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Keywords: gender, sexuality, identity, politics, modernity, Cyprus

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Sexuality, Gender and the (Re)Making of Modernity and Nationhood in Cyprus

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INTRODUCTION

Whether elite-orchestrated or rooted in shared ideas, cultural customs and traditions, whether dynamically or symbolically demonstrated, the importance of conceptions of nationhood and of a coherent national identity that is shared among a population cannot easily be disputed, especially with regard to ethnically divided locales or postcolonial contexts (Anderson, 1983, 2013; Billig, 1995, 2017; Breuilly, 1982, 2015; Brubaker, 2015; Brubaker et al., 2006; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1992; Smith, 2004, 2014). Furthermore, discourses about nationhood and national identity have been employed in order to construct and preserve androcentric and heteronormative perceptions of acceptable gender and

sexuality performances and identifications (Anthias, 2013, 2018; Blom et al., 2000; Eriksen, 2017; Mosse, 1985; Nagel, 2017; Parker et al., 1992; Yuval-Davis, 1993, 1997, 2013; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989).

The management of gender and sexuality as a means for preserving social order and political stability has long been registered in the gender and sexuality literature (*ibid.*).

Gender and sexuality have been the subject of concern, scrutiny, anxiety, and surveillance particularly in postcolonial and ethnically divided places, like Cyprus, where the stakes in this stability are perhaps especially high. This is so because, in such places, the preservation of a “pure” national identity and of the “authentic” ways of the organization of the national collectivity—like the heterocentric and androcentric organization of social relations—are perceived as vital for avoiding penetration or contamination by the ethnic other (Kamenou, 2011; Karayanni, 2004, 2006, 2017). Moreover, in the so-called “global” era, local constructions of national identity, gender, and sexuality are continuously and intensely exposed to transnational and supranational discourses, which impact them in various ways, both positive and negative (Bilić & Stubbs, 2016; Cruz-Malavé & Manalansan, 2002; Drucker, 2000, 2015; Klapeer & Laskar, 2018; Manalansan, 1995; Nicolaïdis & Sèbe 2014; Povinelli & Chauncey, 1999; Rexhepi, 2016).

Given the rise of nationalist powers that draw their strength from reinvigorating binary discourses— “us” versus “them,” “the civilized west/Europe versus the uncivilized rest,” “the good citizen versus the bad foreign/immigrant”—and the challenges that this creates for political constructs and discourses, like the European Union (EU) and the human rights discourse (Bracke, 2012; Chaban & Holland, 2014; Paternotte, 2018; Walby, 2018), the discussion about the relationship between nationalism, gender, sexuality, and politics is once again timely and pertinent. This discussion is all the more important in relation to places where conflicting discourses intersect that, nonetheless, have not been sufficiently addressed

in western European and Anglo-American scholarship (Nagy & Timár, 2017; Thomas, 2017; Tlostanova et al., 2016).

This article seeks to address this gap in the literature and addresses the question of the formation of gender and sexuality identities, political agency, and politics vis-à-vis internal and external conflicting discourses in the “western/European” periphery, through the examination of the case of Cyprus. It focuses on Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals’ gender, sexuality, and national identity construction processes and understandings of gender and sexuality politics, amidst the sociopolitical environment within which these are articulated. Specifically, it examines the ways and the degree to which predominant local and external/transnational/global discourses about nationhood, gender, sexuality, and political agency affect and are affected by Cypriot LGBs’ understandings of themselves as gendered, sexual, and political beings. It does so by addressing a question that is central to gender and sexuality research: How are gender and sexual identities formed, and how do these formations inform gender and sexuality politics in contexts where conflicting discourses coexist? Interdisciplinary in scope, it draws on Foucauldian, feminist, and queer theory. It employs a qualitative research design and thematically analyzes original empirical data from interviews with Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot LGBs.

The article points to the often-ignored complexities of constructing and labeling selves and others, in contexts where local predominant discourses and modalities of gender and sexuality meet, merge, and/or clash with transglobal queer normativity and “European/western” paradigms of gender and sexuality politics.¹ In doing so, it seeks to

¹ By the term “transglobal,” I refer to transnational and global social, political, cultural, and economic movements and crossovers. Drawing upon Ferguson’s critique of globalization

expose hegemonic power structures in understandings of such concepts that emanate from the queer center, and to unearth indigenous modalities of queering and of the queer. Moreover, it marks in-group exclusions and alienations, both intra-ethnic and interethnic, and illustrates that Cypriot LGBs actually participate in the sanctioning of non-heterosexual modalities of sexuality. It argues that some of these exclusions and de-legitimizations are reinforced by local notions about “modernity,” which are reflected in the employment of the “Europe/west–versus the–rest” dichotomy. Nonetheless, it also demonstrates that the formation processes, operations, and successes of the Cypriot lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex (LGBTI) movement have been based on the tools and opportunities afforded to it by “Europe.”

