

Sexual citizenship and cultural imperialism

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It would be enough to rapidly scan the global media, or briefly surf through transnational alternative journalist networks, to see that almost on a daily basis we are confronted with an infinite puzzle of news concerned with sexual battles across the globe. From the successive SlutWalk marches against sexual assault that have taken place in several cities since 2011 or the Pussy Riot imprisonment in 2012, to the campaign to restrict abortion in Spain, and the gay rights march lead by Mariela Castro in Cuba in 2013, in fact, the list could be endless. If we look at the contemporary global scene, the question then arises: how can we understand the conflicts over difference, culture, race, hegemonies, and power that these sexual struggles pose? What do these sexual battles tell us about sexual citizenship on a global scale? How can we give an account of the extreme heterogeneity of sites, genealogies, meanings, struggles, and trajectories where rights concerning our sexual lives are put at stake? To what extent do they point to the emergence of sexual citizenship understood as a paradigm as it has been circulating internationally, and how does this paradigm affect what counts as sexual freedom and justice?

Before we consider these questions, let us first have a look at some of the major news events of the first months of 2013. In late March of that year, Facebook and other social networks, including bloggers and Internet media from around world, were the site of a heated debate on how certain discourses on gender and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights have become the occasion for the promotion of Islamophobia. The controversy began when a call to speak up in defence of Amina Tyler, an activist from Tunisia who was allegedly threatened with death by stoning for posting a topless picture of herself, went viral on the Internet. This gave rise to a subsequent viral thread of posts and blogs condemning Islam/Arabs/Muslims (the confusion with these terms is part of the Islamophobic machine) for their disrespect for women's freedom and equality, which is already a contested issue given the heterogeneous positions in this regard among many different Muslim groups, Muslim feminists, and queers amongst them. The case also opened the way for activists from Femen, a global feminist protest movement that originated in Ukraine in 2008, to initiate an overtly Islamophobic campaign along with extensive broadcasting of blatantly Islamophobic discourses, which, in an all-inclusive move, simply treated 'Islam' as a fanatic monolithic movement characterized by its antidemocratic, fundamentalist, and sexist and heterosexist attitudes.¹

The controversial picture of Amina was posted on Femen's Tunisian Facebook page. Making naked breasts public has been part of Femen politics for some time and this was not the first time that this has generated an adverse reaction.² When attempting to hold a topless protest in Brussels where the Russia–EU summit was taking place, Ukraine's Femen activists were arrested by the Belgian police on 21 December 2012, the EUbusiness news portal reported.³ This would not be the first time Femen activists would face this fate, nor would it be the only site where they were arrested. About two months before Amina Tyler's case, on 13 January 2013, four activists staged a topless protest for gay rights at the Vatican, as Pope Benedict XVI was reciting his prayers. According to the Agi news agency: 'The activists, with slogans "In Gay We Trust" painted on their backs, staged the protest in the centre of St. Peter's Square and so they were detained by Vatican police'.⁴

The official position of the Roman Catholic Church against homosexuality is widely known. Hence, the minimal attention that mainstream global media paid to the fact that the newly elected Pope was the man who launched 'a war of God' against the movement in favour of gay marriage in Argentina, where same-sex marriage has been legal since 2010.⁵ A few days after Francesco – the controversial Argentine Jesuit – became the new Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, a gay couple in Buenos Aires were brutally beaten at a private party for 'showing off' their gayness in front of others. The aggressor, one of the guests at the party (an upper-class gathering taking place in a posh suburban area of the city), argued that 'now that we have an Argentine Pope, there cannot be (openly declared) fags in Argentina'.⁶ This is also the country that was in the spotlight of the international media for sanctioning one of the most progressive gender identity laws in the world in 2012.

As for trans issues in Latin America, in July 2012 the Ecuadorian Confederation of Trans and Intersex Communities launched a challenging campaign, 'My gender in my ID card', demanding that ID cards should state the gender with which a person identifies regardless of their assigned gender at birth. This campaign has accompanied the Project to Reform the Civil Registry Law, which was presented to the Ecuadorian Government in March 2013.⁷ One of the most salient conservative arguments against this demand was that this would work as a shortcut for gay people to be able to get married – so that if, for instance, two women want to get married, having one of them classified as male in her ID will entitle them to do so as if they were heterosexuals – and in so doing, the argument goes, they would be able to defraud the state in order to gain access to taxation discounts and benefits. The differential distribution of suspicion regarding the motives or personal reasons why people get married is outrageous, and of course not limited to Ecuadorians; this is the default logic when it comes to gay and lesbian couples applying for family reunification within the EU. They will be suspected (and even more so if one of the partners happens to be bisexual) and investigated in ways that most heterosexual couples probably will not.⁸

