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BACK TO A NOSTALGIC FUTURE – THE QUEEROSLAV UTOPIA

Abstract

LGBTIQ individuals in (former) Yugoslavia have a history of being denied a space – first because of the invisibility cloak forced upon them during the socialist regime, and then because of hegemonic nationalistic ideologies enforcing the traditional hierarchic gender binary and preventing or limiting, with propaganda as well as sheer violence, the safe, natural expression of sexual diversity. Against this backdrop, a network of queer festivals in former Yugoslav countries emerged as a creative solution for local sexually diverse communities to create a space of their own, a space that some activists have called "Queeroslavija". The essay explores the translation of queer theory and activism into the former Yugoslav context and engages with this neologism as an example of queer use of time and space, coming to define Queeroslavija as a space that is transnational, nostalgic, and utopian – ultimately, a way of finding citizenship in a country that no longer, and does not yet, exists.

Keywords: *queer festival, transnational, nostalgia, utopia, former Yugoslavia*

There is never one geography of authority
and there is never one geography of resistance.
Further, the map of resistance is not simply the underside
of the map of domination – if only because each is a lie to the other,
and each gives the lie to the other.

(Pile, 1997: 23)

Introduction

LGBTIQ individuals in (former) Yugoslavia have a history of being denied a space – first because of the invisibility cloak forced upon them (socially and legally) during the socialist regime, and then because of hegemonic nationalistic ideologies enforcing the traditional hierarchic gender binary and preventing or limiting, with propaganda as well as sheer violence, the safe, natural expression of sexual diversity. Against this backdrop, this study looks at the network of queer festivals in former Yugoslav countries as a creative solution for local sexually diverse communities to create a space of their own, a space that some activists have called "Queeroslavija".

The first section of the paper analyses the peculiar condition of displacement and double exclusion experienced by gender and sexual minorities in post-socialist former

Yugoslavia, caught between opposing trends of globalisation and re-traditionalisation that fail to provide inclusive spaces of social belonging. The second one, in the light of theoretical reflection as well as empirical on-field research and interviews, explores the issues surrounding the translation of queer theory and activism into the former Yugoslav context, focusing on the experience of the Queer Beograd festivals as an example of appropriation of the term “queer” in order to claim an inclusive, pluralistic space for gender and sexual minorities, as well as for groups and individual that are categorised and repressed as “Other” on the socio-political level.

The final part of the essay engages with the idea of Queeroslavija as an example of queer use of time and space, coming to define this neologised space as one that is transnational (as it is built on the cooperation between groups from former Yugoslav countries, regardless of “nation”), nostalgic (as it maintains certain Yugo-nostalgic elements in the longing for a common space without national boundaries and free from nationalistic ideologies, like Yugoslavia was, or was supposed to be), and utopian (as, at the same time, it claims and dreams of a space providing inclusiveness, visibility, and safety, like Yugoslavia never did) – ultimately, a way of finding citizenship in a country that no longer, and does not yet, exists.

Between re-traditionalisation and globalisation: gender and sexuality in (former) Yugoslavia

The relationship between gender, sexuality, and citizenship has been widely explored in the process of debating theorisations of citizenship. Yuval-Davis and Werbner, for instance, have influentially engaged with the relationship between citizenship and difference in an age of ethnicisation and globalisation, showing how freedom, autonomy, and the right to difference – pillars of democratic citizenship – can be subverted by traditionalist discourses of nationhood, family, and religion (2005: 1), claiming for comparative readings of citizenship that take account of gender, class, ethnicity, and location. The insights into the dialogical and aspirational nature of citizenship discourses (Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 2005: 3) will prove extremely helpful for the understanding of post-Yugoslav longings for queer transnational citizenships. Accordingly, this essay is based on an understanding of citizenship that considers people's plural and conflicting memberships in sub-, cross-, and supra-national collectivities (sexual minorities, Balkan

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regional networks, queer international movements and, in perspective, the EU) as well as in the former Yugoslav states.

In addition to overlooking the gendered nature of citizens' rights and duties, traditional understandings of citizenship – as well as feminist critiques – have often relied on hetero-normative assumptions (see for example Johnson, 2002). Therefore, a further development in theorisations of citizenship has focused on the positioning of sexual minorities in relation to political institutions as well as the the notion of sexual rights to be claimed on grounds of practice, identity, or relationship (Richardson, 2000: 107). Like citizenship itself, sexual citizenship is a widely debated concept: Richardson, for example, has extensively discussed the potential limits of pursuing equal rights in an assimilationist effort that builds on and fosters normative notions of "good" homosexuality (2004: 394). On the other hand, at least at the legislation level, a sexual rights approach in a human rights framework has been effective in addressing gender and sexual orientation discrimination within the European context and presents potential for comprehensively queer negotiation of rights to diversity (see for example Beger, 2000), especially in re-traditionalised, nationalist contexts.