Additionally, the article argues that the Cypriot discursive landscape both restricts and enables the reconfiguration of the power dynamics between the center and the periphery. Although transglobal paradigms normativize specific understandings of queerness and gender and sexual political agency, they do not annihilate alternative, local ones. Namely, an understanding of queerness that disrupts predominant local conceptions of sexual normativity without fully or unquestionably embracing the paradigm of transglobal queer normativity and a queering of the normal that might not be conceivable outside the webs of power but that challenges its internal logic are possible, as long as actors manage to employ transglobal discourses in ways that do not annihilate local modalities of gender and sexual existence. Therefore, it builds a theoretical and empirical framework for understanding the implications

(Ferguson, 1992), I see these transborder and transsocietal processes of integration and disintegration as transhistorical and, thus, as integral elements in the creation and perpetuation of the myth that (post)modernity is always and necessarily a linear, one-way—that is, from west to the rest—uniform, and uncontested process towards progress.

of understandings of nationhood, gender, and sexuality on gender and sexuality politics when the “rest” meets the “west.”²

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nationalism as a Discourse of Gender and Sexuality

The literature on women, gender, and nationalism has convincingly made the argument that there is a close link between gender relations, sexual behaviors, and national cohesion (Anthias, 2013, 2018; Blom et al., 2000; Eriksen, 2017; Mosse, 1985; Nagel, 2017; Parker et al., 1992; Yuval-Davis, 1993, 1997, 2013; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). Since gender relations play an important role in the nationalist project of preserving the unity and perpetuating the existence of the national community, these relations are determined by the cultural and religious customs/codes and gender constructions/symbols of the national collectivity. These customs and constructions assume an almost authoritarian character. They

² In the introduction—but not in the rest of the article for clarity and practical purposes—I place the terms “Europe,” “west,” “European,” “western,” and the other pole of the dichotomy they instigate—i.e., the term “rest”—in quotation marks as, in this article, they do not refer to essential geographical entities. Rather, I treat these terms as political, social, economic, and cultural constructs and ideas/ideals, as representations of imagined entities, and as discursive categories that I aim to question (see Bozdogan, 1986: 46; Goldstein, 2018: xv; Jouhki, 2006: 1; Offord, 2005: xv). Moreover, aiming to challenge the homogenization of varied regions and historical experiences and the division and hierarchization of the world, throughout the article, I do not capitalize the terms “west” or “western” (see Lewis & Wigen, 1997: 1–19; Said, 1978: 1–28). Treating “modernity” as a similarly problematic and contested concept that I aim to critically analyze in this article, in the introduction, I also place it in quotation marks.

do not allow enough space for internal power conflicts within the national collectivity, nor do they allow for interest differences along gender lines. They also treat gender as a homogenous category and ignore how gender divisions relate to other divisions, such as sexuality (Yuval-Davis, 1993, 1997, 2016).

Furthermore, nationalism is a discourse of sexuality in and of itself, since its language and demonstrations generate, regenerate, and become definitive of what counts as normal or abnormal sexual behavior (Eriksen, 2017; Mosse, 1985; Nagel, 2017; Parker et al., 1992). It has been argued that the generation of nineteenth-century European nationalisms was accompanied by the creation of ideas about bourgeois proper behavior pertaining to marriage and to sexual relationships. Nationalism and propriety were viewed as mutually supporting and sexual passions were redirected into the love for one's nation (Mosse, 1985).

Consequently, sexual identity and national identity essentially merged, and the borders of national belonging and exclusion corresponded to "normal" sexuality and gender behavior (Eriksen, 2017; Kulpa & Mizielska, 2016; Mole, 2016; Mosse, 1985; Nagel, 2017; Parker et al., 1992; Pryke, 1998; Trošt & Sloopmaeckers, 2015). In relation to Cyprus, homosexuality is not just a type of sexual activity. Articulated as identity, it threatens to become an "other" in a society that sees its purity in expelling all others (Kamenou, 2011; Karayanni, 2004, 2006, 2017).

It is not solely non-heterosexual sexual acts that are portrayed as deadly in religio-nationalist discourses. The people who embody such acts are demonized. Their entire mental and physical structure is rendered as slimy, abnormal, sinful, and dangerous for the survival of the national collectivity (Mosse, 1985: 186). The preoccupation with gender and sexuality and with their physical embodiment has always been a recurrent theme in state and institutional attempts to police their inclusion and exclusion boundaries. For example, as feminist and gender theory has amply demonstrated, ideas about womanhood, manhood,

female sexual modesty, and male sexual vigor are recurrent themes in such attempts (Anthias, 2013, 2018; Chong, 2016; Cusack, 2000; Iveson, 2017; Walby, 2000, 2018; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). Furthermore, although policing and regulation activities have been primarily directed towards women, men have not been excluded from control even though, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Loizos & Papataxiarchis, 1991; Maxwell, 2015; Nagel, 1998, 2017; Shay, 2016; Wendt & Andersen, 2015), the scholarship on national identities, gender, and sexuality has been slow in fully discerning the impact of national identities and nationalist discourses on both men and women. This is unfortunate, as it implicitly reinforces or leaves unchallenged essentialist, binary, and heteronormative approaches to gender and sexuality.

The Promises and Pitfalls of Modernity

The nationhood–gender–sexuality relationship is further complicated when external, supranational narratives are also taken into account (Bilić & Stubbs, 2016; Chaban & Holland, 2014; Klapeer & Laskar, 2018). Namely, deciphering whether and how such external discourses emasculate local exclusionary ones, or reinforce symbolic and discursive violence against intra-ethnic and extra-ethnic others, is pertinent in attempts to understand identity and agency construction processes.

