

The 'Gay Olympics'?: The Eurovision Song Contest and the politics of LGBT/European belonging

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## **Abstract**

The politics of gay and transgender visibility and representation at the Eurovision Song Contest, an annual televised popular music festival presented to viewers as a contest between European nations, show that processes of interest to Queer International Relations do not just involve states or even international institutions; national and transnational popular geopolitics over 'LGBT rights' and 'Europeanness' equally constitute the understandings of 'the international' with which Queer IR is concerned. Building on Cynthia Weber's reading of the persona of the 2014 Eurovision winner Conchita Wurst with 'queer intellectual curiosity', this paper demonstrates that Eurovision shifted from, in the late 1990s, an emerging site of gay and trans visibility to, by 2008–14, part of a larger discursive circuit taking in international mega-events like the Olympics, international human-rights advocacy, Europe/Russia relations, and the politics of state homophobia and transphobia. Contest organisers thus had to take positions – ranging from detachment to celebration – about 'LGBT' politics in host states and the Eurovision region. The construction of spatio-temporal hierarchies around attitudes to LGBT rights, however, revealed exclusions that corroborate other critical arguments on the reconfiguration of national and European identities around 'LGBT equality'.

## **Introduction**

The theoretical interventions of Queer International Relations, which recognise how sexualities and gender non-conformity are embedded in international politics, have ‘transformative’ potential for International Relations (Langlois, 2015: 1). Queer IR moves such as asking ‘how LGBTQ claims shape international relations’ (Picq and Thiel (ed.), 2015) or where ‘locations of homophobia’ are produced in international politics (Rao 2014) aim to place non-heteronormative sexualities, gender variance, and queer subjectivities into the centre of the international fabric for the whole discipline (Kollman and Waites, 2009; Aganthelelou, 2013; Peterson, 2013; Weiss and Bosia (ed.), 2013; Ayoub and Paternotte, 2014; Lind, 2014; Nayak, 2014; Rahman, 2014; Wilkinson and Langlois, 2014; Langlois, 2015; Sjoberg, 2015; Weber, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). Cynthia Weber, in particular, both identifies where queer studies matter to IR (Weber, 2014) and praises the value of a ‘queer intellectual curiosity – akin to Cynthia Enloe’s feminist curiosity’ for illuminating ‘core IR concerns’ of power and statecraft (Weber, 2015a: 1, 10; see Enloe, 2004): and yet, Weber observes, knowledge recognisable as ‘queer international theory’ (Weber, 2015b) is only now emerging.

Weber (2014) suggests four important dimensions of queer studies for IR. Like other critical IR fields, they expose ‘state and nonstate practices of disciplinization, normalization, and capitalization’, in this case around non-normative ‘genders, sexes and sexualities’; states themselves politicize these practices and identities, as literatures on ‘state homophobia’ or LGBT rights in human-rights regimes demonstrates; discourses around them often mobilize International Relations’ foundational concern with ‘order vs. anarchy’; and ‘core domains’ of IR, such as war, state/nation-formation and international political economy, are all objects of Queer IR study (Weber, 2014: 597). The disciplining effects of mainstream IR nevertheless make it ‘appear as if there is no Queer International Theory’ (Weber, 2015b: 30), an illusion Weber seeks to undo.

Queer IR, however, is not and should not be restricted to domains such as state/nation-formation, human rights and international law. Other international institutions, including ‘institutions of global

finance and development' (Lind, 2014: 604), also participate in producing both heteronormativity and the spatialised constructions of sexual-diversity-versus-homophobia that have been mobilized in contemporary international politics. Moreover, the discourses and struggles observed by Queer IR are also the subject of multiple 'popular geopolitics' (Sharp, 1993; Dittmer and Dodds, 2008), where representations in popular culture – music included (Franklin (ed.), 2005) – and audiences' interpretation/re-use of these themselves help constitute 'the international' (Weldes, 1999; Grayson, Davies and Philpott, 2009), as Queer IR already starts to acknowledge (Weber 2015a). This paper demonstrates the role of non-state institutions and the significance of popular culture for Queer IR through studying a televised mega-event, the Eurovision Song Contest, presented to viewers as a competition between European nations and organized annually by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) since 1956 – simultaneously a cultural text mobilising representations of collective geopolitical identities (of 'Europe', and individual nations) and a material production embedded in political/financial interests.

'Eurovision' has successively been a focus of transnational gay fan cultures, a site of pan-European gay, lesbian and transgender (though not bisexual) visibility, and – through a discursive circuit connecting Eurovision with the Olympic Games – a node in popular geopolitics about LGBT rights based on symbolic oppositions first of 'Western Europe' and 'Eastern Europe', later of 'Europe' and Russia. Notions of 'Europe' (re)produced in this process resulted from and fed into spatialised constructions which, as often observed (e.g. Puar, 2007, 2013; Fassin, 2010; Ahmed, 2011; Bracke, 2012; Agathangelou, 2013; Rahman, 2014; Rao, 2014), have informed hierarchical and racialised/ethnicised juxtapositions of 'the West' against 'Islam' or 'Africa', 'Western Europe' against 'Eastern Europe', and 'Europe' against 'Russia'. When the bearded drag queen Conchita Wurst, on whom Weber (2015a: 2) has importantly turned a 'queer intellectual curiosity' already, won Eurovision in 2014, her participation and image emerged within these contexts.

Eurovision could not have become a site of LGBT politics without the growth of ‘a narrative of progression in terms of sexual citizenship linked to European liberalization’ (Cook and Evans, 2014: 9) during the 1990s and 2000s, when certain European states and institutions constructed LGBT inclusivity as both a component of ‘European identity’ and an object needing protection (Ayoub and Paternotte (ed.), 2014). Any state ‘protector’ role (Stiehm 1982), feminist scholars argue, is inherently ‘masculinist’, vesting the ‘security state’ with the ‘masculine role of protector’ and subordinating ‘those protected, paradigmatically women and children’, who become more likely to accept the state’s ‘authoritarian power’ and ‘aggressive war’ as legitimate (Young 2003: 2). The emergence of LGBT inclusivity as a potential – though still not guaranteed (Browne and Nash, 2014) – national or European value has been said to have its own exclusionary flipside in reconfiguring collective identities around ‘sexual democracy’ (Fassin, 2010), ‘sexual nationalism’ (Fassin, 2011; Bilge, 2012) or ‘homonationalism’ (Puar, 2007, 2013). These terms all suggest simultaneous assimilation of certain expressions of sexual and gender diversity and projection of homophobia on to racialised, excluded others, especially Muslims. A related, geopolitical form of constructing national and European identities around perceived attitudes to sexual and gender diversity, meanwhile, separated ‘Eastern Europe’ from ‘the West’ (Kulpa and Mizelińska (ed.), 2011). This would turn increasingly towards Russia, responding to Russian state and Church homophobia/biphobia/transphobia on top of conventional security threats perceived in Russia’s annexation of Crimea and support for separatism in Eastern Ukraine (Rivkin-Fish and Hartblay, 2014).