For the purposes of this study, it is especially important to examine the relationship between gender, sexuality, and nationalism – a crucial one for the understanding of the former Yugoslav context. In the formulation by philosopher Rada Iveković (1996), nationalistic ideologies stand on two core assumptions: the existence of ontological binary categorisations and a natural, unquestionable hierarchic relationship between them. In this framework, the gender binary serves as an ideological foundation that allows for the establishment of other hierarchies based on, for example, ethnicity and class. Indeed, the conventional opposition of domination/submission and activity/passivity attributed to the male/female binary are metaphorically translated to every relationship between a normative Self and a marginalised, debased, or annihilated Other. As Iveković highlights, there are analogies in the treatment of women and ethnic minorities in Balkan patriarchal regimes, excluding non-dominant subjectivities from full citizenship and full participation in the public sphere (e.g., by ways of economic discrimination and limitation of rights of movement and expression). Furthermore, the strongly gendered violence of ethnic wars is a classic reminder of how sexual imageries of potency and invasion shape political and military violence and propaganda. In the former Yugoslav context, the rise of nationalist trends after the demise of Yugoslavia

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and the ethnically framed wars of the nineties have violently brought normative gender enforcement to the surface of public discourse.

During the last two decades, the intensification of nationalist trends following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, together with economic crisis and social uncertainty, has triggered a re-traditionalisation process in culture and society (see for example Naumović, 1999 and Bringa, 2004). Contrary to the globalisation process, post-socialist regimes of the early nineties, especially in Serbia, were leading their countries into isolation, rejecting transition, and causing what has been defined by gender and economics scholar Đurić-Kuzmanović (2005: 29) as “state-directed non-development” . Against this backdrop, the adoption of traditional conservative values – an instrument for regaining security in a precarious social and economic environment – has affected with particular intensity the sphere of family and gender relations, with re-patriarchalisation of social structures and revival of nationalist ideologies acting coherently as factors of rigid codification of gender roles (see Iveković, 1996 and 2002).

In a nationalist context, gender and sexual minorities are excluded from the canons of national identity: as Ramet (ed 1999) reminds us, if men are cast as macho warriors and women as means to achieve the nation's continuity and homogeneity, homosexuals are left as traitors to the nation. Indeed, especially during the nineties, homosexuality was labelled as a foreign import: with the beginning of LGBT activism, often supported by Western European organisations, nationalists were able to use discomfort with non-standard sexuality to amplify hostility to national and ethnic others, according to the other-phobic *topos* of a “pure” national character corrupted by the contact with the West, a constant within the national political discourse (Čolović, 2002):

> To show how the new Serbian male identity is pure, the Regime shows the other side of Serbian society and uses it for comparison. On the other side are people with different national identities than Serbian, non-orthodox, people from subcultures, and persons with different sexual orientation than heterosexual. […] To be gay, during the nineties, meant to be a traitor, social garbage, responsible for all evil in the country. Homosexual identity was an instrument for political disqualification (Stojanović, 2007: 9).

Empirically, the relationship between gender, sexuality, and nationalism becomes apparent if looking at some episodes occurred in the former Yugoslav area during and after the wars, in which Western enemies were branded as homosexuals: in turn, and by association, homosexuals allegedly became Western agents. A TV news anchor, for example, talked about “the gay government of Tony Blair” and called Blair’s wife and Hillary Clinton “lesbians” (Friess, 1999: 20). Graffiti sprayed on the American centre in

Belgrade read “Clinton faggot” and “Madelein Albright, we don’t practice sodomy” (Booth, 2000: 123). During the early nineties, TV stations denounced homosexuality as an alien perversion, accusing gays of subverting national defence and caricaturing homosexuality as a foreign disease. When one of the founders of Arkadija (the first gay and lesbian organisation in Serbia) was killed, investigators referred to the organisation's “seditious activities” and the conduction of “a special war against our country”. This manipulation of homophobic sentiments for propaganda purposes led to a sharp rise in homophobic violence and police harassment in the following years, explaining the violent reactions against LGBT activism exemplified by the attacks to public LGBT events. For example, at Belgrade Pride 2001, now commonly referred as “massacre parade”, participants and NGO representatives were attacked and beaten by nationalist and religious groups. Their slogans, like “We do not want gays in Serbia” or “Serbia for the Serbs and not for the gays”, explicitly showed the connection between nationalism and gender traditionalism, as emerges by an activist’s oral account:

> Fascists and nationalists came to beat people. They all looked like men, like what traditional men look like. They were all referring to their national identity, and they were all referring to God. These are the three things that mostly stand together. They were shouting “Go to Croatia!” and “ustaše!” When I went to gay pride in Croatia, nationalists were shouting: “Go to Serbia!” and “četnik”, which is the same thing but there. We can see the same pattern, this was happening several years after the war (2005, Party & Politics round-table, Belgrade: Queer Beograd Collective).