With the UK Government presenting the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill 2012–13 to Parliament on 24 January 2013, same-sex marriage became a key issue in the inauguration of the winter/spring global media 'sexual rights' season that year. At that moment, the bill had two readings with a third to come and there was widespread consensus in the UK about the need to pass this Act. But in the meantime, the US was exposed, once again, for its more than contradictory position when it comes to gay politics, with the Supreme Court about to rule on the constitutional legitimacy of Proposition 8, the bill that California passed on gay marriage in 2008, and for which an injunction was issued in 2010. The US brands itself as *the name* for freedom, it prides itself on its supposed vocation for tolerance, and so claims to welcome sexual diversity; and it does so to some extent when it comes to popular culture, although mostly in a homonormative fashion, that is, it presents a normalized version of gay and lesbian identities and

lives according to hegemonic heterosexual standards (e.g. *Modern Family*, *The New Normal*).⁹ In terms of consumption, some market trends also give a warm welcome to sexual diversity whenever profit makes it convenient; there is no doubt that the pink economy has been a thriving niche for decades now. However, when it comes to legal recognition, things become much less clear. With France also discussing a gay-marriage bill that same year, 2013 witnessed a return to questions within the LGBT and Queer social movements regarding what a democratic LGBT agenda should be, and to what extent same-sex marriage represents the culmination of a long, steady journey towards sexual justice.

As we can see from the above examples, the list of news items where sexual matters figure as a struggle for sexual rights is seemingly endless, and this is quite apart from the myriad of stories that do not make it into the globalized media, let alone those that escape our attention because of language boundaries. At the same time, we can appreciate the cross-cultural and cross-national contexts in which these scenes evolve and make sense. How can we make sense of the resonances that might be found among these struggles despite their significant differences and particularities? Is this somehow chaotic mosaic of scenes revolving around sexual struggles an expression of the expansion of the paradigm of sexual citizenship on a global scale? Maybe 'global' is far too big a scale to think about. Maybe sexual citizenship is far too big a domain to think about as well. And yet, almost everywhere we can find social movements making claims driven by principles of sexual rights, along with civil organizations and international human rights organizations aiding the development of local and trans-local sexual politics, and 'raising awareness' of the need to achieve key sexual liberties.

In different ways, the mosaic points to the entanglement of at least three already extremely complex topics, from both a historical and a theoretical point of view: citizenship, sexuality, and rights. This chapter analyses some aspects of this recent entanglement within the context of the emergence of the sexual citizen. In doing so, the aim of the chapter is to map some of the challenges and predicaments that the paradigm of sexual citizenship might be posing for progressive and radical sexual politics when considered on a global scale.

What do we mean when we talk about sexual citizenship?

The notion of sexual citizenship is not a clear-cut concept, nor does it respond to a normative definition. Sexual citizenship rather refers to a field of meanings that started to emerge and has continued to grow since political and academic debates opened up questions about the possibility and the implications of starting 'to view sexualities through the lens of citizenship' (Bell and Binnie 2000: 1). In general terms, it evokes those sexual politics that articulate the sexual claims of sexual dissidents – mainly LGBT collectives – in the language of rights. It also designates the field of sexual policies directed towards so-called sexual minorities, which could be understood as a process of sexual governmentalization.¹⁰

But when, where, and how did sexual politics start to cut across the language of rights and subsequently give rise to debates over the implications of this entanglement? Trying to outline the field of meanings of sexual citizenship is, in fact, telling the story of how certain politics have emerged and been addressed and others have not. There might be nothing that could be called sexual citizenship apart from the actual political and intellectual practices that are enacted in its name. And the stories of these practices may vary enormously around the world. Therefore, to try to give an account of what sexual citizenship might be is, from the very start, a risky task. It might even betray the intention of this author, for it would mean, from the start, choosing one trajectory over others (normally this trajectory tends to be that of the US or the UK, or more generally the Euro-North Atlantic) and reinforcing, from that viewpoint, the authority of

this story over that of the rest of the world. Conversely, one could ask if sexual citizenship is, after all, an invention of the 'West'. In that case, one could define sexual citizenship according to hegemonic 'Western' understandings and proceed to nuance the argument at a later point, indicating how the figure of the sexual citizen has expanded and then assumed different shapes and promoted different practices, meanings, and politics in other places. However, these opposing positions – either there are many sexual citizenships depending on the story we tell, or there is one occidental sexual citizenship that has been exported somewhere outside of this imagined West – only make sense if the stories of colonialism are dismissed. In fact, one cannot think of the contemporary notion of sexual citizenship without taking into account the longer sexual history of colonization and later forms of hybridization and *mestizaje* which are features of the postcolonial condition.

The current translation of sexuality into the language of rights on an international scale has not emerged out of a historical void, and it would be difficult to argue that this process has entailed the mere imposition of a Euro-North Atlantic sexual paradigm onto other worlds, as if at this point in history we could distinguish between pure modern-Western and non-modern-Western sexual identities and politics. Rather, the current globalization of sexuality along with the extension of the language of rights and the reconfiguration of sexual identities that go with it, have been taking place against the backdrop of former processes of sexual colonization. As Joseph Massad has argued, the naturalization of heterosexuality and the subsequent naturalization of the hetero-homo binary on which current sexual politics is based, are embedded in a longer history that started in a prior colonial context (Massad 2007). In a similar manner, Maria Lugones (2007) analyses how the gender system and the heterosexualism that goes with it were introduced in Latin America during colonial times. This fact complicates any linear or univocal account, for the sexual orders of current postcolonial contexts have been configured in the aftermath of different colonial encounters, and while they are not purely other, neither are they based on a univocally colonized understanding of sexuality. For instance, while in most cases homophobic legislation in such contexts has been inherited from colonial rule, current forms of homophobia cannot simply be attributed to the imposition of a foreign system of sexual values, nor can they lead to a nativist version of a vernacular culture charged with intrinsic homophobic views.

