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Miloš Jovanović

RESEARCHING NON-HETEROSEXUAL SEXUALITIES*

Sexuality has for a long time been a neglected topic in sociology. It could be said that it would have been "completely forgotten" had it not been for the authors such as William Simon, John Gagnon, Steven Seidman, Jeffrey Weeks¹ and Ken Plummer.² The main contributors to the development of sociology of sexuality from former Yugoslavia are Ivana Spasić, Aleksandar Štulhofer, Roman Kuhar, and Amir Hodžić. Today, it is a sociological sub-discipline with an advanced theoretical and research apparatus and a solid foundation in academic institutions. There are special university courses of sociology of sexuality or, otherwise, it constitutes an inseparable part of gender studies.

For years now, Ashgate Publishing has been contributing to the aforementioned institutionalization of sociology of sexuality, thereby giving special attention to socio-humanistic considerations of issues related to sexual minorities. The most recent electronic catalogue with publications from the field of gender studies and sexuality can be found on the website of this publisher (<http://www.ashgate.com/pdf/catalogues/Gender-and-Sexuality.pdf>). The number and diversity of the titles speaks a lot about the growing currency of sexuality and gender issues in contemporary social sciences.

As a researcher of religious identity of non-heterosexuals, I was lucky enough to acquire two splendid volumes from the extensive production of Ashgate: *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Sexualities* – a reader edited by Stephen Hunt, published in September 2009, and *Queer Spiritual Spaces: Sexuality and Sacred Places*, published in May 2010, edited by Kath Browne, Sally R. Munt, and Andrew K. T. Yip. The informative texts, their critical approach, and a comprehensible style of writing aroused my interest, so I visited the publisher's website and registered to receive regular electronic newsletters in the field of social sciences. Last autumn, through one of them I was informed that at the end of

milos.jovanovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

* Constantinos N. Phellas (ed.). (2012). *Researching Non-Heterosexual Sexualities*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, xviii + 239 pages.

¹ He wrote an informative and stimulating introduction for this book.

² Even the biggest "heavyweights" of modern sociology – Bourdieu, Giddens, and Castells – focused on issues of sex/gender identity, intimacy, and sexuality in some period of their career.

October 2012 a new collection of papers was to be published:³ *Researching Non-Heterosexual Sexualities*, edited by Constantinos N. Phellas, Vice Rector for Research & Faculty at the University of Nicosia in Cyprus. I asked the Ashgate Marketing Assistant by e-mail for a review copy of the book and received a positive answer the next day, and it took only several more days for the book itself to arrive.⁴

The central concern of this collection of texts is how to improve/refine the methodology of research of "other" sexualities. The contributions of various theoretical and methodological treatments of crossover effects of the social, political, and economic structures (gender, class, race, age, ethnicity, etc.) in understanding non-heterosexuality are examined. The idea of cross-sectional operating or intersectionality suggests that inequality, subordination, and a privileged status are shaped by interwoven axes of identity, which are mutually supportive and perpetuated through social interactions. If any identity tag (including "sexuality") is analyzed as a personal characteristic, the effects of the interaction of identity markers are neglected.

Bringing a number of innovations, *Researching Non-Heterosexual Sexualities* abounds in considerations of the established methodology, which are not aimed at its negation, overcoming, or complete abandonment, but at its adjustment to the subject(s) of research. This necessarily entails reflections on epistemological problems and attempts to create an adequate implementation of new cognitive solutions. This collection of papers contains research and critical insights into some of the key issues related to the study of sexual minorities through the categories of community, identities, partnerships, same-sex parenthood and marriage, as well as their care of adopted children, and those pertaining to many political aspects of human sexuality.

A total of twelve papers by researchers from Europe, America, and Australia are included. Their theoretical and methodological diversity reflects the infinite variety of human sexual practices, only some of which are, as a rule, "approved" or even made mandatory, with a high risk of stigmatization and excommunication if a breach of sexual "canon" occurs.

The introduction by Constantinos N. Phellas, among other things, contains the editor's account for the choice of, not exactly elegant, compound "non-heterosexual sexualities" instead of a rather widely accepted LGBT acronym. Specifically, he argues that the plural "sexualities" was deliberately chosen to indicate the range of sexual forms and identities, without privileging any of them, and

³ From the recent newsletter one can find out that a new reader was published in December 2012: *Religion, Gender and Sexuality in Everyday Life* (edited by Peter Nynäs and Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip) and that a new collection of texts is announced for June 2013: *Religious and Sexual Identities: A Multi-faith Exploration of Young Adults* (edited by Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip and Sarah-Jane Page), which can be of special interest to researchers of the relations of sexuality and religion, and can also be seen as an implicit confirmation of the current relevance of the topic areas.