This latest – but not novel (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, 1992; Wolff, 1994; Neumann, 1998) – version of defining Europe against an adjacent eastern Other based on essentialised narratives about values held on each side of the boundary had by 2014, when Russia hosted the Sochi Winter Olympics, converged with critical discourses accusing authoritarian regimes of promoting themselves as attractive locations for investment and tourism through sports mega-events while covering up human-rights violations. A series of ephemeral cultural artefacts in early 2014 celebrated LGBT-friendliness as a national value in

performative defiance of Russia/Putin – revealingly enough of certain popular constructions of what was under threat where. However, a ‘discursive circuit’ between the Olympics and Eurovision, produced as both events structurally and representationally converged, exposed a wider field of international competition and spectacle, demonstrating that states and human-rights institutions are not the only international actors to politicise sexuality and gender non-conformity.

Eurovision, already associated with LGBT politics through its transnational fan cultures and its precedents for gay and trans visibility in 1997–8, was particularly well-placed to inspire imaginaries and narratives within this emergent (geo)politics. Research on Eurovision has already explored narratives of national identity, ‘Europeanness’, gender and sexuality in performances’ content and reception (e.g. Bolin, 2006; Heller, 2007; Rehberg, 2007; Baker, 2008; Miazhevich, 2010, 2012; Mitrović, 2010; Jones and Subotić, 2011; Pajala, 2012; Sieg, 2013a; Tragaki (ed.), 2013; Johnson, 2014; Jordan, 2014b; Carniel, 2015; Ulbricht, Sircar and Sloopmaeckers, 2015); its functions for fan communities (e.g. Lemish, 2004; Singleton, Fricker and Moreo, 2007); political, financial and cultural structures surrounding its organisation (Badenoch, 2013; Fricker and Gluhovic, 2013; Gluhovic, 2013; Motschenbacher, 2013; Singleton, 2013); and how journalistic and viewer discourses have drawn Eurovision into international LGBT politics (Gluhovic, 2013; Ulbricht, Sircar and Sloopmaeckers, 2015). Eurovision, a popular-cultural text/event produced by a non-state international actor, illustrates significant dynamics in international politics that Queer IR acknowledges but does not necessarily centre.

### **LGBT politics and contemporary European belonging**

The ‘east’/‘west’ (increasingly ‘Europe’/‘Russia’) axis discursively constructed around LGBT politics in Europe has depended on the (partial) reconfiguration, since the 1990s, of public narratives of national/European history and values around supposedly-exceptional levels of sexual and gender

diversity. Such reconfiguration qualified, without undoing (Peterson, 2013), what used to appear as nationalism's inherent heterosexism (Peterson, 1999). However, critics suggested this both masked continuing forms of state oppression and violence against LGBT people in those countries and projected intolerance and discrimination on to excluded 'others' (Puar, 2007, 2011, 2013; Butler, 2008; Haritaworn, 2010; Fassin, 2010; Ahmed, 2011; Jivraj and de Jong, 2011; Lentin and Titley, 2011; Bilge, 2012; El-Tayeb, 2012; Aganthelelou, 2013; Kulpa, 2014; Kahlina, 2015).

Studies from multiple countries thus suggested certain states and institutions constructed images of themselves as protecting (depoliticised forms of) LGBT equality while presenting essentialised representations of certain groups (primarily Muslims and racialised immigrants) or regions (primarily the Middle East and Africa but also eastern Europe and Russia) as homophobic. For instance, in the Netherlands – sometimes seen as 'the paradigmatic site of the Othering of racialized Europeans' (El-Tayeb, 2012: 87) – Dutch "'public embrace" of gay rights' was said to have 'become entangled with anti-Muslim discourse' (Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens, 2010: 967) in state immigration and education policy ascribing homophobia to ethnic/religious minorities (Jivraj and de Jong, 2011; Bracke, 2012). Critiques of Swedish sex-education materials addressing immigrants (Bredström, 2005) and UK government publications on forced marriage (Lenon 2012) unfolded similarly. Éric Fassin (2011: 266) identified a 'new sexual politics of national identity' with analogous 'racist and xenophobic implications' in France, and in Germany Jin Haritaworn (2010: 71) described alarming 'rhetoric [...] of "homophobic Muslims" who cannot handle diversity and present an urgent threat to it'. These social, cultural and colonial histories all existed within wider discursive, political and legislative frameworks of 'Europe', meaning this politics of belonging could define 'Europe' as well as individual nations (Lentin and Titley, 2011). Indeed, critiques of this reworking of national and geopolitical identities informed studies of incidents around Eurovision in 2012 and 2014 (Gluhovic, 2013; Ulbricht, Sircar and Sloopmaeckers, 2015).

Terms describing this reconfiguration ('sexual nationalism'; 'sexual democracy'; 'homonationalism') hint at the redefinition of political communities and the 'imaginative geographies' (Puar, 2007: 39 citing Gregory, 2004: 18) or 'symbolic geography' (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, 1992) that give them geopolitical meaning. While the 'homonationalism' debate relates primarily to imagining Islam, the Middle East and Africa, Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska (Kulpa and Mizielińska (ed.), 2011) argued these processes also involved imaginations of central and eastern Europe (CEE), specifically in European-Union-influenced discourse that 'frames CEE as permanently "post-communist", "in transition" [...] and, last but not least, homophobic' (Kulpa, 2014: 432). Although Kevin Moss (2014: 216) questions whether there is evidence of any 'actual negative effect' of these discourses 'on local activists or local queer citizens', Katja Kahlina (2015: 2) still finds the Kulpa–Mizielińska critique and (Puar's 2013 reframing of) 'homonationalism' valuable for understanding contestations over LGBT politics and nationhood as Croatia (Moss's topic) and Serbia negotiated EU accession in the 2000s, as long as local negotiations of European discursive/political frameworks are accounted for.