It is in the aftermath of this long process of hybridization that current forms of cultural imperialism work. They are articulated, as Edward Saïd might put it, upon 'the interdependence of cultural terrains in which colonizer and colonized co-existed and battled each other through projections as well as rival geographies, narratives, and histories' (Saïd 1994: xx). Following Saïd's reasoning, the question then would be to underscore those articulations of cultural imperialism that continue to strip 'the outlying regions of the world' of any 'integrity worth representing without the West', seizing them according to 'Western' standards, even '*after* decolonization, *after* the massive intellectual, moral, and imaginative overhaul and deconstruction of Western representation of the non-Western world' (Saïd 1994: xix).

How can we interpret the homophobic reactions in Argentina and Ecuador described above if we do not take into account this longer history of colonial encounters while paying attention to the syncretic contemporary new formations of homophobia? From a position convinced of both the purity and the supremacy of so-called Western modern values, this backlash against sexual diversity would be attributed to the 'backwardness' of Latin American societies, portrayed as undeveloped and therefore still subjected to traditionalist (and macho-oriented) views. Against this progressive narrative it should be noted that the Ecuadorian arguments against homosexual relations were for the most part pragmatic and cast in the neoliberal language of the economic responsibilities of the citizens with regard to the State. In the case of Argentina, the aggressor had beaten the gay guests, sending one of them to hospital with major injuries,

because they were dancing and kissing at a party at a moment when 'Argentina's decency' was in the international spotlight. According to the aggressor, it was precisely now, with the election of an Argentinian Pope, that they should have hidden. The reference to the Pope indicates that the hetero-nationalist sentiment was already prompted as a result of Argentina's contemporary international image, cast in line with international official Catholic standards rather than according to an exclusive vernacular 'criollo' tradition.¹¹

Indeed, one of the aspects that complicate the politics of sexual citizenship is that, as Bell and Binnie already argued in 2000, we must consider sexual citizenship as a transnational construct. According to the authors,

Instances in the politics of trans-national sexual citizenship, such as the 'Europeanization' of human rights law, the regulation of immigration policies or the globalization of sexual identities, ask that we re-evaluate the boundaries of sexual citizenship and rights claims in recognition of the changing shape of the world.

(2000: 5)

Sexual citizenship might be considered as a transnational field not only because, from the point of view of states, it is linked to international human rights laws and treaties that bind political institutions at a national level, but also because the political practices that sexual citizenship mobilizes cut across national boundaries, both at the level of civil institutions and activism, and at the level of cultural practices, mass culture, and political discourse. If, following Engin Isin (2008, 2012), we understand citizenship as a myriad of practices that exceed the sphere of state-oriented politics, and conceive it rather as a form of enacting multiple political belongings on the basis of 'the right to claim rights', we may find that sexual citizenship is enacted in manifold ways which could include cultural expressions, activism, and other practices that we might not interpret as 'citizenship-oriented' in the first instance, such as Femen activism or Pussy Riot neo-punk performances. In a similar manner, as the examples with which this chapter opened demonstrated, demands regarding sexual rights are constantly shaped by the overlap of the national, the local, the global, the transnational, the regional, and the trans-local, showing that the state (let alone the nation-state) cannot be the only, or even always the most relevant reference point for analysing the political field that sexual citizenship opens.

And yet, as the field of sexual citizenship has been shaped by the globalization of sexual identities under the guise of the language of rights, it has raised particular concerns in relation to the cultural violence involved in processes of universalization. Indeed, sexual citizenship is a paradigm that conceives sexuality as the inextricable entitlement of every human subject, and this mere assertion already implies a whole set of assumptions about subjectivity, sexuality, and politics, which, I would argue, actually point to a sovereign subject that coincides with the abstract citizen of liberal democracies. For instance, the tension between those who understand sexual rights as a universal goal that should be extended to everybody, regardless of their cultural background, and those who see this process of expansion of the discourse of sexual rights as a form of cultural imperialism, is paramount. This fact raised questions about the cultural loss that might be involved as the price to pay for inclusion in the realm of sexual citizenship both globally and also at a local level. Although sexual citizenship must necessarily be an open concept, since the form it takes depends on the actual demands and movements that give meaning to it, it seems that the concept already bears a set of assumptions about how sexual subjects should be in order to be considered legitimate claimants of sexual rights.