Both as an unbound seriality of everyday universals and as a bound seriality of governmentality, nationalism and the politics of ethnicity circumscribe the processes through which identities and imaginable lived experience are shaped (Anderson, 1983; Chatterjee, 1999, 2013; Legg & Heath, 2018). Discerning the possibilities for exercise of agency amidst these processes reveals the pervasiveness of such discourses that manage to reach “into the very grain of individuals” (Foucault, 1980: 39). Nonetheless, it also demonstrates that they are not impermeable to alternative narratives. Even in contexts that are characterized by ethnic divisions and conflict, where the perceived need to protect the national collectivity from external threats is rendered as the ultimate priority, schemes of agency that prioritize

elements and subjectivities other than nationhood and national identity have the ability to destabilize discourses of sterile groupism and national exclusivity. Such alternative discourses and schemes of agency gain impetus as the national sociopolitical status quo gives way to the norms of a new global order and to the workings of supranational institutions and mechanisms (Ayoub, 2015, 2016; Kamenou, 2011, 2016).

The occident and the orient, the west and the east, the west and the rest are binarisms that consolidate bifurcated discourses. Such discourses arbitrarily distinguish the universe into inherently unequal and rigidly distinct social, cultural, political, and economic zones, while their pervasiveness is assured by the continuous employment of rigid and unscrutinized geographical divisions in the analysis of human condition. Eurocentrism is one of the consolidated bifurcated discourses that such binarisms generate and reflect, while Eurocentrism perpetuates such binarisms (Almenia, 2018; Delanty, 2015; Lewis & Wigen, 1997, 2016; Said, 1978).

Colonialism and western imperialism are the offshoots of the merging of modernity's logocentrism—which has equated human progress with the marginalization of traditional ways of thinking and living—with the “Enlightened countries’” expansionism—which has been self-justified through “modernizing”/ “civilizing” missions that sought to free the non-west/the rest from its “backwardness” (Burton & Kennedy, 2016; Palmer, 1977; Pouillion & Vatin, 2014). As Spivak has astutely and succinctly phrased it, “the most frightening thing about imperialism, its long-term toxic effect, what secures it, what cements it, is the benevolent self-representation of the imperialist as savior” (Spivak, 1992: 781). In Cyprus—like in other places they had colonized—through legal practice, the British attempted to “tame,” “civilize,” and “modernize” life, and to implement “a European governmental rationality and categorization” (Bryant, 2004: 49).

It has been argued that the tendency to conserve the subject of the west, or the west, as the subject in western literature and discourses, results in the epistemic violence of constituting the colonial—and the postcolonial—subject as “the other.” As the argument goes, this tendency is complicit in a hidden essentialist agenda: The west is produced by the imperialist project and this constitutes a reflection of the European problem of ethnocentrism, in which the subaltern cannot speak (Spivak, 1988).

If one accepts the argument, then the true subaltern has never existed in Cyprus. In Cyprus, modalities of sexuality were first spoken about, represented, classified, sanctioned, and delegitimized through western/European colonial discourses (Kamenou 2011, 2016; Karayanni, 2004, 2006, 2017). Nowadays, because of the island’s Europeanization, sexual others assume western/European identities in order to speak and describe themselves as sexual beings. In this way, Cypriot LGBTIs are actively engaging with those discourses that have initially otherized them: Cypriot LGBTIs constitute themselves as LGBTIs by adopting the western/European sexual identity discourse and via differentiating themselves from other sexual others, i.e., the subaltern, ethnically, and culturally “inferior,” non-European sexual others (Bracke, 2012; Colpani & Habed, 2014; Kamenou, 2011; Rao, 2014).

Nonetheless, even if the argument stands, this is not necessarily bad for Cypriot LGBTIs. Discourse Eurocentrism and the effects of colonialism have unquestionably muted alternative voices and understandings (Almenia, 2018; Delanty, 2015; Lewis & Wigen, 1997, 2016; Said, 1978). Even if subjectivity cannot exist outside (western/European/external) discourse, subjects are not passively and pervasively constituted by discourse (Butler, 2005, 2015; Butler et al., 2016; Kendall & Wickham, 1999).

It has been argued, though, that there is a tension between increasingly influential discourses and institutions of homosexuality and heterosexuality, and between local sexual ideologies and subjectivities that are often resistant and aspire to be anti-hegemonic (Bilić &

Stubbs, 2016; Klapeer & Laskar, 2018; Povinelli & Chauncey, 1999; Rexhepi, 2016).

Nonetheless, this does not necessarily mean that a real commonality of identity has not been created, or that any attempt to systematically conceptualize LGBTI oppression and liberation is essentially Eurocentric (Ayoub, 2015, 2016; Drucker, 2000, 2015; Kamenou, 2011, 2016).

What needs to be empirically investigated, and this is what this study does, is how the western/European discourse pertaining to LGBTI struggles against the institutional and social legitimization and solidification of compulsory heteronormativity might merge with, and complement—or, at least, exist in parallel and not antagonize—local understandings of sexual liberation, sexual justice, and sexual citizenship.

The argument that in the case of Cyprus, as elsewhere, official elite-led attempts to build the country and its people's modernity are based on Eurocentric ideology and on the reproduction of a colonialist rhetoric that is mounted against the cultural other is hard to dismiss (Argyrou, 1996, 2017; Bozkurt & Trimikliniotis, 2012; Nicolaïdis & Sèbe 2014). Since in such and in similar places modernity constitutes a historically constructed instrument of cultural and ethnic division and of the reproduction of one's own subjectivization, it seems that modernity is neither a destination to be reached, nor an object to be appropriated (Argyrou, 1996, 2017). However, and without denying the west and modernity's complicity in domination, based on the findings of this study that are discussed in the Findings and Analysis section, I argue that these mechanisms of subjectivization could serve as tools of emancipation, given that their victims become aware of their position in the power game, the rules of the game, and their available options. The new challenge in locales like Cyprus consists of molding these new political global stereotypes, images, values, ideals, and ideas based on local needs and understandings; namely, shaping these new concepts and this new language whose aim is to speak a way of being that until recently was silenced, in ways that local LGBTIs see fit for their aims and purposes.