Eurovision, during the 2000s, became a key site for producing and contesting narratives of the relationship between 'gay'/'LGBT' equality (a tellingly ill-defined distinction in this context) and national/European identities. Besides performance, this also involved activist strategies, media discourses, and practices of organisers, viewers and fans. Following recent cultural studies research that reframes the study of Eurovision around its position in the 'affective components' of European citizenship and simultaneously in the politics of marginalisation within the European idea (Fricker and Gluhovic, 2013: 12), this paper shows that geopolitical narratives about Europe and Russia being opposite poles with respect to 'LGBT rights' have been constructed not just around one mega-event, the Olympics, but around another, Eurovision. It also suggests that, even when Eurovision itself has accommodated (certain) gay, lesbian and trans representations, wider LGBT-equality discourses surrounding Eurovision often

depend on a more abstract 'rainbow' signifier which may have less to do with emancipatory politics, more with a narrative of European exceptionalism regarding modernity and human rights.

### **Viva la diva: the 'visibility phase' of LGBT politics at Eurovision (1997–2007)**

Eurovision's open acknowledgement of sexual and gender diversity began in 1997–8 with performances by the first gay man (Páll Óskar) and first trans woman (Dana International) who were already open about their identities. This 'visibility phase' continued into the 2000s, when more creators of Eurovision performances, and eventually Eurovision organisers, started acknowledging gay audience-members as potential viewers and sometimes even advocating for LGBT equality. Eurovision thus entered a context where certain state governments and European institutions were constructing LGBT equality as a matter of European identity and national pride (Tobin, 2007). Even before this, however, Eurovision had been adopted as an annual celebration both by dedicated fan communities (transnationally institutionalised in 1984 when a European network of national fan-clubs was founded) where gay men were strongly represented (Lemish, 2004; Singleton, Fricker and Moreo, 2007; Motschenbacher, 2013: 593), and in wider gay subcultures.

For fans and casual viewers alike, 'Eurovision parties' could provide a focus for socialising and spectatorship in ways gay fans and journalists often compare to the Olympics or World Cup. For instance, the gay British radio/television presenter Scott Mills (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Eurovision semi-final commentator since 2011), remarked 'Eurovision really is the gay world cup' to the British website Pink News (Watts, 2011). A similar fan comparison calling Eurovision a 'gay Christmas' (Rehberg, 2007: 60), or in Israel gay 'Passover' (Lemish, 2004: 51), likewise imagines a 'gay' replacement for a heteronormative mainstream celebration. Initially, gay fans projected queer meanings on to Eurovision by applying a 'camp reading strategy' to an event devised as mainstream entertainment



for viewing in (straight) family homes (Singleton, Fricker and Moreo, 2007: 12). After 1997–8, however, LGBT activism, European politics and Eurovision performance would converge so far that, by 2007, Peter Rehberg could call Eurovision ‘a rare occasion for simultaneously celebrating *both* queerness *and* national identity’ (2007: 60, emphasis original).

Eurovision’s ‘visibility phase’ began in 1997, when Iceland’s Páll Óskar became Eurovision’s first openly gay contestant (Tobin, 2007: 25; Lampropoulos, 2013). Óskar’s sexually suggestive performance also involved technical production advances, such as an electronic backing-track and large scenery, anticipating the presentation style of most Eurovision performances by the mid-2000s when stage-sizes and production budgets had increased. Dana International’s participation and victory for Israel in 1998, performing ‘Diva’, was even more significant for *trans* visibility, in Eurovision and (given how rarely trans people were then depicted in mainstream media) more generally in countries broadcasting it. Contextualising her participation must also, however, account for critiques of Israel’s self-promotion as LGBT-inclusive: Puar (2011:135), among many critics of so-called Israeli ‘pinkwashing’, contrasts the marketing of ‘Israel’s gay decade’ in the 1990s with restriction of Palestinians’ mobility after the 1993 Oslo Accords. Milija Gluhovic (2013: 202) already asks whether selecting Dana contributed to this strategy. Critical studies of Israeli nationalism’s sexual politics, however, have a complex answer, acknowledging her success could be co-opted but also arguing her biographical and musical identity as simultaneously Mizrahi, Arab, Israeli and queer (Swedenburg, 2014) might have ‘help[ed] open public space for [...] deeper critiques of Jewish collective existence’ by radical activists (Solomon, 2003: 151). Here, again, evaluating the convergence of LGBT politics and nationhood requires localised attention to a particular case’s power relationships (Kahlina 2015).

Further contested steps towards ‘visibility’ in the early 2000s included a kiss between two male musicians from the Israeli band Ping Pong in the video for their 2000 entry, the participation of the Slovenian drag cabaret trio Sestre in 2002, and the Russian duo Tatu in 2003. A transphobic campaign

against Sestre in Slovenian media drew the European Parliament's attention, with the Dutch MEP Louisewies van der Laan supporting Sestre (Tobin, 2007: 32). Tatu's international stardom in 2002–3 had owed much to public personas suggesting they were lesbians (Heller, 2007; Miazhevich, 2010: 255–7; Cassidy, 2014: 12–13; Carniel, 2015: 144–6). Other notable changes for Eurovision in this period included movement from theatres into arenas, expanding the complexity and cost of lighting and scenography, and introducing a permanent semi-final in 2004 so all participant broadcasters could enter (and their audiences could vote) annually. Coinciding with the 2004 EU expansion, this gave Eurovision a second symbolic eastward enlargement (Baker, 2008: 174) after its initial addition of CEE participants in 1993 – though Yugoslavia, pursuing an 'between East and West' self-representation, had joined in 1961 (Vuletić, 2007: 83).

In 2007, ambiguous performances of gender by both the Eurovision winner and runner-up inserted themselves into Eurovision's queer history. Second-placed Verka Serduchka (the satirical creation of the Ukrainian comedian Andriy Danilko), representing Ukraine, epitomised a mode of Eurovision camp facilitated by the new technical possibilities, even though Galina Miazhevich (2012: 1512) argues that Verka operated through a lens of post-Soviet self-irony and was not a drag queen in a Western sense. The winner, Serbia's Marija Šerifović, performed a romantic ballad while wearing a tuxedo and trainers, supported by an all-female group who wore suits and held hands with Šerifović and each other. Šerifović's own sexuality was already speculated about in 2007 (Vänskä, 2007: 66), though she did not come out as a lesbian until 2013. Her performance has however been interpreted as 'intentionally [...] to be read as gay' and part of a strategy to alter European perceptions of Serbia after the post-Yugoslav wars (Mitrović 2010: 174–5). Šerifović thus gave Eurovision a canonical lesbian performance alongside the gay and trans visibilities embodied by Páll Óskar and Dana International. Strikingly, however, no Eurovision performer/performance has yet provided equivalent representation of bisexual identities or experiences – suggesting 'bisexual erasure' (Yoshino, 2000) operates at Eurovision as elsewhere.