Quite obviously, the analysis of the current struggles faced by sexual minorities need not lead to idealising a past of invisibility: Yugoslavia was no exception to the repression and domestication of sexuality common to Communist systems. A rhetorical emphasis on masculinity stigmatised male homosexuality as an expression of weakness, while a general erasure of female sexuality and pleasure virtually cancelled female homosexuality from the picture. Fittingly, the penal code (June 30th 1959) deemed male homosexuality illegal in the whole Yugoslavia, but made no reference to female homosexuality (Hosi-Wien Auslandsgruppe, 1984). Thus, according to reports on lesbians in Yugoslavia, the discrimination faced by lesbian women was directed to their non-married status rather than their sexuality (IGLHRC, 1995).

During the first half of the seventies, the power over penal legislation was devolved from the Federal Republic to the states and provinces. In the late seventies, decriminalisation bills were passed in Slovenia, Croatia, Vojvodina, and Montenegro, whereas a second wave of decriminalisation involved Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Kosovo, and Macedonia in the mid and late nineties. In those countries where decriminalisation of homosexuality was a more recent event connected to post-communist transition, the legislative change was most often prompted by international pressure and conceived by local political elites as an 'admission ticket' to international organisations and donor conferences. Being neither the outcome of grass-roots action nor the result of broad consensus on human rights, the exclusion of homosexuality from the penal code did not end everyday discrimination and harassment. In fact, although decriminalisation provided more space for visibility and free expression, enhanced visibility did, in turn, stir stronger reactions by the more conservative strata of society, as exemplified by the attacks to pride parades and queer festivals in Belgrade and Sarajevo. The same can be applied to the recent anti-discrimination laws being approved or discussed in former Yugoslav countries (see for example Mercer, 2004: 24-26 on the introduction of the anti-discrimination law in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Against a backdrop of safety issues and lack of support or legitimisation by domestic political parties or unions, the relationship with international actors becomes crucial for the LGBT movements' survival. In fact, the spreading of LGBT movements in the Balkans took place in the context of a global development of civil society after 1989 (Štulhofer & Sandfort, 2005: 14) and benefited from a number of transnational factors, including international funding and globalised attention to sexual orientation issues in human rights activism (Greif, 2004: 234). Furthermore, in the last few years, external political pressures have been intensifying with the EU accession process, leading to increased accountability of local government before the international community. On the other hand, as globalisation makes transnational politics possible, but brings along the risk of hegemonic developments, international cooperation brought new opportunities as well as conflicts of their own.

The introduction of Western discourses of visibility, coming out, and collective identification has been regarded as a potentially colonialist move, universalising sexual identity categories that are historically and geographically specific as well as socially constructed – in other words, "a movement of containment" (Woodcock, 2004: 11). Concerns for neo-colonialist attitudes have thus invested the realm of international cooperation between Western and South-Eastern European LGBT organisations, often based on the same conditionality principles framing the European enlargement process: i.e., the providing of fund and/or assistance is conditioned to the adoption of a certain set of standard, models, or practices, with local actors envisaged by international ones

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as "implementers" rather than "partners", and thus expected to comply with guidelines or policy frameworks designed for them (see for example Kerkez, 2004: 270). Another widely expressed concern refers to lack of understanding by international activists and organisations of the differences between their own context and working methods and local ones. For example, one activist points to the different relationships with local and national authorities and the related preference for a human-rights approach, as opposed to the civil rights approach privileged in Western countries (Mertus, 2007: 1063):

> another problem I encountered during trainings with international partners involved different methodologies. For example, our approach is strictly connected to human rights, which fits the context we operate in. Everything we do, in terms of public policy, lobbying, and advocacy, is based on a human rights approach. The human rights platform gives you more leverage in our relationship with the institutions because even the government has to be accountable in terms of human rights, while not necessarily so in terms of, let's say, sexual diversity or feminism – which are problematic concepts in a traditionalist context. [...] The core issue here is that assessing needs cannot be done externally – it cannot be done for us by someone who has never lived here or is not familiar with the context of our cultures (2009, interview with S.D., Sarajevo).

