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Queer cities, queer cultures: Europe since 1945

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BOOK REVIEW

Queer cities, queer cultures: Europe since 1945, edited by Matt Cook and Jennifer V. Evans, London, Bloomsbury, 2014, 313 pp., £20.69 (paperback), ISBN978-1-4411-5930-4

Cook and Evans' anthology offers a rich analytic assemblage of urban queer culture in Europe from 1945 to the present time. Although its temporal focus requires further conceptual substantiation, the work is generally effective in analysing queer's complex socio-spatial dimensions. This is particularly done in the domains of politics, mobility, migration, tourism, democracy, religion, language, sex, health, prejudice and justice that have been structurally intersecting urban queer culture over the last seven decades or so. Across genders and academic stages of career, the contributors approach these matters of urban queer culture from anthropological, historical, gender, philosophical, sociological, linguistic and legal epistemologies.

The compilation, consisting of 14 chapters, features some compelling aspects and frontiers of queer citizenship and belonging: imaginary tourist queer spaces of Madrid (Chapter 1) and Paris (Chapter 12); sexual revolution, gay gentrification and 'capital' queer life courses in London (Chapter 2), Amsterdam (Chapter 6) and Helsinki (Chapter 11); Copenhagen's queer oppression (e.g. 1961's 'Ugly Law' – motivated by fear of 'paedophilia', this law increased the age of consent from 18 to 21 for homosexuals), AIDS crisis and queer liberation (Chapter 3); Berlin's memorial culture of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people (Chapter 4); communist and post-communist queer transformations and the (mis)recognitions of sexual difference in Moscow (Chapter 5), Ljubljana (Chapter 7) and Budapest (Chapter 10); non-normative desires and sexual traditions versus subversions in Athens (Chapter 8) and Istanbul (Chapter 9); 'queer Muslims' in Amsterdam (Chapter 13); and digital queer urbanity (Chapter 14).

Chapters 1–12 are now gathered under the label 'Pasts' and Chapters 13 and 14 are 'Closing Reflections'. A further clarification of the compilation's make-up, or a restructuring of the chapters, would have been helpful. That is, a more precise thematic, theoretical and/or geographical framing could have provided the reader with a clearer vista of the main argument and its evolution throughout the work.

It is particularly not clear why Fatima El-Tayeb's Chapter 13, "'Gays who cannot properly be gay". Queer Muslims in the neoliberal European city', which pursues a hot topic, has been made one of the 'Closing Reflections'. El-Tayeb's case on Amsterdam could have better directly ensued from Gert Hekma's Chapter 6, especially from his concluding discussion, titled 'The new millennium: gays, Muslims and straights', which discusses the critical role of

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Islam in the local tolerance of homosexuality. Also, the problematic European/Muslim dichotomy in Chapter 13, the suggested harmonious relationship between 'Europe' and 'queer' and the premise that 'queerness becomes tolerable if and when it is perceived as being compatible with neoliberal demands' (p. 264) ask for further definitions, argumentative gravitas and critical evidence. This chapter's opening position reads:

the externalisation of Muslims and other racialised groups is a European phenomenon, which, in fact, the Europeanisation of the continent's nation-states is in no small part manifest in a shared Islamophobia and a framing of immigration as the main threat to the continental union. (p. 264)

This rather bold statement does not seem to be carried through with full empirical rigour and conceptual interlinkage to sustain its claim and the main notions and geographical categories involved. Rahman's (2014) intersectional account on queer identity vis-a-vis Islamophobic attitudes in Western societies may be complementary in this regard.

The compilation discusses various urban locales that altogether provide a sound impressionistic palette of what can be called queer Europe. That said, the uses of 'Europe' and also the 'city' as geographical scales of analysing the fluidity of queer identities is somewhat challenging. As partially acknowledged by the editors, queer culture as situated in a Western context should be considered in a continuous interface with global, or translocal, forces and agencies. This encourages a more-than-urban and more-than-European (and less Eurocentric) comparative perspective, which may also explicitly juxtapose the Global North with the Global South.

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Moreover, nearly all contributions in this anthology deal with the socio-physical spaces of queer life in the public sphere. A firmer anchoring of bodily and home-based queer spaces (e.g. Gorman-Murray 2015) as well as virtual configurations of queer life within the compilation's analytic scope would have formed a substantial addition. As resonated by Tom Boellstorff in Chapter 14, which is an excellent concise reflection, queer research should reckon with the growing importance of digital media, particularly location-aware devices, and hence with the technologically mediated spaces and potentialities of queer life. Digital urban queer life is now merely plugged in as an afterword in this chapter and some other contributors only allude to this topic as a new horizon en passant. Thus, insights are called for that actually flesh out, in the words of Judit Takaács on the Budapest case, 'the accelerated expansion of queer cyberisation' (p. 205).

Although the empirical merit of the compilation is evident seeing the reported lived queer encounters throughout the work, the reader may grope after its grander theoretical narrative, particularly in regard to sexual identity politics. The anthology could have more systematically situated the at times overly descriptively presented studies in topical queer analyses on, foremostly, intersectionality (e.g. Brown 2012), 'post-queer' politics (Ruffolo 2009) and transforming urban sexual subjectivities (Hubbard 2013). The reader may wonder how this compilation progresses these and cognate bodies of work. Moreover, while the anthology covers relevant and novel observational, (auto-)biographical, participatory, interview-based and other ethnographic works and archival analysis, a metamethodological chapter on doing urban queer research, and the attendant geographically varying methodical concerns, would have thickened the edited volume.

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Queer research is ceaseless and remains a real-time window on the world. As noted by the editors, 'everyday acts of violence . . . continue to haunt queer life across Europe . . . [T]he twenty-first century appearance of openness . . . is still a fallacy' (p. 9), which continue to prompt a critically active and activist stance that, in itself, epitomises what 'queer' is about. Despite the lacunas in this anthology, a range of significant sources is engaged with and each chapter includes a useful list of further readings. As such, this (reasonably priced) anthology serves as sound multidisciplinary textbook for students and scholars who want to gain multifaceted historical understandings of the dynamic interrelationships between queer, space and sociability in urban Europe and the intrinsically ambivalent and shifting mindsets about queer citizenship. Nevertheless, further work would be beneficial to deepen the anthology's queer critiques in terms of theory, method and geographical scale of analysis.

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