De-Centring Western Sexualities

Central and Eastern European Perspectives

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Chapter 1

'Contemporary Peripheries': Queer Studies, Circulation of Knowledge and East/West Divide

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Hurley: Let me get this straight. All this already happened?
Miles: Yes.
H: So this conversation we're having right now, we already had it?
M: Yes.
H: Then, what I am going to say next?
M: I don't know.
H: Ha! Then your theory is wrong.
M: For the thousandth time, you dingbat, the conversation already happened, but not for you and me. For you and me, it's happening right now.
H: OK, answer me this. If all this already happened to me then why don't I remember any of it?
M: Because once Ben turned that wheel, time isn't a straight line for us anymore. Our experience is in the past, and the future occurred before this experience right now.
H: [silence] Say that again.
M: Shoot me! Please? Please!
H: Aha! I can't shoot you because if you die in 1977 then you'll never come back on the island on the freighter thirty years from now.
M: I can die! Because I've already come to the island on the freighter. Any of us can die, because this is our present.
H: But you said that Ben couldn't die because he still needs to grow up and become the leader of the Others.
M: Because this is his past.
H: But when we first captured Ben, and Sayid, like, tortured him, then why wouldn't he remember getting shot by the same guy, when he was a kid?
M: [silence] Huh … I haven't thought of that.
H: Huh!

('Time travel' conversation between Hurley and Miles, *Lost*, season 5, episode 11.)

Hurley and Miles end their dialogue in confusion and uncertainty. The perplexity is caused not only by the heroes' current condition (i.e. travel in time from 2007 to 1977, with some short breaks at different times), but also by the usual way we conceptualise, theorise and memorise time. At the end of the conversation, Miles, who seems to have understood the workings and mechanisms of time, admits otherwise. For a short moment we believe in his explanation/construction of temporality, but then again we get lost – lost in time, lost in translation of time, lost in time construction, lost in space …?

We all live 'here and now', but what do 'here' and 'now' mean – for you, for me, for us? How do we (re)construct them? What elements of a past are persistent in the present? In what form will the present survive into a future? What does it mean to live a certain time in the West?[1] What marks this time? What kind of expectations does it produce for/on its subjects? Everybody has their time, but is this time the same for all? And how is the common perception of time achieved? How is it constructed? What will become history, and what will remain forgotten forever? Unspoken? Unwritten?

These are not new questions, and the reflection on time is perhaps one of the most persistant, troublesome topics, accompanying humankind throughout centuries of civilisation. But in this chapter we want to ponder about the time in a specific context of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and its historical and current developments of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) movements and sexuality/queer studies. What is important is to ask whether CEE's LGBTQ's 'now and here' is only a reflection of a much broader and older Western narrative. Do the movements develop along the same trajectories? And why does it matter to know?

Protagonists of the *Lost* series find themselves not only lost in time, but also in space. The mysterious island on which they found themselves after the plane crash is a no-where no-place. As the narrative develops, we learn that it is somewhere – but the island's 'here' placement is in fact its temporal 'now' harbouring. Time and space, in other words, are inseparable. Therefore, we also feel it is important to ask: if time of CEE is a little queer (a joy of word-play), where is CEE? Where is the West? How does 'here' of one of these myriad geo-referents correspond to/is translated on to '(t)here' of the other? Are the geographical boundaries of regions as fixed as their enclosed countries? Is it possible to establish a relation between 'West' and 'CEE', as between (respectively) 'metropolis/centre' and 'colony/periphery' (popular in post-colonial writings)? And considering that CEE is not (so far) a region of much interest to post-colonial theorists,[2] what would be the implications of such a juxtaposition of geographical regions and academic theories?