METHOD

The data for this article is drawn from ethnographic study in Cyprus. Field research was conducted during numerous trips to, and long stays on, the island from 2007 to 2016. The current analysis is based on data derived from in-depth, open-ended one-to-one, and group interviews with Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot self-identified LGB individuals and activists, lasting between one and three hours.³ Interviewees range from 19 to 84 years of age. In the case of Greek Cypriots, interviews were conducted in the participants' native language, i.e., Greek. They were audio recorded and later transcribed and translated into English by this author. In the case of Turkish Cypriots, the interviews were conducted in English.

I recruited interviewees through snowballing. The majority of the interviews I conducted were one-to-one, although I also conducted a number of group interviews. Group interviews were not initially one of my chosen methods, since I was concerned with maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. However, they were the only available option when, in some instances, I would go meet an individual participant and found a group of friends who also wanted to talk to me. Although I had not planned to conduct group

³ In relation to research participants, by "Greek Cypriots" I mean individuals who, during the interviews and/or in the demographics questionnaire I asked them to complete before the interviews, self-identified as "Greek Cypriots" or "Cypriots" in relation to their ethnic identity, and stated that their parents (one or both) and grandparents (one or more) are "Greek Cypriots" and were born and live/lived in Cyprus. By "Turkish Cypriots" I mean individuals who, during the interviews and/or in the demographics questionnaire I asked them to complete before the interviews, self-identified as "Turkish Cypriots" or "Cypriots" in relation to their ethnic identity, and stated that their parents (one or both) and grandparents (one or more) are "Turkish Cypriots" and were born and live/lived in Cyprus.

interviews, they turned out to be very useful. These types of interviews closely resembled participant observation and naturally occurring talk. Thus, they afforded me the opportunity to get an insight into participants' conflicting and crossing discourses, as well as into the ways through which they negotiate their different positions on common interests (Kitzinger, 1994; Potter, 2004).

The analysis of the data from the interviews that follows is structured around themes. In relation to the question under examination in this article, two major themes emerged from the data analysis. These are: 1) intra-ethnic exclusions through appeal to modernity, propriety, and aesthetics and 2) interethnic exclusions through appeal to modernity, cultural superiority, and Europe. The two themes are discussed in this order in the following section.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Intra-Ethnic Exclusions Through Appeal to Modernity, Propriety, and Aesthetics

Power resides in the ability to name both the self and the other (Binnie, 2015; Dhawan et al., 2016; Epstein, 1987). Namely, identity formation is situated within a matrix of power, where players seek to position themselves and secure their position by challenging dominant discourses and by dominating more inferior others. In the case of non-heterosexual Cypriots, the manifestation of the Foucauldian power/knowledge–governmentality–subjectivity triadic interplay is particularly interesting, since sexual and gender identities are constructed based on the alienation of other others. For example, almost all lesbian and bisexual women interviewees dissociated themselves from butch lesbians. A Greek-Cypriot woman in her late twenties said:

It's ugly for a woman to be too masculine, regardless of whether she is gay or not. No matter what [her sexual orientation] is, she must not completely lose her femininity ... [T]his is a matter of aesthetics, meaning that it looks bad when you see a girl who is macho (Interview with Participant 212550).

When asked about her sexual identity, a Greek-Cypriot woman in her mid-twenties similarly said, “I don’t like the word ‘lesbian.’ It reminds me of butch lesbians. It’s violent, like a disease. I prefer the term ‘gay’” (Interview with Participant 333333C).

The following excerpt from an interview with a Turkish-Cypriot woman in her early thirties is especially revealing of the ways Cypriot non-heterosexual women define themselves in relation to other non-heterosexual women:

Interviewer: How would you describe your sexual identity?

Interviewee: ... I don’t like the term “lesbian” because it reminds me of butch lesbians ... I’m not manly. I’m not manly at all. And I get disturbed if anyone says that I’m a tomboy.

...

Interviewer: Why don’t you like butch lesbians?

Interviewee: First of all, I know that it [i.e., masculinity] comes from their inside, but in the end, it looks as if they are pretending ... [On the one hand] something [about butch lesbians] tells me that they are not pretending but, on the other hand, it doesn’t look right to me ... But this doesn’t mean that I don’t find it [i.e., masculinity in women] attractive. It’s a bit weird in this respect!
(Interview with Participant 212555).

These interview excerpts highlight two different issues. First, there is the “visibility and propriety” issue. Women interviewees stressed the importance of looking “feminine” in order not to disrupt the socially predominant aesthetics that are based on gender binarism. Rules about women’s gender performances and sexual behavior have been inextricably linked to the belonging and exclusion boundaries of the national collectivity, while they constitute the products of patriarchy and androcentrism, the presence of which is particularly manifest in traditional and ethically divided societies, like the Cypriot one (Anthias, 2013,

2018; Hadjipavlou, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 1993, 1997, 2013; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989).

The second issue is that of othering. Interviewees identified as non-heterosexual via distancing themselves from butch lesbians, whom they described both as repulsive and attractive. This is particularly important as it might point to the fact that they were eager to denounce butch lesbians because, although they might find the latter's gender performances attractive, they realize that, if they associate with such deviant gender performance, they will exacerbate their own, already severe, social stigmatization (Browne & Ferreira, 2016; Love, 2016; Mishali, 2018).