Therefore, despite the fact that the dichotomy between Euro-North Atlantic modern sexualities and their others is based on untenable unified versions of history and treacherous unitarian

subject formations, we are still witnessing the hegemony of Euro-North Atlantic epistemic frameworks for setting the parameters within which the fields of sexuality and politics become intelligible. I would argue that it is precisely this hegemony – translatable into the naturalization and subsequent universalization of the figure of the sovereign citizen-subject belonging to the liberal conception of the political community – that is at the root of the tensions provoked by the globalization of sexual politics under the guise of sexual citizenship. Of course, this hegemony is related to colonial legacies, but it cannot be subsumed under them. Rather, it implies a re-articulation of power relations in the light of a new geopolitical scene.

Interestingly enough, this universalizing trend arose in parallel with the emergence of the politics of recognition and the praise of differences. This coexistence does not indicate a paradoxical situation or a tension between these supposedly opposing positions. On the contrary, as I demonstrate below, it has been precisely through the politics of difference and the multiplication of (sexual, cultural, ethnic, religious) identities, that the liberal constitution of the citizen-subject has expanded. Therefore, in order to grasp the main difficulties of sexual citizenship, taking as a starting point the political uses it actually enables on a transnational scale, we should take into account this combination. To do so, in the following sections I turn my attention to two other entangled trends that shaped the context in which global sexual citizenship has been working: the politics of recognition and the culturalization of citizenship.

The politics of recognition

The common understandings of sexual citizenship at the level of global politics are associated with antidiscrimination ideals, the respect for human rights, principles of tolerance, and a growing consensus about the need to achieve gender and sexual equity and to expand key liberties. These are all valuable ideals, and yet the collectives involved in sexual politics, along with the scholars concerned with sexual matters, have not been unanimous in welcoming the translation of sexual freedom and justice ideals into the language of rights. The politics of sexual citizenship has, from the start, been a controversial subject, with unconditional advocates and fierce critics on each side of the spectrum and many positions in between. Among those who have attempted to reconcile positions on sexual citizenship is Jeffrey Weeks, who welcomed the possibilities opened up by the emergent sexual citizen, without dismissing the radical critique of sexual orders altogether (1998). In a less celebratory fashion, but still acknowledging both its limits and its possibilities, Bell and Binnie expressed their ambivalent position towards its politics, recognizing its power for ‘mobilizing (maybe even colonizing) the notion of citizenship with an agenda of sexual politics’, while also expressing their preoccupation with the limitations and the costs of such politics, which, according to the authors, necessarily involve a degree of compromise (Bell and Binnie 2000: 2). Along the same lines, Darren Langdridge (2006, 2013) among others also points to the two dimensions of sexual citizenship as a restrictive institution that constrains the kind of sexual claims that can be made in its name while also pointing out that sexual citizenship enables people to fulfil their quest for acceptance and opens paths for legitimating other ways of living gender and sexuality, leading to potential social change.

These arguments arise against the backdrop of one of the most prominent debates that have accompanied the emergence and development of sexual citizenship under the framework of the politics of recognition: the tension between the assimilation of sexual dissidents and social transformation. Do the claims to the right to same-sex marriage, which are espoused by current mainstream sexual politics, imply the domestication of sexual dissidence? Are these politics of inclusion a path to equality or do they assimilate former sexual others to heteronormative understandings of relational, sexual, and affective life? Do they point to a transformation of

social institutions or are they extending the rules of marriage as the most legitimate way for lovers to be associated? The controversy over same-sex marriage is in fact more complex, as it also involves questions regarding the reinforcement of the heterosexualized split between the public and the private domains, the racialized dimension of marriage, the relationship between marriage and private property, and questions regarding class as well as who has access to marriage anyway. But leaving aside these other dimensions, what remains true and is at the core of current mainstream debates is that these positions represent two opposite poles between radical change and transformation on the one hand, and total complicity with current sexual norms on the other. They are sustained in a strict dichotomy between necessary social determination and radical 'agentic' social change.

It is not easy to understand the pervasiveness of this vexed debate when staged in these terms. Michel Foucault dismantled this dichotomy when he developed the idea of regulative and productive power in his *History of sexuality* (1990). And yet, the idea that we could overcome domination by virtue of a sovereign subjectivity capable of knowing and deciding which norms to follow seems to continue to be the rule.

Against this fantasy of sovereign mastery, Foucault argued that there is neither any such thing as absolute freedom, nor any imaginary place in which to exercise it; there is no agency outside power. Furthermore, Foucault would argue that no matter what the imagined radical change is about, it will not bring us any closer to that imagined natural and absolute state of freedom. Rather, it will simply lead us to a new form of regulation – that is, to a new set of norms. Conversely, Foucault also contends that there is no power able to control its effects to the point of determining agency completely (Foucault 1995).¹² On the one hand, what appears to be merely social reproduction or assimilation (gays getting married), in fact transforms that which has apparently been merely reproduced (the institution of marriage). On the other hand, that which appears to be radically opposed to current norms (BDSM subcultures)¹³ is actually in dialogue with them (even regulated by them) and is more dependent on them than might be expected at first sight (see Langdridge 2006, Woltersdorff 2011).