According to this picture, sexual minorities in former Yugoslavia seem to be caught in a peculiar situation of double exclusion, between a hostile domestic environment and a problematic relationship with global actors. The next section explores the translation of queer theory and activism into former Yugoslavia, focusing on the experience of the Queer Beograd collective and festivals as an example of appropriation and localisation of queer discourse.

From queer to *kvar*: an example of translating queer theory

As is well known, queer theory and queer activism find their original roots in the United States. The start of queer activism in the US is usually associated with ACT UP, a grass-roots, informally structured organisation founded in New York in 1987, originally with the goal of advocating for effective anti-AIDS politics through actions of civil disobedience and confrontational, non-assimilationist politics. Queer theory, on the other hand, stems from the deconstruction of sexual and gender categories that took place in the US academia during the nineties. Annemarie Jagose (1996) portraits the plural, fluid influences and sources – including homophile, gay liberation, and lesbian feminist movements – contributing to the process of re-claiming and appropriation that turned the term *queer* from homophobic slang into theoretical model. Queer theory, in its critique of normativity, emphasis on diversity, and overcoming of identity politics, is in itself a fluid

paradigm that has unveiled the performative character of gender (Butler, 1990) and sexuality (Kosofsky Sedwick, 1990), questioning the essentialness of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual binaries. Over the years, queer theory, which finds in "elasticity" (Jagose, 1996: 2) one of its own core features, has become a way of interpreting reality that looks at, de-constructs, and twists – "queers" – hegemonic discourses in culture and society. For example, Judith Halberstam (2005) has envisaged a conception of space and time that is "queer" inasmuch as it is independent of the normative influence of the heterosexual family lifestyle.

Queer theory's journey to the different regions of Europe has been met with contrasting reactions. For a start, the initial impact of the term is influenced by the lack of etymological resonance, since the original derogatory character of the word is obviously lost in languages other than English, and so is its meaning of re-appropriation (Mizielińska, 2006; Rosenberg, 2008: 5; Mertz, 2008: 20). On the other hand, the word "queer" has also been used as a way to deal with non-normative sexual practices without compromising with potentially imperialistic impositions of lesbian and gay categories (Essig, 1999: x).

Queer theory itself undergoes changes in the process of its translation. For example, Mizielińska (2006, 2009) has argued how de-sexualisation of queer theory and its use as an umbrella term risk to neutralise its subversive potential in the Polish context. Yet, change can also mean active appropriation and localisation of queer discourse. As observed by Rosenberg (2008) with regard to the Swedish experience, the initial reception of queer theory was limited to some small academic circles. In time, however, the concept was integrated in the local debate as an instrument for unveiling and questioning heteronormative discourses, and Rosenberg highlights how the Swedish understanding of "queer" eventually took the direction of an identity project rather than a critique of identity politics (2008: 15). On the other hand, Mertz's account of queer activism in Denmark stresses its critique of assimilationist politics emphasising "normality" (Mertz, 2008: 26). Translation of queer theory, then, is a move that can be interpreted as alternatively imperialistic or empowering. In this regard, a further question involves the reception of queer theory – that in its original version stemmed from a development in lesbian and gay perspectives – in contexts where LGBT movements have still limited impact and spread, as is sometimes the case with Central, Eastern, and South Eastern European countries. Mizielińska (2009) and Blagojević (2006), among others, have wondered about the necessary existence of a linear process in this

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development and the possible overlapping of identity and non-identity politics, as well as the relationship and possible alliance between local and global queer movements.

In former Yugoslavia, promises and limitations of queer theory and activism have been explored in several academic and activist events after 2000. In this account, we focus on the rise of queer festivals in in Serbia, where the first Queer Beograd Festival took place in May 2005. After the repression experienced at the 2001 Pride and the cancellation of the 2004 Pride due to the threat of violence, the idea of an indoor festival was envisioned as a feasible and safer alternative to public parades. On leaflets and announcements, the festival was indicated as taking place in "Belgrade, Queeroslavija" – here, in the imaginary country neologised for the occasion, the discussion of sexual orientation issues would be accompanied by reflection upon war, clericalism, nationalism, militarism, and machismo, as explained in the festival's manifesto.