Gay men interviewees expressed similar views that reflect and reinforce gender binary masculinity (Brooks et al., 2017; Edley & Wetherell, 1997, 1999; Epstein, 1987; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017, 2018). A Greek-Cypriot man in his mid-thirties commented:

I am probably negating myself by telling you this, but I feel annoyed, I don't feel comfortable, I don't feel nice. Maybe [what I feel] has more to do with aesthetics than with [sexual and gender] identification. I am annoyed by "trans;" I mean "trans" as an image ... For example, if I see a man who is perfectly dressed as a woman and, therefore, he can fool me [into thinking that he is a woman], I don't mind at all ... However, I also saw people who liked dressing this way [i.e., like women] just to provoke. There is something about it I consider to be repulsive (Interview with Participant 212545).

Additionally, almost all gay men reported that they are very annoyed by "effeminate" gays and that they do not want to be around "sissies" who make a fool of themselves, thus giving all gay men a bad name. The following excerpt from an interview with a Greek-Cypriot gay male couple—interviewee one was in his mid-thirties and interviewee two was in his early twenties—is indicative of the ways through which Cypriot men rationalize themselves both as non-heterosexual and as non-feminine:

Interviewer: If you have ever experienced any negative feelings in relation to your gender or sexuality, what was the reason?

Interviewee 1: ... I am proud to be gay, but sometimes I think to myself: “Why couldn’t I be more normal?” ... In public, I have to act properly. Outside of my house, I have to appear to be straight.

....

Interviewer: Do you think that gender and sex do or should always correlate?

Interviewee 2: No, I don’t mind it. But ok. It’s one thing to say that I don’t mind and it is another thing to say that I’m not bothered [by it]; because I might be a bit bothered. Ok, it is not the best thing ever to see a feminine man. I don’t like it much. I don’t mind him being like this but I don’t like looking at him. I believe the same thing about a woman who is masculine. I would go out with them, talk to them, be friends with them, but I think that the answer I gave to you has to do with my aesthetics.

....

Interviewee 1: I don’t like extremes. I don’t like those ridiculous, lame sissies! I don’t like them and I don’t want them to be around me! ... I don’t want to deal with such situations, that is, having to explain to people I know and to my relatives why a sissy is sitting next to me, especially since I would never date someone like this (Interview with Participants 212564A and 212564B).

Cyprus’s historic turns and especially the effect of the British colonizers’ discourses—which spread hatred between the two ethnic communities and, for the first time, depicted and de-legalized non-heterosexual male sexuality as deviant and inferior through the transplantation of the infamous Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885—have caused a profound crisis in modern Cypriot identity (Kamenou, 2011;

Karayanni, 2004, 2006). Guarding the boundaries of (heterosexual) masculinity became central within the Cypriot context, in the attempt of Greek Cypriots to distinguish themselves from the other—i.e., the Turk—whose image was constructed both as barbarian and as effeminate (Dalacoura, 2014; Karayanni, 2006; Massad, 2007, 2015; Rahman, 2014).

According to Sedgwick, “effeminophobia” among gay men and phobia of “masculine” lesbians among gay women are driven by the need to disrupt a long western tradition that perceives gender and sexuality as continuous and collapsible categories; a tradition that assumes that everyone who desires a man is feminine, and everyone who desires a woman is masculine. Nonetheless, such attitudes among some LGB people alienate the “effeminate” boy/man and the “masculine” girl/woman and contribute to the reinforcement of discourses that depathologize non-heterosexual sexuality via pathologizing non-binary gender identifications (Sedgwick, 1991, 1993, 2008). In their attempts to render their sexual choices as “proper,” non-heterosexual Cypriot interviewees created in-group, intra-ethnic distinctions, via labeling non-binary gender identifications as inferior and abnormal.

What we call ourselves and what we call others has immense implications for political practice (Binnie, 2015; Dhawan et al., 2016; Epstein, 1987). So, where does this leave Cypriot politics of gender and sexuality? A Greek-Cypriot man in his late twenties explained:

Personally, I wouldn't want to “come out” ... because this would draw a lot of attention ... I live my life and people probably think I'm metrosexual ... I think that if I lived under the “gay” label, my life would be much different

(Interview with Participant 212559).

This interviewee's rejection of the idea of coming out and of assuming a gay identity, which was common among interviewees, is a strong exemplification of the non-western subject's questioning of transglobal ideas about how sexual self-realization, identification, and politics

are constituted in the periphery (Crawford, 2008; Green, 2006). In scholarship that emanates primarily from the Anglo-American and western European center, “coming out of the closet” has been described as a seminal political, social, and cultural event; renouncing one’s closeted self is the process through which one becomes gay (Bobker, 2015; Meeks, 2006). However, such logic leaves discourses that support the notion of visibility/invisibility unaddressed, while it ignores local particularities (Kulpa & Mizielinska, 2016; Sedgwick, 2008).

As the interviews with Cypriot LGBs demonstrated, this visibility/invisibility notion does assume a primary role in their self-identification processes. Nonetheless, what needs to be critically examined is the following question: “what kind of conceptual space is the closet, that confines people who seem neither highly politicized nor self-reflexively ‘gay’?” (Manalansan, 1995: 431–432). As Cypriot non-heterosexual interviewees’ understandings and negotiations of transglobal gay culture and politics show, the public affirmation of a gay identity is not uniformly seen as self-constituting or self-fashioning.