Furthermore, such sovereign mastery over the norms that regulate us would be undone by what, following Judith Butler, can be understood as the iterability of the political meaning of such norms (Butler 1993). We cannot adjudicate a fixed political meaning to a practice without referring it to a broader constellation that includes its history and the impact of actual 'glocal' contexts. What might appear to be assimilation in one spatial-temporal location could have a different transformative value in another. In this sense, the fact that the politics of sexual citizenship are framed by globalization further complicates the picture. For instance, the political meaning of same-sex marriage in the US might not have the same resonances as it has in France, where it was at the centre of public attention after a bill for same-sex marriage was put under discussion in the first months of 2013, provoking mass homophobic demonstrations and violent reactions on the part of far-right movements.¹⁴ Further, it might not even have the same political value for different groups within the same political community, so that for instance, for some activists such as the French group Les Indigènes de la République, the gay marriage agenda not only implies a trend towards normalization but also, and more significantly, the imposition of a white way of behaving as gay onto racialized queer French communities.¹⁵

In the US, the return of gay marriage to the news opened the debate about the link between gay marriage and demands for equality (be it the treatment of LGBT people as equals, namely extending the (not so) universal right to marriage to LG people, or the more vexed controversy among queers as to whether gay marriage is only of interest to a normative white gay elite). In this context, the BBC World Service addressed the issue in its *Boston Calling* Programme of 31 March 2013. The approach the programme chose for bringing US gay marriage news into the

global arena was: what do US migrants think about same-sex marriage? When the presenter of the programme asked 'migrants who come from places that enjoy far less freedom than us' about their opinions, the migrants seemed to consider same-sex marriage as representing the American brand of freedom. While for LGB advocates of gay marriage in the US, such as Lambda, this was an issue primarily related to equality, for the migrants, it reflected a search for freedom, full stop.

The second controversial aspect I would like to refer to bears on the problematization of sexual identities. The debate about the limits of the politics of recognition with regard to sexual identifications has been extensive. In part, the queer movement emerged in the US as a reaction to this politics, not only questioning the shift from a politics of social transformation to a politics of inclusion, but also disputing its identitarian logic.¹⁶ And again, the question of the exclusionary logics of identity, together with its regulatory dimension, has assumed a different and far more complicated character when assessed across cultural contexts. In this regard, it has been widely argued that one of the main problems of the politics of sexual recognition is that it had been framed by the globalization of sexual identities according to the Euro-North Atlantic models (Binnie 2004, Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz 2005, Lugones 2007, Massad 2007, Thomas 2007, Haritaworn 2012). As Houria Bouteldja states, the problem arises when white/Western LGBT rights movements mobilize an identity politics that is based on the presumption that 'the homosexual political identity' is universal. From this standpoint:

The goal is therefore to convince non-Whites that they *must* identify as homosexual. This is the choice offered by hegemonic homosexual activism: pride or shame, coming out of the closet ... In this discourse, any resistance to LGBT identities is seen as an effort to hide or closet, if not as latent or explicit homophobia. How can this assimilation of sexualities – hetero or homo, hidden or visible – be justified?

(Bouteldja 2013, n.p.)

If the path to emancipation within this framework requires everyone to comply with hegemonic LGBT transnational identities, this politics will only lead to assimilationist logics that affect and marginalize racialized subjects.¹⁷ And it affects queers who, independently of being ethnically marked or not, cannot identify with such positions either.

In my view, the multiculturalist responses to humanist universalization of sexual identities remain limited because, while they do multiply the spectrum of available possibilities for sexual identifications according to cultural differences, they do not necessarily challenge the normative field within which such identifications become intelligible, nor would they question the link between sexuality and identity (Sabsay 2013). Concerning the implications that this logic has for conceiving political agency, my contention is that within the politics of recognition, the knowability of our identities – which are assumed to be identifiable – as well as the horizon of sexual claims invested in rights, points to a self-centred subject capable of self-awareness and control built upon the paradigm of transparency (Ferreira Da Silva 2007). I further develop this argument in the next section, while addressing the relationship between rights claims, the recognition of identities at the intersection of sexuality with culture, and the universalization of the sovereign subject.

The culturalization of citizenship

The sexualization of the frontiers of so called Western modernity has emerged in the context of a relatively recent process that has been characterized as the 'culturalization of citizenship', or more broadly, the 'culturalization of politics'. It has been argued that this culturalization of citizenship and politics has led to the depoliticization of differences, by converting political

differences into cultural differences. Conversely, it has also led to the politicization of cultures, that is, the transfiguration of culture into a political battlefield, and the conversion of culture into an object of political battle and governmental power. In this context, sexuality, or rather the political approach to sexuality in different societies, has been culturalized with a new sign as well (Butler 2008, Bracke and Fadil 2012). This process relies on the assumption that the way in which each society regulates the sexual lives of its subjects is a key trait of its culture, indicating the extent to which each culture 'has evolved' in a progressive line towards (liberal) democratic ideals. These are the terms in which the Western civilizational impulse is currently mobilized, enabling the rearticulation of an orientalist scheme that delineates the contours of civilization and its phantasmic other: on the one hand, a sexually progressive, democratic, and tolerant society, and on the other, cultures that are sexually conservative, authoritarian, and intolerant.