Through Eurovision's 'visibility phase' in 1997–2007, Eurovision's non-heteronormative contexts ceased being simply projected on to the contest externally; they became part of the text itself, a precondition for Eurovision to emerge as a focal point for discourses about European identity, security and LGBT politics. Without direct links between Eurovision and European legislative institutions, this phase also paralleled juridical developments that connected LGBT rights and certain constructions of 'Europeanness'. In 2007, Robert Deam Tobin could already suggest (2007: 33) that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)'s pro-LGBT-equality judgements had contributed to a 'European cultural citizenship' (2007: 28) that Eurovision annually restaged; indeed, two key ECHR rulings, requiring Britain to equalise the age of consent in 1996 and lift the gay/lesbian military-service ban in 1999 (Helfer and Voeten, 2014: 87), strikingly enveloped the beginning of Eurovision's 'visibility phase'. Meanwhile, after several years of lobbying by LGBT human-rights organisations, the EU had committed itself to preventing discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation (though not gender identity) in the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam and including sexual-orientation protections in its 2000 anti-discrimination directives (Swiebel, 2009: 22–3). The 'Yogyakarta Principles' on human-rights law, sexual orientation and gender identity, drafted by 29 human-rights experts to inform international law and activism, appeared in 2007 (O'Flaherty and Fisher, 2008; Waites, 2009), the year of Šerifović and Verka. International LGBT politics were thus increasingly part of the conceptual space where narratives of European/national identity were being framed.

### **You may now kiss the groom: the 'organisational phase' of LGBT politics at Eurovision (2008–13)**

During the 2000s, Eurovision also transformed into a 'mega-event' (Bolin, 2006: 190; Müller and Steyaert, 2013: 139), comparable to the international sporting competitions and cultural exhibitions the term usually (Roche, 2000) describes. Mega-events have already been recognised as significant in

international politics. Mega-events have been public diplomacy mechanisms for emerging powers such as Brazil, China and South Africa (Cornelissen, 2010; Grix and Lee, 2013: 521), and for post-socialist cities and states keen to prove themselves sites of global modernity and 'full members' of Europe (Müller and Pickles, 2015: 124). Meanwhile, the security/surveillance practices that national and municipal authorities determine necessary in cities hosting mega-events have been said to legitimise these persisting after the event and to advertise security technologies globally (Manley and Silk, 2014). Domestic activists and international NGOs, meanwhile, use intense media attention on mega-events' hosts to demand '*transnational* forms of accountability' (Brownell, 2012: 309, emphasis original) over human-rights violations – potentially uncomfortable for events' governing bodies – and may wield constructions of 'human security' in doing so (Amar, 2013: 23–4).

Eurovision's mega-event status put Eurovision host cities and states under increasing scrutiny during the 2000s, where Eurovision was hosted in eastern Europe in five years out of ten. Moving from theatres into arenas (first during Eurovision 1998 in Birmingham, then permanently after Eurovision 2000 in Copenhagen) increased live audiences and made host cities temporary 'event cities' (Binnie, 2004: 134), promoting themselves to gay tourists like cities hosting large Pride events or Gay Games. A complication for hosting-as-promotion, however, is that Eurovision awards hosting rights to the previous year's winning broadcaster, not through bidding; potential host broadcasters must first select an entry that wins the most points from public and expert voters in perhaps more than 40 other states. Wherever the next host city/country is located in symbolic geographies of Europe, broadcasters, city/state authorities and the EBU must integrate it into Eurovision's ongoing cultural text with only one year's notice.

Marija Šerifović winning Eurovision 2007 meant Radio–Televizija Serbia (Radio–Television Serbia, RTS) would host in 2008. Belgrade, where far-right groups had attacked the first Pride march in 2001 and Pride had not yet been reorganised by 2007, would temporarily be an 'event city' likely to attract LGBT visitors, foregrounding the question of how, if at all, the EBU and Eurovision broadcasters would address

LGBT people's status in Eurovision host states. In Serbian cultural politics, Pride and LGBT rights had already become symbols in domestic discourses about Serbia's relationship with European institutions and values (Mikuš, 2011: 835). RTS's director Aleksandar Tijanić claimed a pro-integration position in stating that hosting Eurovision would 'help Serbia improve its image in the European Union' (Mitrović, 2010: 176). In May 2008, Russia's Dima Bilan won Eurovision, passing 2009's hosting rights to the Russian broadcaster, Pervyi Kanal (First Channel). The tensions the EBU faced in 2008 thus recurred the very next year. Then, Russia's own controversies over LGBT politics – Moscow Pride having been banned since 2006 (Stella, 2013) – combined with the aftermath of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had been accused of complicity with an authoritarian regime's masking human-rights violations through a mega-event (Kidd, 2010; Brownell, 2012). The Eurovision/Olympic convergence was now political as well as organisational.

Exhibiting Eurovision's then highest-ever budget and largest-ever stage, Moscow 2009 presented an opportunity to 'market a post-Soviet, open, tolerant, and democratic new Russia' domestically and internationally (Meerzon and Priven, 2013: 119). Complicating this narrative was violent police repression of a Pride march organised by Russian and Belarusian activists on Eurovision final day (Cassiday, 2014: 18–21). One Dutch vocalist had previously pledged to withdraw if that occurred, though in the event his group De Toppers had already been eliminated in the semi-final (Cassiday, 2014: 21). The BBC's live commentator, Graham Norton, called Moscow 2009 'the Beijing Olympics of Eurovision' (Jordan, 2009: 56), directly comparing the EBU's relationship with the Russian state to the IOC's with China. These debates receded during the Oslo 2010/Düsseldorf 2011 contests but revived in 2012 when Azerbaijan, having won Eurovision 2011, hosted it in Baku.