1 We will reflect on the construction and meaning of the 'West' and 'Central and Eastern Europe' later in this chapter.

2 That is not to say that there is no interest at all. We discuss this issue later.

In this chapter we would like to outline a general theoretical framework for the whole book. Its primary goal (though one of many) is to question the construction and conceptualisation of sexuality and LGBTQ activism in contemporary Central and Eastern European countries. We consider how Western discourses/theories influence this process. How (as we suggest) does Western hegemonic imposition/dominance work in local contexts? Therefore, the question of *CEE locality* (local translation of politics and theories) plays a significant role in gathered analyses. This local geotemporal dimension of sexual politics problematises, usually taken for granted, the Western/(post-)colonial dichotomy and also the unified notion of 'Western activism', dominated by the Anglo-American model. Therefore, we want to scrutinise it and see to what extent it forecloses, marginalises and separates histories of LGBT movement and sexuality studies in CEE. This stance is obviously a particular enactment of reflection present in the field of 'queer studies' and, as we like to connect our work with this body of literature, we will begin by outlining our relation to queer studies. As we progress, we expand our analysis of time and space, as introduced above. While doing so, we also take up the question of relations between post-colonial and post-communist studies, showing (with the ultimate example of the whole book) how the 'cross-contamination' of theories is one of the best queer studies practices we can think of.

Geographies of Queer Studies

There are many uses of the word 'queer', varying from context to context, within academic and activist circles. It may be an umbrella term for 'LGBT', or opposition to 'lesbian' and 'gay'; queer may be predominantly concerted with sexuality, or may stand for an intersectional approach; it may be another term for 'homo', or a non-identitarian category. The word might be meaningless in a non-English speaking context, or its notion may be differently shaped according to needs and conditions.

In the Western context the history of queer is rooted in AIDS politics and in the opposition to the gay liberation of the 'Stonewall era' (e.g. Jagose 1996; Phelan 1997). In CEE countries, and also in some Nordic (Rosenberg 2008) and perhaps other non-Western countries, the term 'queer' is often used to express identity politics, and becomes a bone of contention/battle between local queer theorists (who know the academic narrative of 'queer vs LGBT' and are willing to preserve it) on the one hand, and on the other local communities and activists, who use the term as another, 'new' name for 'lesbian and gay' or often use it in the commercial context (e.g. TV series as *Queer As Folk* or *Queer Eye For a Straight Guy*).

This volume shows localised meanings of these categories in CEE. Consequently, the authors will use the words 'queer', 'lesbian', 'gay', 'homosexual' or 'LGBT' differently, according to their specific needs and cultural uses. However, each author specifies the way they use these labels. As

such, this is already one of the ways this book contributes to queer studies – it offers the proliferation of perspectives on the meaning and application of the 'queer' category.

If one evaluates this volume from the Western/Anglo-American queer perspective, one can rightly question the lack of articles dealing with transsexuality, bisexuality and its representation of non-normative sexualities outside homosexuality. There are many reasons for this. For example, a primary reason for not dealing with bisexuality and transsexuality relates to what we call a 'temporal disjunction'. Transgender activism in CEE only began to emerge since around 2007–2008. This might be one reason for the general lack of scholarship about transgender issues in/about the region. However, it also must be noted that unlike in the West – where transgender groups had a long history of struggle for inclusion and widening of lesbian and gay politics to 'LGBT politics' (Meyerowitz 2002; Stryker and Whittle 2006) – 'transgender' was included in lesbian and gay politics in CEE almost from the very beginning of these movements. Homosexual activism was self-labelled as 'LGBT', even if 'B' and 'T' were purely discursive invocations. This 'inclusion before coming into being' occurred because of different temporalities of West and CEE. As in many other spheres of life, activists in CEE adopted labels already in use in the West, even if these markers did not denote their new reality. So when the first lesbian and gay groups began to self-organise in the early 1990s, they looked at the Western models and their categories (LGBT), rather than trying to figure out their own terminology.

Another issue to be raised is the substitution of 'sexualities' from the title of the book with the primary focus on 'homosexuality' in its content. Actually, we believe that the book's content develops and builds around the concept of 'heteronormativity' rather than 'homosexuality'. Heteronormativity is not only an object of direct examination in some chapters (e.g. Roseneil and Stoilova, Lambevski) but also forms a viable and crucial backdrop of analysis in others (e.g. Blagojevic, Kuhar). This is already another way (focusing on heteronormativity as one of the major categories organising our contemporary lives, irrespective of geopolitical locations) in which this book contributes to the field of queer studies.