This is the context in which the debates about the instrumentalization of sexual politics for the promotion of Islamophobia and neocolonial projects have been taking place. And that is why, the Islamophobic reaction provoked by Amina's case, which included a racist campaign against Islam on the part of Femen activists rather than focusing on the transnational multiple and multilayered configurations of sexism and heterosexism, so easily assumed that this was a cultural problem. Within this framework, an already demonized 'culture' was converted into the emblem of sexism and heterosexism, while sexism and heterosexism were converted into that culture's 'defining signifiers'. In Spanish-speaking contexts, and in the Spanish media in particular (which is especially drawn to picking up on sensationalist West North-African stories), it was even asserted that Amina had been condemned to death by stoning by a Tunisian fatwa, but soon after (or even while it was happening) this outburst of racist judgments was spread all over the Internet, it turned out that it was false, because Amina had been neither legally denounced nor condemned. The Network of Muslim Women in Spain had explained that first of all, there is no death penalty in Tunisia, nor did any fatwa (a legally binding pronouncement) take place in this case; just the misogynistic and sexist declarations of a Tunisian ulema, who, by the way, publicly denied he had gone so far as to say that Amina had to die.¹⁸ In this case, again, some misogynistic declarations became metonymic of the whole Islamic culture understood as a clear-cut monolithic entity.

Questions of cultural imperialism with regard to sexual matters, the intersection between sexual politics and economic justice, race, neocolonial impulses, and secularism, have been centre stage since 9/11, drawing from the context and following the logics of the culturalization of citizenship, arriving at what we could interpret as the culturalization of sexual politics. The question then arises: what are the implications of the sexualization of cultural difference, by means of which the culturalization of sexuality also occurs? How does this entanglement refigure the processes described above about sexual citizenship more generally?

Discussing the context of the culturalization of politics, Wendy Brown (2006) argues that whenever culture – or in this case, sexuality reconceived as sexual culture – is viewed as a right, something more universal, from beyond culture and prior to culture, has already been accepted, and that is the liberal subject form. As Brown states, the language of cultural rights 'implies an ability to isolate ... the culture and the individual', and this ability, she concludes, 'rests on an autonomous, pre-cultural, Kantian subject to whom such judgment and assertion is available' (Brown 2006: 168–9). Brown argues that the liberal individual subject is construed as free from culture and, within this framework, culture always appears in the plural and as specific, while the liberal individual subject is conceived as universal, because it is positioned as an ontological foundation of freedom and rationality. Following her argument, one might suggest that in fact, the human (of sexual human rights, for instance) is equated to this liberal subject, and by this displacement the model of Western rationality is universalized. While sexual cultures can never

be universal, the sexual liberal subject is assumed as a universal ontological *a priori*. The logic by which this occurs is through the configuration of this subject as an ontological fact, prior to any particular culture to which s/he might belong, and also, prior to any gender and sexual culture to which s/he might ascribe.

That is why the alternative to the reduction of the sexual to a monolithic culture – which is always a hegemonic version of it and cannot give an account of its own internal heterogeneity and counter-voices – cannot be to resort to the moral autonomy of an individualized universal subject. From this liberal perspective, the attitudes we might have towards our own sexual way of being and others', becomes a matter of an autonomous relation to values, understood as the product of our rational capacity for deliberation and individual choice. And as we have seen with Brown, this already implies having been co-opted by the cultural imperialism of the liberal subject form. The problem here is not that just of opposing a cultural (or socially determined) version of sexual cultures with an individualist one. Such a liberal version of sexuality understands sexuality as an entitlement (a right) that any and all individuals have, and conceives of sexuality as peripheral to the constitution of the individual and exterior to the subject's core, which is understood as primarily rational and in possession of a free will. In a similar manner, the sort of entanglement between cultural difference and sexuality that leads to multiple cultural diverse sexual identities might be misleading if such a framework envisions both sexuality and culture in this way, for the understanding of sexuality and culture (and their combination) as the entitlements of an abstract sovereign subject is already indebted to a liberal framework that conceives such a subject as an ontological foundation of politics.

Following Brenna Bhandar (2011), one could argue that this ontological subject form, which is entitled to culture or sexuality as their objectified rights, is also indebted to ownership conceived as a paradigm. According to Bhandar, this is 'a subject for whom certain qualities or properties are prefigured as the bounds of intelligibility that are co-emergent with relations of ownership' in such a way that ownership becomes the form in which the 'propertied subject' constitutes itself ontologically as prior to what he or she might possess (2011: 228). Furthermore, revising the rationale of coloniality, Bhandar also shows how this subject is a racialized one.