> …Because the state and citizens are still ignorant toward problems of LGBT population and all the others who are different. Because human rights are abused on daily basis. That is why this year we had a new concept – we refused to spend time on worries about violence that might happen and hiring private security or police. We wanted to build exciting cooperation between people on an international and local level, to have fun, and to promote queer politics. In this context to be queer means to refuse social rules and to constantly re-question supposed norms of patriarchal tradition. To create space beyond the rigid boxes of LGBT or straight sexuality, allowing each other the 'privilege' of self definition. To present a radical politics that sees the interconnectedness of all forms of oppression.

Participants from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Macedonia, Croatia, Slovenia, Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt, Vienna, and London attended the festival, which lasted 5 days and featured a variety of events both inside the main venue (a formerly abandoned building) and in public spaces such as city parks and streets. On the last day of festival, activists organised a street party in the centre of Belgrade, with the theme 'no more violence in the streets'. Participants danced, played music, and distributed food and informative hand-outs about discrimination and tolerance, with mostly positive reactions by the public and no explicit violence or threats.

This festival can be considered the start of grass-roots queer activism in Belgrade: for the first time, according to the interviews and written narratives provided by the members of the collective[1], activists conceived and organised an event which was not

[1] All narratives used here were provided in the written form and maintained in the original version; thus, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary mistakes have not been corrected, in order to preserve the original text. Narratives are also available on the Collective's website, www.queerbeograd.org.

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an imitation of Western rituals, like the Pride parades. The new formula was chosen and developed as appropriate to the demands of the local context, e.g. safety, and fulfilling for the participants, who were able to become involved, active subjects rather than passive recipients of the initiative. This translates into a peculiar double dimension of closure and openness that emerges when reading the narratives: on the one hand, safety is an ever-present concern that gives the event a strongly closed, intimate character ("we always have to discuss security issues. It is always present what will if they..."); on the other hand, the very possibility of doing something that had seemed impossible – organising a queer festival in Belgrade – imbues these recollections with a sensation of opening to novelty, space, and freedom. A dream, an illusion, something unreal: those are the words that describe this experience, sometimes reminding an epiphany ("everything is so clear now..."):

> It says on the door: 'Attending this festival is allowed to registered participants only'. Well, yea, unfortunately, here you can't do it differently, and it turned out later that there was no need to. Coz it was closed, yet so open, unreal.
>
> ...And then, there was the opening...I think that it was in this moment that I started to dream. As if every pore in my body was open and Beograd suddenly seemed like a free spirited city.
>
> I'm not crazy, only confused, there's no conclusion, the process continues. And I want to continue working like this, with this crew of people, where queer means that we break the boxes that system squeezed us in. We break our own, one to another, and so on...

The last quote defined queer as "breaking the boxes" of pre-determined roles and identities, in a constant process of re-elaboration that involves the sexual as well as the socio-political sphere. This notion of queerness as a comprehensive, non-conformist approach to mainstream and difference was further explored, elaborated and canonised on the occasion of the second festival, where the focus shifted from the reclaiming of human rights and community formation to specifically discussing the concept of queerness and its potential in the local context. If the first festival sought to reclaim the right to existence for sexual minorities, the second one moved beyond to discuss notions of space for living such difference:

> After our first festival in Beograd we realised its not enough to try and stage a queer DIY festival in Serbia, because for a start no one knows what queer is! […] We don't want to create a new kind of closet, but we use the word queer for a reason, for us it means more than the right to freedom of sexual expression. As a radical queer collective, we differ from the mainstream LGBT organisations in that we work on all kinds of politics: But it came to us that we needed to explain why, why do we connect all kinds of politics together? Why do we refuse to stay in the 'identity politics' box? How does queer relate to the Balkans context – not just as some western import? […] We wanted to present a politicised vision of queer, to provide a platform to explore and educate on important issues such as racism,

> capitalism, gender, fascism and nationalism. To actively show how these things connect by putting speakers alongside each other whose lives didn't fit into neat categories and who were living beyond the boundaries (from the festival manifesto).

The second festival, "Queer Beograd Party & Politics" (2005), included seminars and discussions as well as performances, film screenings and party events. The round-table seminars were held by activists, artists, and students from former Yugoslavia, United Kingdom, United States, and Italy, and followed by discussions with the public. The evening performance was also a cooperation between performers from Belgrade and London. The core theme of this event was the discussion of the notion of "queer", its meaning, potential, and possible application in the local context. In the general awareness regarding this concept as an imported one, "queer" emerged as a useful tool to contrast discrimination on multiple levels, as a way to think "differently". Thus, the Queer Beograd festivals initiated a discussion of the concept of 'queer' among the local sexually diverse population, enabling the local subjects to experience and elaborate, autonomously and according to their own needs, a formerly foreign concept.