Our Time Which Is Not Yours Is Not Ours: Sequence, Coincidence and Temporal Disjunction

After the collapse of the 'Iron Curtain', CEE countries quite unanimously adopted a Western style of political and social engagement, without much questioning of its historical particularism and suitability for their context. When lesbian and gay activism began to emerge in CEE, the West was already at the 'queer' stage, with a long history and plurality of models, forms of engagement, goals and structures. Conversely, the communist past of CEE built completely different social structures and modalities. This could be represented graphically

as two separate geopolitical-temporal modalities (communism and capitalism) running parallel, where in 1989 one of them finishes (communism), and the other one becomes universal for both regions (capitalism).

This is what Francis Fukuyama (1992) once called 'the end of history' – (neo-)liberal democracy and capitalism triumphing over decades of long struggle for dominance in world ideologies and politics. However, for the West the continuity was preserved and the 'end of communism'/1989 may be placed as another event in the sequence of events. For CEE, this change was much sharper and more abrupt, literally bring the collapse of one world and the promise of a '(brave?) new world' much more coincidentally than sequentially – 'everything at once'. Indeed, it should be even more complicated, and represented as a constant 'knotting' and 'looping' of time(s) after 1989. This Western 'time of sequence' and CEE's 'time of coincidence' might, therefore, look as shown in Figure 1.1.[3]

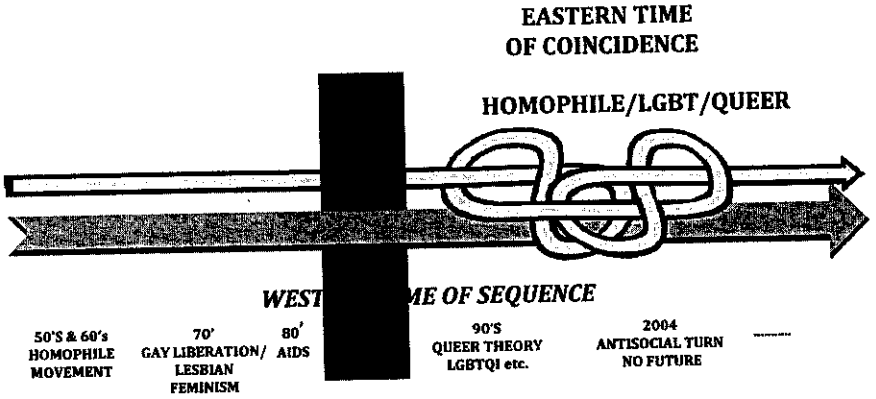

Figure 1.1 Western 'time of sequence' and Eastern 'time of coincidence'

3 We are fully aware that this drawing is a simplification or even a process of strengthening of what we call 'Western time'. The way people in Western countries live/ experience/perceive their time differs (within countries, but also in the way time is theorised). Also, as we want to show in this book 'Western/Eastern' division is highly problematic. In our opinion what is perceived as Western is dominated by Anglo-American, or even just American thinking/theories. Therefore, our aim is not only to recognise particularities of the CEE countries, usually 'put into one box', in this Americanised model, but we also want to problematise the notion of the 'West', which barely touches/reflects the experiences of the non-English speaking countries.