Azerbaijan determinedly integrated Eurovision into an existing, intensive nation-branding strategy (under the slogan 'Land of Fire'). Eurovision 2012, supposedly the largest touristic event then ever organised in Baku (Ismaylov, 2012: 835), entailed extensive redevelopment of central Baku to build an

indoor music/sports arena. Just as in recent Olympic host cities (Boykoff and Fussey, 2014: 258), this involved compulsory purchase of homes and was protested by residents who felt inadequately compensated (Valiyev, 2014: S47). This itself exemplified the Eurovision/Olympics convergence, as suggested by one study including Baku 2012 in coverage of mega-events in post-socialist Eurasia (Müller and Pickles, 2015: 122). However, Gluhovic's study of Baku 2012 (Gluhovic, 2013) reveals further parallels – origins of a discursive connection that strengthened in 2014 when Russia hosted the Winter Olympics shortly after passing a federal 'anti-homopropaganda' law.

Baku 2012, like Beijing 2008, demonstrated the potential for international human-rights NGOs and domestic activists to create a temporary 'transnational public sphere' (Brownell 2012) around a mega-event to publicise host authorities' human-rights violations. Several Baku-based activist groups formed a 'Sing for Democracy' campaign and held events for international journalists during Eurovision, with Sweden's Loreen Talhaoui – who won Eurovision 2012, enabling Sweden to host in 2013 – notably meeting Sing for Democracy activists in Baku (Gluhovic, 2013: 208). Another participant in the broadcast, the German presenter Anke Engelke (giving Germany's votes live from Hamburg), was also interpreted as drawing attention to Azeri governmental authoritarianism when she said 'Tonight nobody could vote for their own country, but it is good to be able to vote, and it is good to have a choice. Good luck on your journey, Azerbaijan, Europe is watching you!' (Taylor, 2012). A BBC *Panorama* documentary called *Eurovision's Dirty Secret: Azerbaijan*, broadcast in Britain during Eurovision week, had meanwhile documented government repression of the opposition and suggested the EBU had been co-opted by Azeri state PR (Kenyon, 2012).

Gluhovic however implies the EBU's hope Eurovision would encourage permanent improvements to democratisation and LGBT rights in Azerbaijan did not materialise. Azeri police arrested at least 15 democracy activists in the weeks after Eurovision 2012 (Gluhovic, 2013: 211). Little changed by 2015, when the investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova (interviewed for the 2012 *Panorama*) was detained.

The transnational group Reporters Without Borders petitioned President Ilham Aliyev to release Ismayilova before the 2015 European Games in Baku (Reporters Without Borders, 2015) – a new multi-sport event which Baku had bid for uncontested after failing to obtain the 2016 or 2020 Olympics (Brown, 2014). In Eurovision's history, Baku 2012 even more than Moscow 2009 represented the EBU's 'Beijing moment', at which the question of international organisations' complicity with repressive political regimes could no longer be ignored. The Swedish organisers' narratives around Malmö 2013, meanwhile, contrasted with the organisation of Baku 2012 (Jordan, 2014a) much as the London 2012 Olympics organisers implicitly contrasted Westminster and Beijing (Bonde, 2014). At Eurovision, however, the central narrative move in this contrast concerned Swedish and European achievements in LGBT equality.

One well-publicised difference between Malmö and Baku was the attempt to reduce production costs, which had spiralled to £47 million in Baku (Singleton, 2013: 94). The EBU and the Swedish state broadcaster Sveriges Television (Swedish Television, SVT) thus had practical as well as political reasons for reducing arena size and hospitality events (Jordan, 2014a: 97). The 2013 executive producer, SVT's Martin Österdahl, explicitly distanced himself from 'using the [Eurovision] program to market your own country at any cost' (and, implicitly, from Baku) in October 2012: 'we should not pat ourselves on the back and say that Sweden is best' (Storvik-Green, 2012). However, even rejecting emphatic promotion of the nation presents a certain image of that nation – as a pluralistic, open and democratic country where grandiose nation-branding is unnecessary. A similar narrative of Swedish national identity and political culture emerges through the state tourism board's 'Curators of Sweden' initiative, which since 2011 invites a different Swedish citizen to use its Twitter account every week (Christensen, 2013).

The interval entertainment during the final in Malmö was a cabaret poking fun at the values and cultural artefacts for which it suggested Sweden was known abroad, including environmentalism, sexual liberation and gender equality as well as LGBT rights. At a key moment, the presenter Petra Mede played

a minister at the wedding of two men, declaring 'you may now kiss the groom'. Paul Jordan (2014a: 98) argues this, with Russian state homophobia accelerating through 2013, clearly demonstrated Sweden's 'intention [...] to promote egalitarian values through the ESC'. Eurovision was available for this because of its LGBT associations developed first through fandom and then through the 1997–2007 'visibility phase'. Organisers attaching the text of Eurovision to a specific mode of expressing sexual difference (taking city breaks, enjoying kitsch popular music and desiring marriage) further linked Eurovision to LGBT politics and to contestation of the meanings of European security, citizenship and identity.

The Malmö organisers' narrative about openness and equality was serendipitously accentuated by that year's Finnish entry, Krista Siegrids's 'Marry me'. Siegrids, who publicly explained her song as a statement against the Finnish parliament's decision not to vote on equal-marriage legislation, said she would end her performance by kissing one of her female backing vocalists (Wyatt, 2013). Ten years earlier, in 2003, much media anticipation around Tatu's participation had centred around the two Russian women doing exactly that, which they went on not to do. Siegrids, conversely, did kiss another woman on stage, applauded by the live audience (Carniel, 2015: 142). Broadcasters televising the final – including Pervyi Kanal in Russia, where federal 'anti-homopropaganda' laws were then under parliamentary discussion (Wilkinson, 2014: 366) – therefore had to broadcast both the Siegrids kiss and the male 'wedding'. A similar moment had occurred during the London 2012 Olympics opening ceremony, where a clip of the first kiss between two women shown on British television before the adult viewing watershed (from a 1994 episode of the soap opera *Brookside*) was broadcast globally, including in 76 countries where homosexuality was then illegal, during a montage of famous screen kisses. Anita Brady (2014: 83) argues that showing the *Brookside* kiss at the Olympics, in a heteronormative international context, 'constituted lesbian visibility as national history'. Malmö's two same-gender kisses not only identified Finland and Sweden with the narrative of LGBT-inclusive Europe but hinted at



another convergence between Eurovision and sports mega-events – anticipating the interplay of geopolitical narratives that shaped reception of the Olympics *and* Eurovision in 2014.

