book *Rainbow's Revolution* (Kurc, Tomasik, and Bielas 2011). As a result, a very specific and exclusive coming out narrative has been constructed. One that produced a strictly defined notion of essentialized sexual identity around which the LGBT group identity can consolidate itself, making CAH the guardian and gatekeeper of such an identity. It is worth pointing out that this approach and its effects could be

criticized for supporting the homo/hetero dichotomy and the privileged position of heterosexuality (Fuss 1991; Phelan 1994; Foucault 1998).

On the other hand, the more queer-friendly face of CAH is represented by CAH Q and convenors of queer studies, which in itself is an interesting mixture of approaches. Its curriculum is inclusive, offering modules run by Polish queer scholars (e.g., Tomasz Basiuk, Jacek Kochanowski), by gender/feminist theorists (e.g., Agnieszka Graff), and by LGBT activists and scholars (Jerzy Krzyszpien, Pawel Leszkowicz), advocating what could be seen in the West/America as “lesbian and gay studies.”

Hence, we can see a split attitude within the same organization: refusal of queer theory in practice and its approval in theory, attempts to develop an essentialized group identity in its political actions of coming out, and queer courses that often undermine a crucial and coherent character of any identity. All at once. So, how to explain this self-contradictory approach? On the one hand, the importance of queer theory is being acknowledged by conducting queer studies, on the other hand, it is not applied in practice, smeared as supposedly apolitical and as weakening the LGBT movement. Besides the growing split between theory and practice, what goes unnoticed by CAH activists is the fact that theory changes practice (and is being changed by it in a reciprocal movement). Consequently, the identity narrative produced by CAH always already includes queer criticism, and therefore more attempts should be taken to recognize how this already queered identity (or what we already coined as queer potentiality) could be taken as a point of departure for political actions which are more attuned to the needs of LGBT people.

Queer as Love: Shifting Forms of Politics

In the remaining part of the chapter we will analyze the campaign “Love Does Not Exclude”⁸ and trace the shift from politics based on coming out to politics underlining non-heterosexual

relationships. We ask if this has to do with rising and more loudly voiced demands and criticisms of “ordinary LGBTQ people,” who show dissatisfaction with current forms of activism, which are mainly concentrated on promoting coming out and organizing Gay Prides (Krzemiński 2009). Could this strategy foreground new LGBT politics in Poland?

“Love Does Not Exclude” draws attention to the Polish law, which does not provide any regulations for same-sex couples. The campaign uses billboards and posters mounted in cities. Organizers also struggle to show the campaign in smaller provincial towns but often are faced with resistance from the local government and the media. There are two kinds of posters: Firstly, there are childhood photos of the campaign’s protagonists, and then there are current photos of protagonists’ non-heterosexual relationships. The campaign also uses Internet-based social networks to seek financial support and help in decision making, opening the project to be influenced and “run” by the LGBTQ community and not only by the campaign leaders. It also has to be mentioned that the campaign is a “non-activist” project, in that organizers are active in their communities but are not affiliated with any LGBT organization in Poland. What seems interesting in the case of this campaign, especially in comparison to what we have said above about the campaigns organized by CAH, is that it does not seem to be about collective coming out processes. The sexual orientation of its protagonists is not the main theme. Conversely, it is about “love”—a word/concept that has never appeared before in CAH campaigns. “Love Does Not Exclude” articulates a concrete demand for recognition for non-heterosexual relationships (for legal provisions in the Polish law), which is exactly the same goal that LGBT organizations have. However, its uniqueness lies in the articulation of this demand by a reference to “love,” “family,” and “childhood,” rather than by claims of citizenship that dominate the liberal discourse of LGBT organizations.

Why did the organizers of this campaign decide to stress love, family, and childhood, instead of emphasizing visibility and identity politics based on coming out? What significance does this bear

in the Polish (LGBT) context? In order to answer these questions, we first need to introduce the context, which, in our opinion, could have had an impact on the decisions regarding shifting the means and strategies of the “Love Does Not Exclude” campaign.

In 2009, Ireneusz Krzemiński, one of the leading Polish sociologists, published a report on his comprehensive, large-scale research on homosexual people living in Poland. *Stigmatized: Sexual Minorities in Poland* (2009) has pointed towards the perceived gap dividing “ordinary LGBTQ people” from “activists.” Firstly, many LGBTQ people do not know much about the activities of LGBT organizations in Poland and perceive them mostly as “Gay Pride organizers.” Pride parades themselves are not seen as very important or leading to any change. Secondly, the research shows strong resistance towards coming out among the “ordinary LGBT community.” Against the coming out narrative promoted by CAH (from a hidden life of lies and oppression, through the cathartic and possibly traumatic moment of “telling the truth,” to a positive and content life “happily ever after” coming out), most of the respondents see coming out as a complicated, multilevel, and nonlinear process that does not always entail the same scenario and definitely does not always have a happy ending. Thirdly, Krzemiński’s report supports claims, also made by LGBT activists, that civil partnership law is seen as urgently needed and desired by the LGBTQ community. The report provides us with an argument for greater flexibility in activist strategies rather than an almost exclusive focus on coming out.