The debates brought up, again, the relationship between sexual and national identity. Given the relationship between nationalism and rigid gender roles, and the consequent conflict between mainstream national identities and "alternative" gender and sexual practices, the LGBTIQ population has shown to perceive identifying on the basis of national belonging as limiting (this, rather than generic Yugo-nostalgia, may be why the idea of Yugoslavia comes back up in this context). On the other hand, identification through alternative sexual practices may become empowering – embracing difference in sexual identity can be interpreted as going against "the order":

> I don't identify nationally, and that's why I always like to remind that not all people belong to any ethnicity or even nationality. My provenance would be the ex-Yugoslav lesbian cultural and political area (2005, Party & Politics round-table, Belgrade: Queer Beograd Collective).
>
> [Being gay] it is challenging the national ideal (2005, Party & Politics round-table, Belgrade: Queer Beograd Collective).
>
> Serbia is totally homophobic society and lesbian and gay identities have power of disrupting this. I'm talking about politics of identity (2005, Party & Politics round-table, Belgrade: Queer Beograd Collective).

In this perspective, identity politics seems more effective, whereas queer politics can be perceived as more vague or problematic:

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> Queer in Serbian society has tiny space and it still doesn't have any power. Queer sounds like it is more connected to culture, it is fashion. When you say that you are a lesbian, it has much more power than when you say you are queer (2005, Party & Politics round-table, Belgrade: Queer Beograd Collective).

> I predominantly don't identify or name myself queer, but rather lesbian. For me, using this term [queer] – which more or less has Anglo-American connotation – is very questionable. On the other hand, positive effect of the term, as a lesbian or a homo, is a negative part of it – opposing, fighting back, the rebellious element (2005, Party & Politics round-table, Belgrade: Queer Beograd Collective).

It so appears that standard and fixed LGBT identities, being a clear-cut definition of the self, pose a stronger defence when the subject is confronted with a hostile domestic environment, thus needing a strong sense of identity to face a strongly normative context. On the other hand, queer has a different potential:

> during the War, the strong resistance toward all kind of hatred, violence, crimes, militarism, nationalism, racism, and hate speech came from queer people. Queer people used the experience of being oppressed to show their solidarity to new victims, mostly discriminated for their national and religious identity (Stojanović, 2007: 10).

In this perspective, embracing fluid identities – queer politics – allows to go beyond the sexual realm and becomes a key to a wider form of social protest. The third edition of the festival (2006) brought a further step in the appropriation of the term 'queer'. Here, the concept arrived at its full elaboration, both on a linguistic and conceptual level: on the basis of the connection established between deconstruction of gender identities and comprehensive refusal of normative categorisation, including ethnic and national ones, queer found its own Serbian translation in the term *kvar*:

> In Serbian there is no word that means queer, no way to say what we mean about queer being more than LGBT equality. For us queer means radical, inclusive, connecting to all kinds of politics and being creative about how we live in this world. So our new festival is called 'Kvar', a technical term literally translating to mean 'a malfunction in a machine', because in this world of capitalism, nationalism, racism, militarism, sexism and homophobia, we want to celebrate ourselves as a malfunction in this machine. We dare to resist conformity and go against what is accepted to create something about living and justice, not false productivity, war and money. We are happy to present to you 'Kvar – the malfunction' a festival celebrating diversity and freedom of sexual expression, celebrating everyone who fights against the system (festival manifesto).

From the manifesto, we can see how a foreign concept ceased to be an alien one: the local subjects found a brilliant synthesis on the linguistic as well as semantic level, and thus fully 'localised' the original term. By claiming the phonetically close word "*kvar*" – "malfunction" – activists creatively managed to localise and adopt, in a way that suited their own needs, a concept that was formerly perceived as alien, imported, or

homogenising. Queer discourse has thus become fully localised – no longer an import product, but integral part of the local cultural debate.

Welcome to Queeroslavija: queer networks in former Yugoslavia

The Queer Beograd festivals make an interesting case for looking at the evolution of an activist, theoretical, and political discourse neatly developed over a continuum of events. After the three editions discussed in the previous section, that laid the basis for a local queer discourse, there have been so far two more events, respectively focusing on transgender and sex workers' issues (October 2007) and queer groups' potential for direct political action (September 2008) – the latter encountering, again, violent reactions from religious and political extremists in the indifference of the police. Of course, however, Belgrade is not the only former Yugoslav city to have a queer festival, nor was the first to. Queer festivals have been taking place for years now across former Yugoslav countries, with varying degrees of regularity, frequency, and safety.