Figure 1.1 may seem familiar to some. This might be because we have intended this representation of CEE time-knotting to resemble the 'figure-eight knot' or 'four knot' from the cover of Diana Fuss's seminal *Inside/Out* (1991). At the end of her introduction, she addresses this figure and writes about it in these words:

> This three-dimension geometrical domain, constituted by rings and matrices, loops and linkages, is nonetheless embodied, sexualized. The undecidability of this simple topology may be its greatest appeal, for it seems to signify at once an anal, a vaginal, a clitoral, a penile, and a testicular topography. The knot interlaces many orifices, many sites of pleasure, many libidinal economies. It visualises for us in the very simplicity of its openings and closures, its overs and unders, its ins and outs, the contortions and convolutions of any sexual identity formation. (Fuss 1991: 7)

So the 'knotted time' not only represents the queer experience of CEE, but it is also an embodiment of sexual desires and pleasures. Thus, when we use the term 'queer time' for CEE, as opposed to 'straight time' of the West, it is not only a linguistic game we play upon various meanings of 'queer' and 'straight'. We also intend to highlight the erotic dimension of time, the oddly erotic experience of identity formation in CEE.

When in 1989 'the communist time' ended and the physical borders began to dismantle, the flow and exchange of material products and ideas really took over. The protuberance of clutching ideas, into which CEE was 'thrown', was far from a linear and progressively accumulative vision of time, which continued (exactly: continued!) to unfold in the West (or at least in its academic representation). Sexual politics in CEE may serve as an example. The strong assimilationist model of activism currently present in CEE, as some authors in this book show, could be read as 'stepping back in time' to 'Western homophile times' of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet this 'going backward' is actually 'stepping forward' for lesbian and gay activists in CEE, if only because they can self-organise, which was not possible before 1989. Additionally, these 'homophile-like' claims of acceptance and assimilation may be attempted by 'jumping into the 1970s' and using some contestation strategies predominant at the time in America (and a handful of other countries). At the same time, other groups in CEE label themselves 'queer' and draw directly on 1990s Queer Nation events such as 'kiss-ins' in public spaces. Therefore, the beginning of the 1990s for LGBT activists in CEE is truly a 'queer time': a time of mismatched models and realities, strategies and possibilities, understandings and uses, 'all at once'. It is the time when 'real' and 'fake', 'the original' and 'the copy' collapse into 'the same'/'the one'; and yet, nothing is the same, nothing is straight any more. (Had it ever been?)

However, what we have just presented is already an attempt to 'untie the knot' and 'linearise' the present 'here and now' reality of CEE. It is done by categorising various activities, attitudes and approaches present all at once, as belonging to certain historical, sequential narratives. Thus in organising the 'knotted temporality

of CEE' into stages and inscribing it into a particular 'familiar' history (of Western history of LGBTQ movements) we already simplify it in order to make sense of it. But do we actually succeed? Does such 'unknotting' make sense, and for whom? And what are the prerequisites to be able to understand it in either form? In other words, we feel it is important to ask why certain models (notably Western/American) are familiar to 'all' and perceived as 'The One' and not one of many; and why 'local' narrations of lesbian and gay emancipation will be seen as, precisely, 'local' and not 'universally' recognised. We follow postmodern historians who see history as a discursive narrative activity, a strongly (and irreversibly?) (non)linear process that shapes cultures, political customs and social attitudes, and serves to maintain particular power relations (White 1990; Carr 1991; Jenkins 1991, 1997). Thus, 'another stage in development' from the Western perspective, knots the time, as from the CEE perspective it is 'just a beginning'. Consequently, this disjunction/crossover has to become problematic for both Western and CEE people. It is troublesome for the latter, who are trying to 'catch up' with the West (although living in the 'common present', the feeling is of being sort of 'retarded', in the 'past'); but also for Western communities, who see CEE as 'lagging behind' or 'dragging the progress down' (equally here, CEE is seen as 'contemporary', but somehow 'hindered' and 'behind').

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. But since this would annihilate the very idea of 'Western progress', something else needs to be done; some mechanism needs to be deployed to differentiate the 'West' and 'CEE' as 'not at the same time'. So although the 'communist time' 'collapsed' into the Western narration, making it 'The One', CEE (or former 'communist time') and West are still discursively maintained as 'parallel' and separate. This may seem paradoxical, but as Foucault (1998) noted, the use of opposite and apparently contradictory discourses by one discursive instance may not have to be that unusual. In his own words: 'Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy' (Foucault 1998: 101–2).