The closet is not necessarily repressive and can also be seen as a strategy of both accommodating normative heterosexuality and resisting it, since it creates a protected space within which individuals are permitted to fashion a non-heterosexual self and create social networks. Additionally, the displacement of “coming out of the closet” as the sine qua non of a politics of sexuality does not undermine political agency; rather, it encourages a post-identity sexual politics that challenges the norms that regulate same-sex and heterosexual bodies, desires, pleasures, and intimate practices (Crawford, 2008; Green, 2006; Seidman, 2002; Seidman et al., 1999).

Another important factor that needs to be taken into consideration is that, in some contexts, transglobal notions of sexual identity pose a problem not because of their swiping force against local sexual identities, but because such notions of identity do not exist, or did

not exist until very recently. In many cultures, including the Cypriot one, same-sex sexualities continue to exist parallel to emerging transglobal LGBTI identities (Clark, 2015; Drucker, 1996, 2000, 2015; Fernandes & Arisi, 2017). Therefore, it seems that: because of the pre-existence of diverse same-sex identities and/or practices in the non-west; because of the non-west's rapid economic and social change due to the rise and export of a global capitalist economy; because of cultural influences from the west; and because of major local political developments, in some contexts, LGBTI identities are characterized by “combined and uneven social construction” (Drucker, 1996, 2000). Namely, there is a tension between increasingly influential discourses and institutions of homosexuality and heterosexuality, and local sexual ideologies and subjectivities that are often resistant and aspire to be anti-hegemonic (Bilić & Stubbs, 2016; Klapeer & Laskar, 2018; Povinelli & Chauncey, 1999; Rexhepi, 2016).

Interethnic Exclusions Through Appeal to Modernity, Cultural Superiority and Europe

Particularly interesting is the employment of discourses about nationhood and about “Europe/the west versus the rest” by a number of interviewees, who defined themselves both as Greek-Cypriot and as non-heterosexual by positioning themselves against the Turkish-Cypriot ethnic other. During a group interview with three Greek-Cypriot women in their mid-twenties, early thirties, and mid-thirties, the following debate arose:

Interviewer: What do you know about the intimate relationships between non-heterosexual Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots? What is your opinion about these relationships?

Interviewee 1: The ethnic element plays out a lot [with regard to same-sex relationships between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots]. You cannot have sex with the enemy. It's like a national betrayal.

Interviewee 2: Well, I don't know... [*She pauses*]. I'm open-minded towards these types of relationships.

Interviewee 3: What? Are you for real? I'm totally against them! This has to do with our nationality, not with whether one is gay or not. I feel that these people [i.e., the Turkish Cypriots] have mistreated me. They are guilty for what happened in 1974.

Interviewee 2: You [to interviewee 1] were in a relationship with a Turkish-Cypriot woman for quite a long time, though.

Interviewee 1: Well... [*She pauses*]. She was different.

Interviewee 3: Yes, she was not like the rest of them.

Interviewer: In which sense? [*Silence*]

Interviewee 1: Well, look. The thing is that when we were together, we would not discuss politics (Interview with Participants 333333A, 333333B and 333333C).

Whether or not they consciously attempt to create the Self through a political process that directly challenges predominant prescriptions of national and sexuality identity, subjects remain rooted—though not in fixed positions—within the Foucauldian subjectivity–power–knowledge matrix that characterizes their historically specific social body. This restricted, yet not defined, subject positionality sometimes leads to the production of contradictory subjectivity (Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 54; Wilson, 2013). These interviewees' perceptions about national identity on the one hand, and the positive view of one of the interviewee's Turkish-Cypriot ex-girlfriend on the other hand, position Interviewee One and Interviewee Three in two different and contradicting ways in relation to discourse. As a result of the effects of nationalist rhetoric on them, these two women reject the idea of being emotionally and sexually involved with the enemy, i.e., with Turkish-Cypriot women. However, their

positive view of the Turkish-Cypriot ex-girlfriend disrupts the effects of nationalist rhetoric. In their attempts to resolve the contradiction they argue that “she was different from the others,” though they cannot offer any explanation as to how she was “different” from other Turkish Cypriots and, therefore, “better.”

Nevertheless, there were a number of interviewees who defined themselves, both as Greek-Cypriot and as gay, by completely distancing themselves from, and even positioning themselves against, the Turkish-Cypriot, “non-European,” “non-modern,” “backward” ethnic other. The following excerpt from the interview with the aforementioned Greek-Cypriot gay male couple is illustrative:

Interviewer: What do you know and what do you think about the intimate relationships between non-heterosexual Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots?

...

Interviewee 2: A guy I know liked this Turkish-Cypriot man and everyone would tell him: “With a Turkish Cypriot? Why? Aren’t there any [Greek] Cypriots?” You know, we left aside the fact that he is gay and now the issue is: “With a Turkish Cypriot?” [For some people] having sex with a Turkish Cypriot is ok, but not a relationship; whereas with a British [man] or a German [man], or whatever, there is no problem.

Interviewee 1: I don’t mind someone having sex with a Turkish Cypriot, but I don’t like the relationships [between Greek and Turkish Cypriots]. I wouldn’t do it. What? Would I pick up a Turkish Cypriot? He is Turkish Cypriot! Here is why I hold this belief: He is Turkish!

Interviewee 2: Why not? I met Turkish Cypriots who are very clever people and to them, all these religion and culture issues are complete nonsense.

Interviewee 1: [*Surprised*] Would you have sex with a Turkish Cypriot?

Interviewee 2: Would you have sex with a British?

Interviewee 1: Yes! Why not?