### **Rise like a phoenix: sharpening the ‘geopolitical phase’ of LGBT politics at Eurovision (2014–15)**

Events in 2014 including the Winter Olympics in Sochi (7–23 February), escalating conflict in Crimea/Donbass (26 February onwards) and Conchita Wurst’s Eurovision victory (10 May) confirmed the interdependence of transnational public spheres around Eurovision and the Olympic Games (however transitory these were) and their dependence on geopolitical narratives about LGBT politics. Anna Alekseyeva (2014: 159, 167) argues Sochi gave the Russian government an opportunity ‘to signal its strength in the contemporary international order’ but that ultimately ‘the international audience [was] not receptive to the Sochi discourse of a progressive and strong Russia’. Many Western journalists, entertainers and advertisers instead spoke of Russian governance under Putin as repressive and undemocratic, calling for boycotts of Sochi (Rivkin-Fish and Hartblay, 2014). These rested, above all, on the so-called ‘anti-homopropaganda’ laws of June 2013 preventing promotion of ‘non-traditional sexual relations’ to minors (Wilkinson, 2014; Persson, 2015). The IOC could be said to have betrayed its own Charter’s universalism by not addressing human-rights concerns with Russia (Postlethwaite, 2014: 270). However, much Western popular geopolitics around this issue reflected an essentialistic binary between an inherently tolerant West and an inherently homophobic Russia, reducing complex politics of gender and sexuality in any of these countries to a simple national us/them.

Narratives of LGBT inclusivity as a national value characterised Olympic advertising in countries including the UK, the USA and Canada to the extent that rainbows appeared in advertising where Olympic tie-in advertising conventions would normally lead viewers to expect national flags. A US yoghurt manufacturer, for instance, photographed its pots with rainbow-coloured rims and the slogan

'Naturally Powering Everyone' (Chobani, 2014), and Google displayed a rainbow-coloured logo (Postlethwaite, 2014: 272). Channel 4, the British broadcaster televising Sochi, reworked its logo in rainbows for the Games' first day and promoted its coverage with a 90-second music video, 'Gay Mountain' (Sweney, 2014). In a country where Eurovision is often the butt of jokes that perform British distance from Europe by laughing at Eurovision musical kitsch (Fricker, 2013), 'Gay Mountain' placed the viewer on the side of kitsch and camp liberation. It invited them instead to laugh at a repressive Russia, staging the invitation through conventions already associated with Eurovision in the UK.

'Gay Mountain' began as a pastiche of Soviet patriotic choral music being performed, accompanied on a gramophone record, in a drab municipal hall. After 30 seconds, its stocky, bearded singer (Fred Bear of the group Bearlesque) tore off his fur coat before spectators' astonished eyes and revealed himself as the frontman of a camp cabaret act inspiring his audience to 'be proud on Gay Mountain' (Channel 4, 2014); one shot included the same shirtless Vladimir Putin impersonator who, satirising Putin's famous outdoors photographs (Foxall, 2013), had been featured on Channel 4's topical comedy show, *The Last Leg*, since 2013. After a final scene with the audience dancing and two male spectators kissing each other, the trailer ended with the pun 'Good luck to everyone out in Sochi'. 'Gay Mountain' invited a liberal British audience to share the idea of Russia as a culturally alien space with different values, waiting to be liberated and brought into the present through the power of disco and camp. Its problematic narrative of Western rescue, exemplifying the spatio-temporal hierarchies Kulpa and Mizielińska criticise, relied on the same message about national identity that rainbow advertising conveyed: the reason that country was championing LGBT equality in Sochi, these texts all suggested, was because Russia did not have it.

In the context of Sochi, the anti-homopropaganda laws and Crimea/Donbass, the geopolitical frame of Putin's governance in Russia and its implications for Europe would probably have informed popular discourses about Eurovision 2014 in Copenhagen even without Conchita Wurst. This was partly because of how far Russia (and other states) had recently used Eurovision performance and hosting to

communicate ‘projections of national identity’ (Johnson, 2014: 29), but also because of Eurovision’s very structure, presented to viewers as a competition between different national musical cultures. Not only do organisers and many participants use Eurovision to communicate messages about spatio-conceptual borders and identity, but the finale of one nation being voted winner by other nations invites spectators to do narrative work of their own and project geopolitical imagination on to any result. Copenhagen’s municipal authorities, meanwhile, used Eurovision to promote Copenhagen and Denmark as a destination for gay as well as straight wedding tourism, even announcing (a few weeks after the 2014 Grammy Awards’ ‘mass wedding’) that to commemorate 25 years since the Copenhagen Rådhus’s first civil partnership they would host open-air weddings during Eurovision week (Storvik-Green, 2014) – reminiscent of the ‘positioning [of] London as offering a universal model of lesbian and gay rights’ (Hubbard and Wilkinson, 2015: 604) before the 2012 Olympics. However, the persona of Conchita Wurst – a character who, by inviting audiences to accept the gender variance they perceive in her, encourages them to accept others as they present themselves (Wurst, 2014b) – could hardly have been a more symbolic winner within the discursive framework already constructed around Sochi.

Constructions of Conchita as a symbolic opponent of Putin’s Russia abounded during and after Eurovision 2014 (Ulbricht, Sircar and Sloopmaeckers, 2015). In Britain, for instance, the *Daily Telegraph* columnist Cristina Odone (2014) described Conchita’s win as ‘one in the eye for Putin’ and ‘unwittingly [...] the opening salvo in this culture war’. The British tabloid *The Sun* – though itself frequently implicated in stigmatising queer and trans people (Trans Media Watch, 2011) – photographed a bearded male reporter dressed as Conchita outside the Russian embassy in London (Morgan, 2014). The scholar of music and nationalism Philip Bohlman (2014), meanwhile, argued Eurovision had ‘reclaimed its relevance’ by being able to confront state homophobia and provide a space where ‘the queering of the ESC had given common meaning to Europe’ through Conchita’s win.

Russian politicians such as Vitaly Milonov (proposer of St Petersburg's 2012 'anti-propaganda' law), who had already been calling 'Europe' a threat to Russia's 'moral sovereignty' (Wilkinson, 2014: 368), meanwhile fitted Conchita into their geopolitical frameworks. Milonov wrote to Pervyi Kanal after Eurovision arguing Russia should stop participating because '[t]he participation of the clear transvestite and hermaphrodite Conchita Wurst on the same stage as Russian performers' was 'obvious propaganda for homosexuality and moral decay' (Golubock, 2014). Russia's deputy prime minister, Dmitry Rogozin, similarly tweeted that Conchita had 'showed supporters of European integration their European future: a bearded girl' (Sindelar, 2014), and Putin's adviser Vladislav Surkov tweeted that 'If Conchita is a woman, then Ukraine is a country' (Miazhevich, 2015: 2). None expressed similar outrage at 2014's sexually suggestive but heteronormative Polish entry, a celebration of (as its lyrics stated) 'Slavic girls' who 'know how to use their charming beauty' and who mimed traditional homemaking practices on stage (Kaneva, 2015: 2).