What is at stake here is power and hegemonic strategies of subordination. How then is the difference between CEE and West kept alive, while at the same time the smokescreen of its lack is deployed? Our proposition is to understand the constant reference to CEE as 'post-communist' as a technique aimed at rendering CEE as the 'other'. It is this constant 'transformation' through which CEE supposedly 'has been going' (present perfect continuous is much at home here) that allows the West to place itself 'above'/'before', as the mentoring force which CEE should look up to. How

and who is to decide when the 'transition' ends? When the CEE will no longer have to 'transform' anything; when will it join the Western club?[4] Of course there is no single instance, yet we somehow feel under the skin that the agency here is not belonging to CEE, that authority lies elsewhere. 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.

Central and Eastern Europe is a 'contemporary periphery' because it is 'European enough' (geographically), 'yet not enough advanced' to become 'Western' (temporally). This 'temporal disjunction' and the meaning of 'time'/'temporality' and 'history'/'History' are shaped by economic and political conditions. These, in turn, have clear gender and sexual underpinnings (Friedman 1997; Young 1997). The 'hegemonic temporality of West' is constructed as continuous and linear, progressive and 'accumulative' (from 'old-primitive' to 'new-advanced'). As such it becomes clear that the contemporary Western notion of 'time' has underpinnings in classical liberal ideology of the individual in a progressive, future-oriented world (Adam 1995, 2004). Following Lee Edelman's (2004) queer polemic that sparked discussions about queer rejecting such a temporal trajectory ('anti-social turn'), this collection problematises this perspective. Edelman claims that queer should reject the hetero- and homonormative trajectory of a progressive future-oriented world symbolised by the figure of a child. However, he does not take into account that this turn for 'no future' has some *raison d'être* only in cultures that *have* 'future', are 'future-oriented', and in the privileged position of being able to 'waste' it.[5]

The notion of 'future' in CEE was shaped differently and its vector does not have the same direction as the 'Western future'. In the context of post-communist CEE, where people have just released themselves from the dominance of the USSR, that call of Western queer theory to 'reject future' and 'embrace the negativity' does not resonate with the needs, positions and opportunities of queer people in CEE. In fact it would be a kind of suicidal move to embrace the position that the majority of homophobic society has always already seen as the most appropriate for queers. Thus, by engaging with the discussion about temporality and the 'anti-social turn' in queer studies, this volume provides new insights about the other possible shapes of 'queer temporalities'.

So, in summary, we would like to ask whether it is possible to do 'queer' politics without the historical baggage. Is it possible to do non-identitarian politics (the Western model of queer) without first going through a stage of identity politics?

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4 Please note that Shannon Woodcock makes the similar claim in this volume. We were not aware of each other's work before, hence this 'coincidence' of almost identical thoughts is even more telling and interesting.

5 This is why the book was criticised by lesbians, feminists and people of colour – for representing the privileged position of the white, middle-class man, who could afford to 'fuck the future'. For a summary of this critique see Elizabeth Freeman's Introduction to the *GLQ* special issue on time (Freeman 2007: 166–7; see also Halberstam 2008; Muñoz 2009).

As much as these are open questions without definite answers, what we want to suggest is that perhaps more important is the need to contextualise meanings and focus more on the 'cultural translation' of queer, conceptualising it each and every time anew. So, as Joanna Mizielińska argues in her chapter in this collection, we may realise that what is called 'essentialist politics of identity' in the Western context may very well function to bring close results to those of 'Western queer', if present or used in a non-Western (here CEE) context.

East and West: Post-Colonial Relations of (Dis)placement

There is an ongoing debate about what constitutes 'colonialism', 'post-colonialism', 'neo-imperialism' etc. (Loomba 1998; Chakrabarty 2007). There is also a growing body of work about queer post-colonial subjects (Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 2000; Hawley 2001a, 2001b; Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002; Pitcher and Gunkel 2009) and sexuality and globalisation (Hennessy 2000; Altman 2001; Binnie 2004; Padilla 2007). It has become clear by now that post-colonial scholarship is an important field of reference for this book. Indeed, we are influenced by this body of work and use some of the key concepts in our own formulation of ideas and analyses. In a sense, we would like to see this project as an effect of merging post-communist and post-colonial studies.