Interviewee 2: Why not with a Turkish Cypriot?

Interviewee 1: The British is European!

Interviewee 2: So, what? A Turkish Cypriot is European too! He lives on the other half of Cyprus that is Europe!

Interviewee 1: If there is a solution [to the Cyprus problem] and the rest of Cyprus becomes part of Europe, I'll think about it!

Interviewee 2: Oh! So currently a Turkish Cypriot is worthless and tomorrow, when there will be a solution, he won't be worthless!

Interviewee 1: No! He will still be worthless! I had sex with Turkish Cypriots many times. But just sex! To make Cyprus and Greece proud and fuck the Turk is ok! But this is where you draw the line! No relationship!

...

Interviewer: How would you describe your ethnicity and national identity?

...

Interviewee 1: I don't hate Turks because I feel I'm Greek. But they came and took our houses and properties, so why should we like them? I don't get it! My family had so much property and now I can't call my family's property and land my own, because they remembered to come from Turkey and take it!

Interviewee 2: Yes, but I know Turkish Cypriots who are from Larnaca ...

*[Interrupted by interviewee 1]*⁴

⁴ Larnaca is a city in the non-occupied part of the island. Before the division of the island, a large percentage of Turkish Cypriots lived in Larnaca.

Interviewee 1: There are no Turkish Cypriots anymore! With all those settlers they [i.e., Turkey] brought [to the island], what has been left of Turkish Cypriots?

Interviewee 2: There are!

Interviewee 1: Yeah, right! When they kick out the settlers, let them find the Turkish Cypriots and I will tell them [i.e., to the Turkish Cypriots] “Hello my friends!” (Interview with Participants 212564A and 212564B).

The literature on nationalism has convincingly made the argument that the construction of external others remains necessary for the conceptualization of the nation. Nonetheless, the unity of national collectivities is challenged by the existence of internal ethnic and sexual others (Kramer, 1997; Readman et al., 2014; Soper & Fetzer, 2018). In fact, nationalism is a discourse of sexuality in and of itself, since national discourses become authoritative of what comes to be perceived by the national collectivity as normal and abnormal sexual behavior, while the borders of national belonging and exclusion correspond to legitimized and delegitimized sexual identities (Kumari, 2018; Maxwell, 2015; Mole, 2016; Mosse, 1985).

The analogy between interethnic sexual intercourse dynamics and the 1974 events was repeated by numerous Greek-Cypriot gay men. A Greek-Cypriot gay man reported:

When some [Greek-Cypriot gay men] are having sex with a Turkish Cypriot, especially if the Greek Cypriot is assuming the passive role, it’s sort of... [*He pauses*]. Do you know what I mean? Sex role dynamics alternate in the case of men. It’s not like “man–woman.” A man–man [sexual relationship] is very different. A Turkish-Cypriot once told a friend of mine: “I fucked you like you fucked us in 1974.” ... If I was to be told this, and I am not a racist ... [*He pauses*]. But hey! ... It’s not you [i.e., Turkish Cypriots] who won against us, it

was Turkey... I heard of many [Greek Cypriots] who date Turkish Cypriots. Because there is anonymity, there is no reason it should stop happening. Also, because of what gay Greek Cypriots go through within [Greek-]Cypriot society, they hate their country. Thus, they do not care having sex with Turkish Cypriots ... Personally, I am a bit more protective towards my country. Just because Cyprus has hurt them, they don't care at all (Interview with LGBTI Participant 212573).

The usage of gender and sexual metaphors to describe and negotiate ethnonational conflict is common (Baruk & Popescu, 2008; Kozintsev, 2015). In such metaphors, sexual aggressiveness is often not employed to describe national threat; rather, it is referred to as a weapon against the enemy other and as a means for getting revenge against past injustices. This is because “[it] generates fresh rigour, pleasure, and confidence in ... a male ... national identity” (Karayanni, 2006: 261).

Although as formerly colonial subjects Cypriots have been rendered as inferior when compared to their western/European colonizers, some of them participate in the perpetuation of binary discourses that hierarchically organize the world into a civilized western/European center and a less civilized periphery (Almenia, 2018; Delanty, 2015; Lewis & Wigen, 1997, 2016; Said, 1978). This tendency is all the more striking when discerned among some of the other others, namely among non-western/non-European, non-heterosexual individuals. While trying to define and position themselves within the local matrices of power, some Greek-Cypriot interviewees replicated the “European versus the other” discursive binarism, by distinguishing between Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot non-heterosexuals, and by describing the former as European and modern and the latter as non-European and backward (Bracke, 2012; Colpani & Habed, 2014; Rao, 2014; Rexhepi, 2016).

Such statements demonstrate that discourses of Europe do not necessarily have a weakening impact on predominant discourses. Namely, although Cyprus's EU accession has offered a language for the articulation of alternative discourses of gender and sexuality, it has not fully obliterated nationalist rhetoric and its impact on Cypriots' understandings of the self and the other (Kumari, 2018; Maxwell, 2015; Mole, 2016; Mosse, 1985). When appropriated by oppressed groups and individuals, the tools and language of Europe can help bring about positive change (Ayoub, 2015, 2016; Kamenou, 2011, 2016). However, the fact that the Greek-Cypriot part of the Republic of Cyprus was admitted to the EU while the Turkish-Cypriot part was practically not, supplied already existing ideas about ethnic superiority with new rigor. This is a peril that needs to be kept in mind when propelling arguments about Europe's impact on conceptions of nationhood and national politics of gender and sexuality.