The geopolitics of Europe/Russia was not the sole framework for responding to Conchita. Activist groups like, in Croatia, Zagreb Pride could attach Conchita's image and post-victory quote 'we are unstoppable' to their struggles against the national right wing (Zagreb Pride 2014) – still within a transnational politics of LGBT rights but not aiming primarily at Russia. The international trans group Global Action for Trans\* Equality both headlined and ended its 2015 statement on International Day of Action for Trans Depathologization 'we are unstoppable' (Cabral and Davis 2015). More personal responses were also heard: trans writers reflected on Conchita's potential both as 'an ambassador for diversity' (Lees, 2014) and as a figure whom transphobic harassment might appropriate (Kennedy, 2014). Eurovision voting itself revealed more complexity than a Europe/Russia or West/East divide (Walsh, 2014). Conchita received an average of 4.4 points from each ex-Soviet state, 6 points from each other ex-Communist state and 10.5 points (the maximum being 12) from each other competing country – but public 'televotes' (contributing 50 per cent of a country's overall award) varied far less, with Conchita

notably third most popular in Russia's televote. It was instead 'expert juries' of music and media professionals (awarding the other 50 per cent of points) who scored Conchita significantly lower in ex-Soviet states (Renwick, 2014).

Even Conchita initially avoided playing fully into a symbolic moral geography of Europe versus Russia. While her Eurovision victory speech addressed 'everyone who believes in a future of peace and freedom; you know who you are – we are unity, and we are unstoppable' (BBC News, 2014), she did not directly oppose herself to the Milonov/Rogozin form of state homophobia that 2014's iteration of the 'new Cold War' geopolitical narrative (Foxall, 2009; Ciută and Klinke, 2010) had mapped out for her. Her adoption of a 'celebrity ambassador' role later in 2014, visiting the European Parliament in Brussels and the UN headquarters in Vienna, did however link her persona more closely to a wider geopolitics of human rights and democracy. At the European Parliament on 8 October, for instance, her speech referred to 'forces in Europe [which] are forgetting our common history', 'prefer to discriminate [against] minorities' and 'characterise democracy as something painful' (Wurst, 2014a). Developing her stage persona into an activist role through international institutions apparently required Conchita to sharpen her geopolitical positioning.

## **Conclusion**

Contemporary Eurovision is a nexus of international cultural politics, drawing in music production; music broadcasting; fans' and other viewers' practices of meaning-making and place-making; states' and cities' promotional strategies and security practices; ideologies of national and 'European' belonging; international competition; and the objectives of an international technical organisation (the EBU). These can be turned to multiple, sometimes contradictory, purposes. Eurovision enables states, performers, commentators, journalists and host states/cities to express particular narratives of geopolitical (especially

national) identity, with queer-coded signifiers among its building-blocks (Vänskä, 2007; Mitrović, 2010; Jones and Subotić, 2011; Sieg, 2013a; Carniel, 2015; Ulbricht, Sircar and Sloopmaeckers, 2015). It can also be used directly for LGBT advocacy. Acts and performances combining both purposes have made Eurovision a site for positioning a nation and/or 'Europe' at the vanguard of LGBT equality. By 2014 it was thus embedded in the construction of geopolitical Europe/Russia divisions around LGBT rights.

How far did narratives about LGBT equality produced through and around Eurovision exhibit the spatio-temporal hierarchies criticised by Kulpa and Mizielińska, and indeed how far could representing certain nations as havens of LGBT rights through Eurovision tacitly contribute to racist and Islamophobic exclusions in the 'homonational' moment? A transnational-level answer requires nuance: as Fassin (2011: 273) argues, campaigns may be 'co-opted in an imperialist strategy' without being reducible to imperialism only. Dana International, Marija Šerifović, Conchita Wurst and other cases demonstrate that an over-generalised benchmark for evaluating advocacy would not capture the event's complexity.

At both European and national levels, however, constructions of geopolitics and culture did combine into justifications for setting or advocating norms. Ayoub and Paternotte (2014: 6, 15) note both a 'core' association between 'the European project' and 'values [...] at the foundation of LGBT rights' in European politics, and exclusions where this association 'intersects with an idea of civilization, positing some individuals and some peoples as less civilized than others'. Since 9/11, this discourse turned primarily against Islam to the extent of closing down possibilities for queer Muslims' own activity and expression (Jivraj and de Jong, 2011; El-Tayeb, 2012). CEE was the target of semi-analogous discourses (Kulpa and Mizielińska (ed.), 2011), which in 2008–14 increasingly homed in on Russia. The sharpening emphasis on Russia exemplifies the co-production of exceptionalism and homophobia that Momin Rahman (2014: 280) observes in the context of Muslim homophobia (opponents of 'queer rights' resisting them as 'neocolonialist impositions' and expressing homophobia that Western activists respond to with a sharpened geopoliticisation of inclusivity-versus-homophobia). The rhetoric of 'moral sovereignty'

(Wilkinson, 2014) in Russian state homophobia, viewing non-normative sexualities and gender identities as European and US threats to Russian health and strength, suggests a similar process. Its discursive circuit has woven through several iterations of Eurovision, and other mega-events.

All these discursive formations, Judith Butler suggests, rely on an underlying teleology of modernity overcoming tradition; specifically, they inform and justify classificatory practices, inequalities, and state violence through asking ‘who has arrived in modernity and who has not?’ and answering with ‘Europe and its state apparatus [as] the avatar of freedom and modernity’ (Butler, 2008: 1–2). They simultaneously relegate Western and European violence to the historic past (Ahmed, 2011: 129; Agathangelou, 2013; Bhabra, 2016). Rahman (2014: 278) notes, however, that LGBT rights are an object of political struggle in the West itself (Browne and Nash, 2014), not a traditional norm; as such, he argues, they symbolise ‘Western exceptionalism’ all the more if used to imply that *only* in the West (or Europe) can that struggle openly occur. Eurovision too has demonstrated the *contingent* nature of LGBT rights: in 2014, one Danish presenter, Pilou Asbæk, claimed Eurovision organisers had denied his request to wear a rainbow symbol on stage (suggesting it was ‘[b]ecause east Europe is such a big part of Eurovision’) (Heritage, 2014) – not, one year after Malmö 2013, what a teleological progress-narrative would necessarily expect.