This volume is an exploration of sexual politics in CEE ('contemporary periphery') in relation to the West ('metropolis'). It contributes to post-colonial studies by problematising the category of 'centre/metropolis/West' by showing it as a relational and unstable concept. However, we have also noted that many works of post-colonial scholarship tend to bipolarise the centre–periphery relation. Often unintentionally 'metropolitan centre' is constructed as more or less unified and coherent, against which the pluralisation and diversification of 'post-colonial periphery' is done.

Therefore, we join voices calling for wider coverage and scrutinisation of the metropolis, and not only of the colony (Mishra and Hodge 1991; Hulme 1995; Loomba 1998; Janion 2007). In particular, this collection shows how some geographical locations are under-theorised in post-colonial studies. The obsolete communist 'Second World' (contemporary Western relations with China, Korea and Cuba have developed more individualistic discourses) – remnants of which fall in CEE, located somewhere between the 'developed countries' of the 'First World' and 'developing countries' of the 'Third World' – disrupts the dyad centre–periphery. As we have shown above, geographical, political, economic and temporal status of CEE puts it at times in either the first or the third class, and at times in both simultaneously. Consequently, we need to ask: where exactly does 'Central and Eastern Europe' locate itself? And where is 'West'? Does (geographical) being in 'Europe' automatically grants the privilege of belonging to the first-class 'Global North' club? Or does the process of 'catching up with (the idea of) West' make CEE more a part of the 'Global South'? How global is

'Global'? The terms 'Global North/South' are relatively new and their use is just spreading; but do they really solve the problems imposed by previous hegemonic categories? What is the role of homosexuality and lesbian and gay activism in making, sustaining and transcending those divisions – especially in light of the resurgence of nationalist movements after 1989 and post '9/11'? As more and more scholars highlight (Duggan 1994; Beverley 2004; Puar 2007; Butler 2009), cultural attitudes and legal provisions for lesbian and gay people are becoming important factors in creating and maintaining modern divisions of 'Us' ('West', 'civilised', 'secular', 'liberal' and supposedly 'pro-gay') and 'Them' ('Orient', 'primitive', 'religious', 'fanatical' and consequently 'anti-gay'). This volume joins this discussion and shows another dimension of how this process works, not only in relation to 'West/Orient', but also 'West/CEE', which in our eyes is a much more problematic relation, not easily classifiable along the 'Us/Them', 'insider/outsider' lines.

Additionally, the context of 'democratisation' of CEE, which in practice denotes installing some type of modern, liberal, democratic regime in politics and neo-liberal capitalism in economics, evokes recent works about consumerism, 'mercantilisation of sexuality' and the neo-liberal economy of sexual identities (e.g. D'Emilio 1993; Chasin 2000; Hennessy 2000; Duggan 2004; Woltersdorff 2007). This book contributes therefore to the some of the hottest debates in today's queer scholarship, offering new perspectives on the influence of market organisation and political regime for the formation of non-normative sexual identities and activism in the transnational context.

What is 'Central and Eastern Europe'?[6]

There are many labels in use, denoting, describing and indicating what 'CEE' might be. There are geographical ones: East, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Balkans, Southern and Eastern Europe, or just Southern Europe. There are historical ones: post-communist/former communist, post-Soviet/former Soviet, communist/Soviet satellite countries, former communist bloc, countries behind the former Iron Curtain. There are also political ones: post-authoritarian, emerging democracies, new democracies, transitional/transforming countries, developing democracies, consolidating democracies. There is also a set of terms relating to the EU only: new members, second-wave enlargement countries, aspiring countries. And of course the use of these names is neither systematic nor consequential; they are all being used as parallels and as synonyms. The three types under which we have grouped them are only to highlight how geography, history, politics and time are the fabric of these categories. And since the labels are

6 What we present here is just a brief exercise. More comprehensive and in-depth analysis is to be found in a handful of works that attempt a post-colonially inspired analysis of 'CEE' and its relations to/with 'West' (see Todorova 1997; Moore 2001; Buchowski 2004; Kelertas 2006; Melegh 2006; Chari and Verdery 2009; Owczarzak 2009; Korek 2009).

highly contested and conflated, intention, meaning and understanding rely heavily on the user rather than on the label itself.