There are, however, a number of core features shared by these events: a syncretic approach combining activism, art, and academic reflection; grass-roots cultural and political activity, mostly self-financed and entirely elaborated at the local level; an emphasis on regional cooperation within the former Yugoslav space; an international character visible in both programmes and audience participation, as well as elements of international cooperation as far as organisation is concerned. Some of these elements, such as the formula or the international dimension, are by no means exclusive to this specific region. On the other hand, their networking brings along a regional dimension that cannot but be looked at in the light of both their former common history and their separate paths after the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Slovenia, obviously benefiting from the relatively early decriminalisation and the European integration process, has been hosting several festivals since 1984 and pride parades since 2001, accompanied by seminar, cultural, and sports events. The Ljubljana Pride is partner with the Croatian Pride, that has been taking place since 2002. In addition, Queer Zagreb festivals have been taking place since 2003, joining international and local artists, academics, and activists. Themes explored have so far included post-socialist queer identity, conflicts of private and public spaces, and heteronormativity in education – always in a plurality of forms – visual arts, performance, film, and academic conferences or workshops. Queer Zagreb defines itself a non-

government, non-national, and non-profit organisation aiming at producing and presenting art, theory, and activism challenging hetero-normativity in a queer perspective defined as subversive, yet innocuous. Over time, it established relationships with analogous events, groups, and individuals in Japan, Australia, and Brazil. Another academic and artistic event was the 2005 Transgressing Gender conference, organised to initiate discussion over the interconnection of feminist, gender, and transgender issues.

In other countries, similar initiatives have had more troubled paths. In 2006 and 2007, the Macedonian Association for Free Sexual Orientation (MASSO) planned queer festivals ("Queer Square") in Skopje that would re-appropriate the city's public space with street parties and street performances. On both occasions, however, the events were halted by local authorities. In September 2008, Bosnia had its first – and one so far – Queer Sarajevo festival. Intense expectations had surrounded its opening, but also tensions and fears that were unfortunately confirmed. The night of the festival opening, about 150 religious extremists gathered – armed and undisturbed – in front of the location, preparing a witch hunt that left several activists and visitors severely injured and led the festival to a premature conclusion. Such events gathered the solidarity of queer organisations outside Bosnia, as illustrated by this statement from a member of the Queer Beograd Collective:

> After Queer Beograd festival, where I have experienced the same example of intimidation and violence, where people have been brutally beaten up, here I am in Sarajevo at the first proud Queer festival and I am reliving the same story, where it is being said that a person who is beating me up has the right to walk freely and kill me. And I am being pushed into a room and victimised just for being a lesbian, a queer feminist and a proud activist. Well, there will be no stopping, we will keep on living, rejoicing and fighting (mailing list).

In fact, it is common for such events to see the presence of activists and participants from the rest of the former Yugoslav space, the reasons for this involves different layers of issues and circumstances. For example, specific concerns over personal safety and comfort have led LGBTIQ people from Bosnia to more easily attend festivals and parades in Croatia or Serbia rather than in Sarajevo. As pointed out by an activist, "it is much easier to bring people to manifest in other countries than their own, since it creates less discomfort and fear of being outed. They will go to Zagreb, for example, but you won't get them to become activists here in Sarajevo" (2009, interview with S.D., Sarajevo). Thus, on the one hand, part of this "networking" may be also seen as a

solution for finding some space for expression without compromising too much one's safety and comfort.

On the other hand, there is a strong "affirmative" side of this trend. Communication and collaboration between activists and organisations from different countries provide the space for discussion, exchange, and solidarity that lacks within the domestic borders. Indeed, a regional network was initiated in September 2003, including both individual activists and organisations from all over the region of former Yugoslavia, on the ground of the shared history and language, who met 4 times a year to discuss about training in advocacy, lobbying for public policy, and activist methods. In the end, however, activities slowed down and stopped, because of lack of resources and energies. As one activist says: "now, it is as if there were a moment of silence, as happens when everybody is talking at the same time, and every now and then there is a pause. We are now in that pause, waiting for someone to speak up and re-initiate this regional discourse, which would be needed, since a networking at the regional level would provide for better leadership and coordination of initiatives" (2009, interview with S.D., Sarajevo).