What, then, could these new narratives of national/European belonging erase or silence? The widespread ‘LGBT’ or rainbow label, for instance, failed to recognise specific marginalisations affecting bisexual, trans or intersex people (Serano, 2013; Wilkinson and Langlois, 2014: 252). Eurovision fit this pattern both regarding bisexual erasure and, despite contributions to trans visibility through Dana International and Conchita Wurst, as a space that still exhibited cissexist ‘microaggressions’ (Nordmarken, 2014). Malmö 2013’s interval act, for instance, may have made ‘serious political points [...] about gender equality’ in Sweden (Jordan, 2014a: 98) when Mede sang ‘In all our cities, the men don’t have titties, but they still stay at home to raise the kids’, but the lines still contributed to the erasure

of trans men, of whom some were fathers and some did have breasts. More widely, Swedish national narratives about sexual equality also masked serious socio-legal inequalities regarding gender identity: Sweden's abolition in 2012 of compulsory sterilisation as a requirement for trans people to obtain gender recognition did not come into force until July 2013, two months after Malmö (Amnesty International, 2014: 22).

Visions of an inclusive Eurovision and an inclusive Europe also revealed troubling silences and erasures about race (Sieg, 2013b). Iona Szeman (2013: 139), for instance, argued Eurovision producers had persistently marginalised Roma, a racialised and marginalised group 'across Europe': Eurovision entries might contain signifiers of Roma music without Roma performers, or Roma performers without music marked as Roma, but hardly ever both (Bulgaria's representative Sofi Marinova in 2012 was an exception). When the Romani pop-folk star Azis – whose performance persona was famously gender non-conforming and whose sexuality was ambiguous but undefined (Silverman, 2012: 188–94) – joined Bulgaria's Eurovision entry in 2006, he was placed almost unseen behind the main vocalist, the (less famous but ethnically Bulgarian) singer Mariana Popova (Szeman, 2013: 132). This positioning missed an opportunity to centre a simultaneously non-heteronormative and racialised musician in the Eurovision text so that, to paraphrase Sara Ahmed (2011: 128), he could have entered as a subject with his own voice.

Eurovision cannot therefore be termed a source of 'European cultural citizenship' (Tobin, 2007: 28) *unproblematically*. Rather, viewing it as a source of European cultural citizenship requires acknowledging the *inequalities* of access to citizenship in Europe, both in terms of political, social and economic participation and the nationality-based stratification of residency rights. Juxtaposing the 'militarized spectacle' of EU border enforcement (de Genova, 2013: 1183) with the 22,394 deaths since 1993 attributed to European border control practices by campaigners (UNITED, 2015 updating Bialasiewicz, 2012: 848) reveals a more violent dimension of Europe's 'common history' which also



shapes the European project. Extending Young's argument about the state as 'masculinist protector' (Young 2003) suggests white, non-Muslim queers with EU passports are invited to acquiesce in this violence. During the Sochi Olympics, the feminist writer Flavia Dzodan, who lives in the Netherlands, tweeted: 'Why [do] I speak about homonationalism? [Because] while EU media is spinning wheels of gay rights in Russia, queer asylum seekers are summarily deported' (Dzodan, 2014). The Eurovision space extended beyond the EU – in 2015 even incorporating Australia – but still traded on the symbolic idea of Europe ostensibly defended by EU border management.

Implying LGBT people's security was guaranteed and valued in the space of 'Europe' and under existential threat in the space of Russia, therefore, would overestimate the meaningfulness of equality achieved in states where 'Europe' is being lauded over Russia on these grounds. Neither, however, must one minimise the dangers posed by state homophobia, biphobia and transphobia to LGBT people in Russia (Soboleva and Bakhmetjev, 2015). During the results of Eurovision 2015, a period when Russia's entrant Polina Gagarina looked poised to win (after a song calling, controversially for some fans, for global peace – and after Vitaly Milonov had condemned her for hugging Conchita Wurst (Schreck, 2015)) produced strong reactions on social media against what narratives the Russian state might promote through Eurovision as host in 2016. Ultimately, Sweden rather than Russia won, and anticipation of a Russian victory might have been artificially accelerated by an algorithm used by Eurovision organisers since 2011 to produce what they call 'as exciting as possible' a viewing experience during results (Roxburgh, 2015). The strength of the reactions, and of booing inside the arena which forced the Austrian presenters to discreetly remonstrate with spectators, depended on too many people's motivations to be legible as evidence of one prevailing factor, be it hierarchical symbolic geopolitics, genuinely-held fear for one's safety visiting or living in Russia, or any other factor such as expressing solidarity with Ukraine (which did not participate in 2015). Viewers could have watched the results through any of these lenses and more. Rather, the responses demonstrated that substantial numbers of people, in the arena and

remotely, continued to interpret Eurovision through scripts about the international politics of security, sexuality and gender identity in Europe, as they had in 2014.

Eurovision, like the Olympics, is thus embedded in an international politics of competition and spectacle which Queer IR, and other fields, should take seriously. As significant as judicial and legislative institutions are for the geopolitics of sexual and gender diversity in Europe (Swiebel, 2009; Thomas, 2012; O'Dwyer, 2013; Amnesty International, 2014; Helfer and Voeten, 2014), they are not the only institutions to consider (Ayoub and Paternotte, 2014); as well as theorising the 'EU effect' (O'Dwyer, 2013), there is just as much to learn, for instance about the production of 'locations of homophobia' (Rao, 2014) or the clash of claims between 'global security depend[ing] on the freedom of queer sexualities' and 'queer sexualities [as] a security threat' (Sjoberg, 2015: 451), from what might be called the 'EBU effect'. The very project of Queer IR is, as framed by Langlois (2015: 2 citing Dunne, Hansen and Wight, 2013: 419), predicated on the need to continually ask what "'processes, objects, 'things'" we miss using our current lens'. It is not just 'hegemonic states', or even international financial/development institutions, that instrumentalise 'queer visibility' (Lind 2014: 603–4); the popular geopolitics of television, music, sport and international competition are just as implicated in the public contestation of human rights, the reconfiguration of Europe–Russia relations, and the contexts that Queer IR invites the rest of the discipline to consider. They demonstrate, simultaneously, how studying these topics elsewhere in International Relations today requires the contributions of Queer IR.

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