Let us briefly discuss two examples. First: is Germany a part of CEE? Most people would say no. But eastern Germany, a former communist republic, is without doubt in a similar state of 'transition' as other former communist countries. Facing similar problems of unemployment, slow economy, social disappointment and intensified migration to big cities and western parts of the country, the only difference is that it is now officially part of 'one Germany', the 'correct one' (Western), and not a independent state. The process of 'unification of Germany' thus somehow erased the difference, erased the memory of Germany being a 'former communist' country, setting the boundaries of a 'post-communist world' east of Germany.

There is no doubt that 'former communist bloc' was not a bloc at all, that there were significant differences between the USSR, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and East Germany; and that there are equally significant differences between what they have become now. Yet still, these and all other countries in the region are thrown into one bag (with the discussed exception of 'Germany'), and often referred to as coherent, 'out there'.

Second example: is Poland an 'Eastern European' country? The answer depends on who is asked. For Poles themselves, no; Poland is either simply a 'European' or a 'Central European' country. 'Eastern Europe' is outside Poland's eastern borders. In the UK and other Western European countries, 'Central and Eastern Europe' and 'Eastern Europe' are interchangeable, denoting the same. Thus, Poland is an 'Eastern European' country. But is it 'post-Soviet'? No – neither for Poles, nor for Western Europeans. But yes, from American point of view, where it is more common to use the 'post-Soviet/former Soviet' label; whereas in Europe 'post-communist/former communist' would be more popular. Also the geographical designation 'CEE' seems to be more popular in a European rather than American context, where the historical/political categories prevail. (But then again, all of these are only our, the editors', perceptions. And these are shaped by the fact that we share a Polish cultural upbringing, although Robert has chosen the UK as a place to live, and Joanna maintains relations with Nordic countries while working and living in Warsaw.)

What is 'West'?

Similarly, it is important to ask: where is the 'West' to which we (and other authors in this book) refer? The answer is (not so) simple. 'West' is a myriad constellation, floating in a time-space of individual perceptions and 'CEE' idealisations. It is at times synonymous with 'Europe', sometimes more precisely to 'European Union', sometimes 'Western Europe'; it denotes 'Europe and America' or only 'America' (and this in turn means solely the USA, although at times a shadowy and weak hint of Canada beams from underneath the colossal USA) or 'Anglo-America'. 'West' is 'liberalism and progress', 'West' was 'a promise of freedom', 'El Dorado' –

a dreamland of colourful prosperity; 'here' and 'there', perhaps (t)here; 'West' was/is where 'we' (CEE) want to be. Finally, 'West' is a normative ideal of 'how things should be'. How to make sense of what is actually meant each time 'West' as a category is invoked – we do not know. As much as we want to rationalise and categorically understand/understand through existing categories, we also *feel* (and it is precisely the *feeling* that we want to stress here) that none of the above explanatory terms ever fills the vessel of 'West' completely. We *feel* that even the most 'precise' denotation of 'West' (e.g. 'EU') always carries a suitcase (or just a small handbag, or even perhaps only a pocket) full of other labels, always echoing something else, in a never-ending chain of equivalence and relationality.