This transnational – or regional – dimension thus seems to help addressing the isolation created by hostile domestic contexts. This is consistent with cosmopolitan views of civil society, identifying peace, human rights, and transnationalism as its core values. Indeed, in the networking of queer organisations in former Yugoslavia, we do find the poles characterising cosmopolitan interpretations of civil society: a conflict between state and citizens countered by a transnational, horizontal solidarity between citizens (Kaldor, 1999). Yet, this "defensive" aspect is accompanied by a very precise ideological statement – sometimes spelled out, sometimes to be read through the lines – that is related to the rejection of those traditional national identities that are so inevitably imbued with gender and sexual normativity. This is the element that leads us to Yugo-nostalgia and to the generation of the utopian idea of Queeroslavija.

Conclusions: the Queeroslav utopia as a queer use of time and space

Yugo-nostalgia has been defined as "virtual remains of a pop-cultural or 'ethic' identity" that can take different forms, from vague escapism to actual political revisionism (Terzić, 2003), is common to both ordinary people and elites (Stone, 2000), and involves – in some forms – even Slovenia, the country that most wanted independence from the

Federation (Velikonja, 2002). Queeroslavija may even have a precedent in Titoslavija, a virtual nation created on the net in 2005, complete with Constitution, anthem, flag, and capital – Sarajevo (currently inactive, it used to be found at www.titoslavija.com). So, while nostalgic longings for the Yugoslavian past are certainly to be found within the mainstream population as well, the strong connection between post-Yugoslav extreme nationalist trends and normative, violent gender traditionalism created a natural, idealistic escape into the conceptual recreation of a common space.

This longing, nevertheless, is neither merely escapist nor purposefully revisionist, but obviously carries a utopian character: as we have seen in the beginning, the sexually diverse population was denied a space in Yugoslavia as well – though without the explicit weight of the nationalist ideological stigma on alternative gender presentations and sexual behaviours. So, perhaps, what the participants in these events are looking for is not an idealised past, but a nostalgic future: the finding back of a common space that existed in the past, and yet one to be re-built as inclusive, tolerant, and diverse, in one word, queer. And that would be Queeroslavija: a common, abstract yet real, space that "rituals of global belonging" (the festivals, in the definition of a respondent) have contributed to create in the local collective imaginary.

Such metaphorical space can be defined as transnational, nostalgic, and utopian: transnational, as it is built on the cooperation between groups from former Yugoslav countries, regardless of "nationality", and actually refusing or downplaying identification on an ethnic or national basis; nostalgic, as it maintains certain Yugo-nostalgic elements in the longing for a common space without national boundaries and free from nationalistic ideologies, like Yugoslavia was, or was supposed to be; utopian, as – at the same time – it claims and dreams of a space providing inclusiveness, visibility, and safety, like Yugoslavia never did. On the basis of this definition, I would like to play with the idea of Queeroslavija as a queer use of time and space – elaborating on a concept presented by Judith Halberstam's "In a queer time and place" (2005).

In her reflection on queer temporality and post-modern geographies, Judith Halberstam has mainly looked at queer uses of time and space that develop in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. On the other hand, she also leaves open the possibility for queer time and space constructions to develop "according to other logics of location, movement, and identification" (Halberstam, 2005: 1). This way, she argues, queerness partially detaches itself from sexual identity and comes to encompass alternative relations to time and space. Here, I

would like to draw on Halberstam's intuition and take it further, to look at the idea of Queeroslavija precisely as an example of “non-normative logics of community” (2005: 6) embodied in a “post-modern fantasy of flexibility” (2005: 77) applied to borders rather than bodies.

Indeed, an imaginary Queeroslavija can be envisaged as built in opposition to hegemonic logics of post-socialist national identification in terms of time, space, and gender. In opposition to the nationalist emphasis on continuity with the past and a mythologised tradition, the utopian character of this imaginary place locates it in a time of future and potentiality that is grasped more than narrated – to borrow Halberstam's words (2005: 15), “a fantasy of futurity and anachronism”. Its transnational reach, on the other hand, questions and contradicts the physical national borders drawn after the demise of Yugoslavia. Finally, if nationalist communities stand on normative gender assumptions that are necessary to perpetuate an ethnically homogeneous community, the utopian queer community stems from an opposite force, i.e. the celebration of diversity, self-definition, and individual expression.

This non-normative geography, that finds abandoned places to inhabit, metaphorically (the abandoned Yugoslav space) and physically (the abandoned place chosen for the first queer festival in Belgrade), is engaged in a constant confrontation with official borders where the space of “normality” is policed, more often than not with repressive results that lead to the erasure of spaces for expression and, going back to the theme of the issue, citizenship. The questions we can pose to the future of this queer sentiment of belonging involve its potential to queer normative logics of identification, to gather multiple longings for subversion within and outside the gender and sexual realms, and to find survival strategies for the creation of a transversal space of inclusion.

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