Another important contextual factor for “Love Does Not Exclude” was the 2010 SAS Scandinavian Airlines promotional action “Love is in the Air” (cf. Ciesla, Tomaszewicz, and Rawińska 2011). It was a competition for European same-sex couples to “win” a same-sex wedding aboard a flight to New York. It was an Internet-based, social media contest with people voting for couples from across Europe. Perhaps a little surprisingly, given that the Polish law would not recognize the marriage, the contest was very popular in Poland, and not only in the LGBTQ communities but also in the mainstream media. Of twenty Polish couples, many made it to

the top ten of the contest, and more than 30 percent of all votes in the competition came from Poland.⁹ The most popular Polish couple was Gosia and Ewa, with 70,000 votes, who quickly became “local celebrities.” And even though they finally ended up winning second place, SAS decided to offer them an *ex aequo* winning prize. Gosia and Ewa used their popularity and stressed the political dimension of their participation at every possible occasion. The relatively big success of the contest, with all the attention it received in the mainstream media, and the significant number of votes, shows that it was an important cause for the LGBTQ community and the majority of the Polish society.

In the same year, another wedding took place. This time fully recognized and sanctioned by law, even if it was between two women, Ania and Greta (cf. Konarzewska and Pacewicz 2010). It was possible because Ania is transgender, and in the face of the Polish law, she still is a man. Although self-defined as a translesbian couple, they are legally recognized as a heterosexual married couple, they are constantly playing with those socio-legal-biological configurations, in constant passing (perhaps even “passing”) between those positions according to situation and needs. As such, Greta and Ania use the heteronormative framework for their own queer pleasure and need. Additionally, the case of Piotr Kozak (cf. Lloyd 2010; Kobalczyk and Zawadka 2010) is also informative here. After the death of his partner, Kozak requested the right to inherit the communal flat in which they both lived for many years. The city council rejected his claim, forcing Kozak to move out. Kozak’s further appeal was also unsuccessful in Polish courts, mostly on grounds of “unrecognizability” of his relation by the Polish law, hence his claims were classified as “unjustified.” Dauntless, Kozak reached the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, where he finally won the case. And even though Polish law does not recognize the “precedent,” it was an important symbolic (and material) case, empowering the Polish LGBTQ community.

In all three cases, the important factor is the “ordinary” case of the “everyday life struggle turned into political action,” coming

from outside LGBT activist circles. Every one of the described stories was first of all about the standards of everyday life and securing the feeling of safety for and between partners. In this context, “caring for relationships” rather than “coming out” turns out to be the most important issue for the Polish LGBTQ communities at the moment. This is also seen in interviews with Ewa and Ania. Ewa notices that particularly taking into account class differences, coming out is not available to everybody: “For us it is easier because we have a lot of luck, we live in Warsaw, an island of tolerance” (Ciesla, Tomaszewicz, and Rawińska 2011; our translation). Whereas Ania points out that coming out in a specific form (the organizational narrative described above) can be futile and harmful: “I think it is always better to show yourself first. People see how I look and behave in my other incarnation, this eliminates stupid thoughts. Otherwise, if I just say that I am a transgender they will google it and instantly find some porn photos and code it this way” (Konarzewska and Pacewicz 2010; our translation).

And finally, it seems that Krzemiński’s report and the three described cases have also had their impact on LGBT organizations. For example, the 2010 Warsaw Pride used the slogan “We demand civil partnership law!” and in 2011 it was “Everybody wants to love!” signaling the LGBT organizations’ return to civil partnership law as the main goal of their activism.¹⁰

What Is (or Could Be) Queer about Queer Love/Family (Here and) Now?

The events described above not only demonstrate the need for same-sex partnerships but also make us aware of the strategies and discourses used to achieve them. Specifically, it is the narrative of love, childhood, and intimate relationships—virtues that are often assigned to family life—that strikes our attention. It is so because the majority of Poles (88 percent) consider the family to be a central value in their lives and the most important

form of relations (PORC 2009). In such a context, sexual politics are framed as an attempt to socially and culturally recognize the LGBTQ minority within the “traditional” framework of Polish communitarianism (“same-sex love” and “same-sex family”) rather than as a post-1989 import of liberal individualism (“gay rights” and “self-determination”), which is potentially radical and subversive. This potential of a “challenge to conventional definitions, and an attempt to broaden these” (Weeks, Donovan, and Heaphy 2001: 11) is not unique to Poland and may be productive in other cultures as well. This is also the case in those with weaker communitarian bonds, as we learn from cross-cultural research on same-sex kinship across Europe (Weeks, Donovan, and Heaphy 2001; Ryan-Flood 2009).