What does it mean in the context of queer studies, knowledge production and LGBT activism? Possibly, that for us 'Western' means 'English', 'Anglo-American'. In fact, it should be narrowed even more to denote just 'American'. During various presentations and discussions, we became increasingly aware of how much more our perception of English-speaking academy ('Anglo-American', as we used to call it) was persistently 'Americanised' than we initially thought ourselves. So for example, while exploring 'CEE's temporal knotting' in the earlier part of this chapter, we constructed a linear narrative of the lesbian and gay movement, calling it 'Western narrative' – it has to be noted and acknowledged that, for example, British scholars working in the field of histories of non-normative sexualities may not necessarily agree with it,[7] and rightly so. However, what this situation of us, 'non-Westerners', labelling English literature about sexuality as 'Anglo-American' (yet more American than British, and not even trying to think through the case of Australia) highlights is the actual workings of the hegemonic position of 'America'/United States in the production and circulation of knowledge. And we, although critically engaged and presumably more aware of it, are not exempt from its conditioning – unfortunately and unwillingly, yet perhaps necessarily, reproducing at times these mechanisms of inequality ourselves.

* * *

We are fully aware that the processes and mechanisms we criticise here are partially recreated in our own analysis when we make certain generalisations or, conversely, when being very particular, perhaps too much so to make sustainable claims. This seems an inevitable process of approaching own aporia in trying to 'see behind' (if it is possible at all). Self-reflection thus needs to be an indispensable element of any research dealing with discourse and power. We particularly owe a debt to a number of significant feminist works, all dealing with 'new' epistemologies of 'situated knowledge(s)' (e.g. Alarcon 1990; Minh-ha 1990; Haraway 1997; Applebaum 2001; Presser 2005). However, we also feel that although risking some over- and

7 We would like to thank participants (especially Prof. Lynne Segal and Prof. Sasha Roseneil) of the 'Beyond the Pink Curtain?' seminar organised at Birkbeck Institute for Social Research, University of London, 22 January 2010, for drawing our attention to this issue.

understatements, it is important to not be afraid of them. Only by pushing the boundaries one can approach what is set aside of the core in hegemonic discursive practices, sparking discussion and enabling more diversified exchange of ideas and insights.

Keeping all this in mind, what possible lesson one can draw from exercises we have carried out with 'West' and 'CEE'? Perhaps the conclusion is that since none of the markers can be perceived as stable, the 'West' and 'Central and Eastern Europe' are ultimately a phantasmagorical '(t)here and now'; two regions impossible to enclose within fixed boundaries, neither geographical, nor temporal-historical, nor political. 'West' and 'CEE' are thus relational concepts, and as such entail hierarchies of power, subversion, resistance and hope. Referring to 'CEE', as in the case of any other discursive practice, is not a value-free, or 'neutral', 'objective' practice. It already designates 'self' ('West'), policing and distinguishing it from the 'other' ('CEE'). Yet still, thanks to the variety of uses, flexibility and permeability, the opposite may occur. By using and exchanging 'West' with 'European' and 'American', blurring of communities and cultures is intended, subverting established power hierarchies (West over CEE), carving a space for 'Central and East Europeans' to become part of the 'First World', 'just Europeans', club. Such practices subvert the core and re-render CEE as part of the 'European' 'self', and not its 'other'.[8]

Conclusion

To summarise, we would like to repeat that this volume offers a new perspective on some crucial contemporary issues raised in queer studies. These are globalisation of sexual identities, circulation and power(s) of knowledge, strategies of acculturation and the translation of dominant approaches to a local (country-specific) level. We offer the theoretical figures of 'contemporary periphery', 'temporal disjunction/knotting' and 'time of sequence vs time of coincidence' as perhaps useful ways of thinking about CEE – 'European enough' (geographically), but 'not yet Western' (temporarily). Thus, we take a geotemporal rather than only a geopolitical approach, which we believe offers wider possibilities of understanding the current process of transmission of sexual identities and models of activism. We further try to problematise the very categories of 'West', 'CEE', 'centre/metropolis', 'periphery/colony', 'First, Second and Third Worlds', and 'Global North or South', 'homo- and heterosexuality', 'queer', 'lesbian and gay', 'local and global', 'democratisation' and 'post-communist transformation', and lay the general framework for all other chapters gathered in this book.

8 And we leave aside the case of Russia, whose relation to the 'West' has its own, equally complicated, narrative.

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