Indeed, according to Brown, the conversion of culture into a right brought with it the transformation of culture into an object – the objectification of culture – a property that a subject *has*. So, her argument follows, cultural difference can be tolerated only when the subject of culture has accepted becoming a liberal subject who *has* a culture instead of coming to exist in it, that is, a subject who chooses his or her attachment to culture and the way in which s/he might exercise their belonging to it.¹⁹ Therefore, the defence against Islamophobia and liberal classic discourses of fundamental rights beyond cultural difference that does not question the objectification of sexuality and culture as something that a subject *has* would only reinforce the hegemony of the liberal assumptions which are embedded in different positions (classical liberal, pluralist, and multiculturalist), and which form the basis that configures the sovereign subject as an ontological foundation for any politics, including sexual politics.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted some of the predicaments of sexual citizenship when it is mobilized on a global scale, showing that much of the difficulty with which the paradigm of sexual citizenship is confronted is indebted to the particular entanglement between subjectivity, sexuality, and politics that sexual citizenship enables.

Considering the difficulties faced by sexual citizenship in the light of the globalization of sexuality that forms its context, we have seen that sexual citizenship is already a transnational

construct. In this regard, I contended that although the field of sexual citizenship could not be easily reduced to the univocal and straightforward expansion (and imposition) of mainstream sexual rights agendas onto the rest of the world, it does follow the hegemony of Euro-North Atlantic models. Furthermore, I have argued that it does so in a way that reinforces Western modern political rationality, in that sexuality is converted into a right to which any individual is entitled pointing to a sovereign subject that coincides with the abstract citizen of liberal democracies.

Sexual citizenship on a global scale cannot be considered without linking it to current iterations of cultural imperialism, which, in turn, have sexualized cultural frontiers. In this context, my argument has been that the global expansion of Westernized versions of sexual politics, together with the naturalization of liberal understandings of political subjectivity and agency, should be considered in the context of the politics of recognition and the culturalization of citizenship.

With regard to the politics of recognition, I have suggested that both the tension between claims to inclusion and social transformation, and the tension between cultural difference and assimilation, rely on the figure of a sovereign subject. In the former case, the ideal of sovereignty appears in the form of an agency capable of self-consciousness, autonomy of thought, and the idea that freedom derives from knowledge and reason: knowledge about the conditions to which we are subjected, and reason to decide for ourselves how to relate to those conditions and potentially change them. In the latter case, it is the demand to be recognized according to a knowable identity that exposes an 'aspiration to sovereignty', as understood by Patchen Markell (2003). As the author would put it, within the politics of recognition, political action is based on the mastery and the transparency of who we are, even when the identities at stake are considered fragmented, multiple, and unstable. In effect, the expectation is that recognition will occur at least provisionally, insofar as ongoing changes around us will constantly give rise to new identifications of what is other to us – that is, what we are not – as well as what we are, in a process of continual fixation. Such provisional fixations will make those shifting identities identifiable, privileging the subject's sovereignty over the past and the present against its openness to an unknown relational future (Markell 2003).

In relation to the understanding of sexuality as a cultural trait, that is, as a specific sexual culture within the logics of the culturalization of citizenship, we have seen that through the culturalization of sexuality sexual citizenship remains a liberal construct. If sexual citizenship works with a culturalized notion of sexuality that separates the subject from culture and sexuality, it is doomed to sustain rather than question the defining faculties of the sovereign subject (rational consciousness and free will). It is in this context that, by virtue of the logics of sexual citizenship, subjects are conceived as *having* a sexuality, which remains objectified as a set of rights. To paraphrase Brown's argument, then, subjects can enter the multicultural game of sexuality only on the condition that they abandon their attachment to culture and become liberal subjects who are prior to, and morally autonomous from, the sexuality (or the sexual culture) that they allegedly *have*.

With Brown, I have argued here that the universalization of individualized free will, rationality, and moral autonomy as *the conditions of possibility* of sexual politics within the field of sexual citizenship restrict our ideas of political subjectivity to a specific cultural tradition, namely that of liberalism. This is the problem that certain human rights frameworks and international LGBT organizations are facing, when adhering uncritically to these universalist versions of the subject of politics. But it is also the problem of pluralist and multiculturalist approaches as well, as the multiplication of culturally diverse forms of being sexual is already over-determined by the liberal subject form.

How can one think of a notion of sexual citizenship able to challenge this paradigm? Should one rather abandon the framework of sexual citizenship in search for post-sovereign forms of political subjectivity? Maybe, when considering a sexual politics in opposition to the objectification of culture and sexuality, it might be useful to think of sexuality along the lines of Judith Butler's work, where she argues against the ontology of the sovereign subject (Butler 2005, Butler and Athanasiou 2013). If sexuality could be also understood as the *locus* of our own social dependency, a site that exposes us to our radically relational ontological condition, an experience by which we are reminded of our fate as dispossessed beings, maybe such an understanding would help us to develop notions of sexual freedom and justice that challenge the liberal constructions of the individual and of the Euro-North Atlantic modern tradition that gave rise to it.