This brings us back to the earlier part of our chapter when we were reflecting upon the hegemonic relations between the West/America and CEE. Western/American queer studies discussions on same-sex partnerships, gay marriage, and futurity are much debated and even led to the proclamation of the so-called “anti-social turn” in queer studies. In his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman (2004) proposes a “queer rejection” of every (lesbian and gay) demand upon relationship, family, and childbearing. Instead, he encourages “queers” to embrace “queer negativity” (as always already socially assigned to us) and suggests the path of *jouissance*. Important criticism by José Esteban Muñoz (2007) points out that Edelman offers a very narrow understanding of “the future,” which he then wants to reject. Edelman re-creates “the future” as a normative, white, middle-class reproductive project. However, as Muñoz shows, such a construction of “future for all” is far from reality, hence not available for many. Consequently, Muñoz argues that queers cannot “fuck the future,” which seems particularly important to us in the context of the above-mentioned turn in LGBT politics towards relationality, familiarity, and love as locally adequate and powerful political concepts.

Another argument in this discussion on family, future, relationships, and marriages comes from Tom Boellstorff (2007). He claims

that “same-sex marriage is not necessarily an assimilationist act reinscribing monogamy and the nuclear family, any more than queer subjectivity necessarily inscribes a medicalized discourse of deviant homosexuality” (2007: 242), as it is understood by Edelman. Boellstorff therefore argues that by queering marriage it is possible to subvert and transgress its heteronormative character, a claim that echoes Michel Foucault’s claim in relation to homosexuality and life. As he wrote:

I think that’s what makes homosexuality “disturbing”: the homosexual mode of life, much more than the sexual act itself. To imagine a sexual act that doesn’t conform to law or nature is not what disturbs people. But that individuals are beginning to love one another—there’s the problem. The institution is caught in a contradiction; affective intensities traverse it which at one and the same time keep it going and shake it up. [...] These relations short-circuit it and introduce love where there’s supposed to be only law, rule, or habit. (Foucault 1981)

If we agree with Foucault, we cannot easily overrule love as a subject and a tool of politics. Hence we ask how an ethics of love (and reciprocity/rationality) can be a new, local, and reflexive path for Polish LGBT(Q) politics. After all, what all the cases described above have in common is the idea of legal recognition of love and relationships of LGBTQ people. It is more “basic human needs” than “universal human rights” that have been emphasized and productively endorsed. Protagonists of the campaign did not rely on drawing similarities with heterosexuals but stressed common needs and desires, shifting away from rigid identitarian politics of “us/them” towards more permeable social configurations.

Conclusion

Let us return to the ideas of our opening paragraphs about the hegemonic relations of the West/America and CEE, historiographical narratives of “progress” and “backwardness,” and geotemporal divisions. Is the shift we are trying to capture in Polish sexual politics, queer? We do not know. But perhaps we should rephrase and ask what is queer in CEE? In the West? In Poland? What is queer for us—Polish queers? We provided complex readings of the activism of the “Campaign Against Homophobia,” as well as of the non-CAH-related campaign “Love Does Not Exclude.” In both cases we underlined the impossibility of a clear reading of any of these campaigns as simply identitarian or as simply queer projects. In the end, we are left with the question: Who are those kids looking at us from the posters of “Love Does Not Exclude”? If we were to agree with Lee Edelman, we should forget about them, should not stand up for the rights and privileges of the heteronormative society. But are those kids really there to say: “We need to replicate the heteronormative nuclear family”? No. The kids in the picture are us from the past. What we fight for here and now is the future for the kids we once were. We demand the “present,” more because of “our past” rather than because of “their future.” We do not want to “fuck the (straight) future” because we are still fighting for the queer present. Does it mean that we are not “queer enough”? We are queer. Locally.

Notes

- 1 We want to express our uneasiness in dealing with the terms and concepts of the “West,” “Central and Eastern Europe,” “Orient,” and others. It is important that we highlight the impossibility of a specification of what these terms exactly

relate to; yet still, it seems inescapable to use them, while they persist in their abundance of historical, cultural, political, geographical, ideological, and other meanings.

- 2 In our chapter LGBT denotes organizational politics and activism. LGBTQ, however, refers to the wider community of non-heterosexual people (some of who self-identify as “queer” and not as LGBT).
- 3 Whereas *ipse* describes the need to differentiate oneself from the other in order to reclaim one’s own specificity, *idem* signifies the continuity of oneself throughout time and refers to the feeling that despite changes in one’s life one remains the same person.
- 4 A nostalgic awaiting of a “Polish Stonewall” as an ignition of emancipation can be found in Sypniewski and Warkocki (2004).
- 5 Such as Annamarie Jagose’s *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (1996), William B. Turner’s *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (2000), or Nikki Sullivan’s *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003).
- 6 For instance, in *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement* by Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel (1999).
- 7 See <http://www.homoseksualizm.org.pl>.
- 8 The campaign is run by well-known activists and academics in Poland, but none of them is a member of any organization. The background of their activities consists of voluntary work and donations by sponsors, both companies and private people.
- 9 See <http://love.flysas.net/blog>.
- 10 Same-sex partnerships were on the LGBT organizations’ agenda back in 2002, when the first attempts to introduce these regulations took place. However, after a brief discussion and media frenzy, unsuccessful as it was, organizations decreased the significance of the issue of same-sex partnerships on their agenda by focusing on other topics (notably visibility).

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