To be sure, postcolonial experience includes western hegemony. However, if the west is omnipresent, it is not possible for a postcolonial critique that is unpolluted from colonial experience to arise (Isin, 2014; Nandy, 1983; Prakash, 1995; Shilliam & Rutazibwa, 2018). Rather, what postcoloniality does is to engage in what Spivak calls "catachrestic criticism;" that is, it confiscates the omnipresent apparatus in order to reverse and displace it (Spivak, 1989, 1990). Although processes of gender and sexuality identity and politics formation are embedded in modernity/modernization, western/European, and transglobal discourses, their outcome is not predetermined. Even if subjectivity cannot exist outside discourse, subjects are not passively and pervasively constituted by it, since they are both products of power and discourse and producers of themselves (Foucault, 1978). Consequently, even though non-heterosexual Cypriots "provide the bodies on and through which discourse may act ... [they also] form some of the conditions for knowledge" (Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 53). Although the "I" is subjected to discourse, its agency is not annihilated and its positionality is not predetermined, since the "I" is not bound to specific, established forms of subject formation,

but only to the sociality of any of a number of possible relations. This offers an occasion for transformation and reconstruction (Butler, 2005, 2015).

In the case of Cypriot LGBs, this occasion is created by the disruption and the crossing of local and external/European/western discourses of gender and sexuality. Admittedly, the former negate Cypriot LGB subjectivities, while the latter do not pay sufficient attention to their specificities. Nevertheless, the space created by the crossing of these two sets of discourses constitutes an open space for Cypriot LGBs that they could occupy and adjust to their needs, by prioritizing some elements of these local and transglobal discourses and abandoning some others.

It has been argued that the cultural production, circulation, and reception of a presumably transglobal LGBTI movement is problematic, since this process is defining LGBTI liberation by “tracing the trajectories of modernity” (Manalansan, 1995: 425–426). Allegedly, the subordination of local subjectivities by transglobal structures and the hierarchical relations between metropolises and peripheries is concealed under the rubric of the terms “gay,” “bisexual,” “trans” and even “queer” (Bilić & Stubbs, 2016; Bracke, 2012; Colpani & Habed, 2014; Drucker, 2000; Manalansan, 1995; Rao, 2014; Rexhepi, 2016). However, a closer look at transglobal discourses of sexuality reveals that they are not monolithic or inflexible. On the contrary, they are adopted in multiple and constantly negotiated ways in different settings, as part of the process of formulating hegemonic or counter-hegemonic responses to transglobal LGBTI agendas.

Transglobal discourses have a double potential impact at the national level. Firstly, Europe, the west, and modernity can function as vital pressure tools in the hands of Cypriot non-heterosexuals when they seek recognition by national political and institutional elites. For example, a change in social values that is linked to Cyprus’s Europeanization, and the tools afforded by the EU to national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been the

cornerstones of the inception, the basis of its operations, and the reason behind the successes of the Greek-Cypriot LGBTI NGO *Accept-LGBTI Cyprus* (Kamenou, 2016). Secondly, they could lead to the formation of less nationalistic and ethnicity-based LGBTI identities and politics, without annihilating local understandings of non-heteronormative and non-cisnormative sexuality and gender. For example, with the help of the *European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association*, *Accept-LGBTI Cyprus* and the Turkish-Cypriot NGO *Queer Cyprus* collaborated over the organization of the first Cyprus LGBTI Pride March in May 2014 (ibid.). Events such as these constitute examples of successful attempts to reconstruct ethnonational, gender, and sexual identities and political agency, and to promote collective and inclusive notions of civic identity and citizenship.

CONCLUSION

Whether real or imagined, invented or constructed, elite-engineered or rooted in the past and memory, discourses of nationhood have the power to define collective and individual modes of existence. Nonetheless, they are not impermeable to alternative discourses. The importance of nationalism lies both in its inherent contradictions and in its ability to reinvent itself. This allows the ostracized other to have an impact on how national identities and the borders of national collectivity are debated and formed. This Foucauldian line of argument is helpful in understanding the case of Cyprus. Although Cypriot LGBs' understandings of the nation, gender, and sexuality are located within a specific discursive context, the possibility of agency and reconstruction is not annihilated. Discourse outlines how the self and the other speak and are spoken about and constructed, but the act and the result of the articulation and reconstruction are not given or predetermined.

Sexuality and gender remain zones of management, containment, regulation, and conformity, but also of resistance. Even in places that are characterized by ethnic divisions and conflict, alternative schemes of agency have the ability to destabilize discourses of sterile

groupism and national exclusivity, and to promote more collective and inclusive understandings of identity and citizenship. The issue that needs to be further addressed, both by scholars and activists, is how to invoke transglobal discourses in ways that expand the plane of the thinkable and the recognizable. This necessitates embracing what has been called the “double movement of globalization;” namely, balancing the notion of transglobal gender and sexuality politics as a criterion of progress with a degree of resistance to the notion of the transglobalization of same-sex sexualities and binary gender as identities (Roseneil et al., 2013; Stychin, 2004).

Gender and sexuality’s oxymoronic status as both the objects of local and transglobal discourses and as the forces behind subaltern agency formation means that, in order to fully comprehend them, we have to escape easy assumptions and generalizations about their role and impact both in the west and in the rest. This article attempted to respond to this challenge by approaching gender and sexuality as multifaceted and powerful analytical tools that are indispensable for understanding the nature and the dynamics of discursive wars and interconnections, circuits of power at different levels, and their impact on non-heterosexual and non-gender-binary lives.

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