Notes

- 1 Available online at www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/03/22/topless-tunisian-feminist-amina-stoning-death_n_2930611.html (accessed 2 April 2013).
- 2 Ukraine's radical feminist movement Femen was established in 2008 and devoted mainly to protests on women's and gay and lesbian issues. Later the group made headlines for pro-democracy and anti-corruption protests in Russia, Ukraine, and London.
- 3 Available online at <http://en.rian.ru/world/20121221/178316284.html> (accessed 2 April 2013).
- 4 Available online at www.nydailynews.com/news/world/amina-tyler-supporters-set-topless-jihad-day-april-4-article-1.1301311 (accessed 2 April 2013).
- 5 Available online at www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/15/argentine-gay-pope-francis-war-of-god-against-same-sex-marriage_n_2885596.html (accessed 2 April 2013).
- 6 Available online at www.infonews.com/2013/03/25/sociedad-67107-agreden-a-joven-gay-con-papa-argentino-no-hay-putos-argentinos.php (accessed 2 April 2013).
- 7 See www.proyecto-transgenero.org/videos.php (accessed 8 April 2013).
- 8 See ILGA Report of February 2012, *Europe's Contribution to the Green Paper*, available online at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-is-new/public-consultation/2012/pdf/0023/famreun/internationalorganisationssocialpartnersngos/international_lesbian_gay_bisexual_trans_and_intersex_association.pdf (accessed 14 April 2013).
- 9 Lisa Duggan describes homonormativity as a 'politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (Duggan 2002: 179).
- 10 In fact, as has been extensively argued, citizenship has always been gendered and sexualized. In this regard the scholarship concerned with sexual citizenship would also include the critical analysis of citizenship as a heteronormative construct (see Richardson 2000, 2004, Phelan 2001), that is, a construct built upon the presumption that heterosexuality is *the* norm, as within conventional notions of citizenship, heterosexuality is assumed to be the 'normal' standard against which all other sexualities are measured. Even when citizenship is not marked as specifically sexual, citizenship, as an institution, is already sexual as it participates in the multiple processes through which heterosexuality is naturalized.
- 11 Interestingly enough, while the establishment of the Argentine Catholic Church – the new Pope included – has been publicly despised in Argentina for its complicity with State terrorism and the repressive politics during the last dictatorship, gay activists' first reaction to the reported incident was to ask the government to heighten the repressive measures for those convicted for discriminatory acts, legitimising in this way the very same repressive police apparatus that took part in the disappearing of people, and has been historically involved in the persecution of sexual dissidents, not to mention its homo/lesbo/transphobic ethos. The tensions among different governmental bodies – for instance, between the legislative and the repressive apparatuses – as well as within progressive forces, and in relation to religious institutions, point to a constellation whose complexity would simply remain obscured by the portrayal of Argentina as being a more or less sexually modernized space according to Euro-North Atlantic standards.
- 12 Judith Butler's performative reading of Foucault also points in this direction: we are habilitated by power *qua* subjects and asked to comply with social norms, but these norms can be transformed (or even subverted) through unexpected forms of repetition, the introduction of new (and contradictory

norms), or the displacement of norms altogether. In Butler's theoretical scheme, the displaced repetition of a norm does not merely reproduce the norm, but transforms it. At the same time, Butler also suggests that any social change comes from the negotiation with existing norms, and – along the lines of Foucault – cannot come from a radical exteriority that has no relation to existing norms, for such an outside does not exist as such. As Butler would suggest, following a Derridean path, this outside would be a power effect by which discursive practices create their own exterior (see Butler 1993, 1997).

- 13 BDSM is an abbreviated acronym that stands for the three following dyads: B/D for Bondage and Discipline; D/S for Dominance and Submission; and S/M for Sadism and Masochism.
- 14 This does not mean, however, that each particular context can be assessed in isolation. It is clear, for instance, that the international symbolic value that the legalization of same-sex marriage in the US, the UK, and France would have in these homonationalist times also affects the dynamic of this process at a domestic level.
- 15 Available online at www.decolonialtranslation.com/english/gay-universalism-homoracialism-and-marriage-for-all.html (accessed 18 April 2013).
- 16 Since the early 1990s a critical mass of scholarship from the Euro-North Atlantic has questioned the politics of recognition proper to sexual citizenship considering a wide array of domains and implications, such as the limits of identity politics that rely on representational politics of inclusion (Warner 1993), the liberal pluralist form in which sexual politics enter into dialogue with governmental institutions (Cooper 1994), the reduction of public concerns to the legal realm (Berlant 1997), the appeal to sameness and normalization (Warner 2000, Richardson 2004), and the privatization of the sexual sphere along with the advancement of neoliberal logics (Duggan 2003, Richardson 2005). Since then, the field has expanded enormously posing new questions and challenges in the light of changing political moments and geopolitical contexts, today shaped by the sexualization of democratic rhetoric, homonationalist logics (Puar 2007), pinkwashing strategies and racist trends within sexual progressivism (see Douglas, Jivraj and Lamble 2011, Haritaworn 2012).
- 17 By LGBT hegemonic transnational identities, I refer to the conjuncture of Euro-North Atlantic models of gender and sexual identification that cut across national borders and are encouraged by international organizations.
- 18 Available online at <http://perderelnorte.com/al-islam/pechos-y-fatuas-comunicado-de-red-musulmanas/> (accessed 2 April 2013).
- 19 Saba Mahmood (2012) makes a similar point in relation to the notion of religious freedom within minority politics, which relies on a liberal conception of the subject of religion – that is, the configuration of subjectivity as split from, and prior to, religion.

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