⁴ I have to admit that I did not expect that someone from England would be willing enough to send a book worth £60 for free to a non-renowned sociologist from a distant Serbia. Moreover, I thought I would not get any response at all. But my dependency was nulled, as it seems there are publishers who appreciate potential readers, whoever they are and wherever they come from, for which I am especially grateful to them.

without limiting the number of identities that can be "justifiably" singled out as separate. It is most often the case that only L and G remain of the abbreviation while other "letters" fall under the "and so on" section.

The first chapter, written by the editor and the late Anthony P. M. Coxon, reviews the development of methods and techniques applied in the research of non-heterosexual men, which used to contribute to the image of them as perverse and deviant offenders. The authors also deal with a much more complex notion of "sexuality," and its recent operationalizations and use in the study of human sexuality (through social/sexual networks and new sampling techniques and methods that rely on the opportunities provided by the Internet).

In the paper on researching religion in LGBTQ populations, Melissa M. Wilcox begins with a summary of theoretical standpoints from the existing literature, and continues with her experiences and methodological, as well as ethical, problems she encountered in studying the sensitive relations of sexuality, gender, identity, and religion. I am familiar with the work of this American sociologist through a number of articles and readers, and in particular with the book *Coming Out in Christianity: Religion, Identity, and Community* (2003), which made her one of the pioneers and founders of the research of religious lesbians, gays, transvestites, and transsexuals.

The work of Alex Toft deals with the specifics of researching bisexual and Christian men and women, compared to the more developed practice of studying religious lesbians and gays. Some of the difficulties of reaching these "hidden" populations and conducting research projects are described and discussed. Toft puts special emphasis on reflexivity of the researcher (recognition that s/he cannot remain neutral to the end) and the fluidity of the concept of sexuality.

The next chapter's theme is the use of methods of analysis of visual material in the study of non-heteronormative sexualities as particularly suitable for an insight into the practices that were previously pathologized and excluded from the scientific research. Meg Barker, Christina Richards, and Helen Bowes-Catton point out the importance of using creative approaches to data collection and analysis in these particular areas (the study of bisexuality, transsexuality, polyamorous relationships), since they enable a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences that were previously unavailable.

In his paper "Sexual diaries: theory, method and application", Anthony Coxon discovers the importance and particular significance of diaries containing records of human sexual experiences (practices through which identity is confirmed on everyday basis) as the source of data. This special form of methodology is very innovative in its integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches to sexuality and to overcoming their shortcomings. Coxon considers the possibilities of revealing sexual experiences on the Internet (through blogs or some other means), which would contribute to the increment of the body of primary material and increase the possibility of presenting the findings of specific sexual subgroups and special sexual practices.

The next chapter deals with sexual diaries, but also with the ethnographic approach as an alternative to "traditional" large-scale survey research, which operates with "experience-distant concepts." Three authors – Miguel Muñoz-Laboy, Richard G. Parker, and Patrick A. Wilson – describe the key factors that made the ethnographic approach a useful tool for documenting a wide range of lifeworlds of people with non-heteronormative identities present on the "sexual market".

What is perhaps the most important contribution of this chapter is an attempt to formulate a theoretical framework that would allow the effective merger of ethnographic approaches and analysis of sexual diaries, as well as the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods into a multi-dimensional, mixed, approach.

In chapter seven, Ian Rivers discusses criticisms of the quantitative form of psychological studies of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals. The pros and cons of quantitative studies, their relevance to policy and practice, as well as various challenges facing quantitative researchers (especially those related to scientific rigor and representativeness) are considered. The basis for this is the research conducted by the author, and a number of well-known quantitative studies of LGB populations by other scientists. One of the more important ethical issues of large scale quantitative studies is the absence of "voice" of individuals who are participants in the research, which, according to the author, makes the complement of qualitative approaches justified.

Chapter eight deals with the case study of Cyprus in relation to depression, stress, self-esteem, and discrimination of gays with AIDS, conducted by the editor of this book on the sample of 50 Cypriots. The various difficulties and problems faced by HIV-positive people on the island are explored, together with strategies that can minimize them, reduce the level of public ignorance (which is the main source of discrimination), and provide support to ill-affected gays in their adjustment and achievement of psychological well-being.

In chapter nine, Gabriel Koureas reveals the opportunities and lists the difficulties that arise in the use of military and war archives in researching (homo)sexuality. He explores the British archives from the period of the First World War, with particular emphasis on issues of masculinity, class, and national identity and their relationship to the visual culture of the period. His article incorporates methodological processing of memories, conflicts, and various forms of commemoration in the construction of gender identity through performative acts that create the illusion of their naturalness, relying on the theories of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault.

In chapter ten, Stavros Stavrou Karayanni deals with homophobia and sexual persecution in Cyprus and focuses on the three most common responses a researcher encounters when conducting a sociological study of homosexuality: awkward silence, denial followed by rejection, and an affected lack of understanding followed by a hostile and often insulting condemnation.⁵ The socio-political context, which is characterized by pronounced Cypriot nationalism (and the accompanying phenomena of patriotism, familism, and the imperatives of procreation and emphasized masculinity) influences, to a large extent, the study of attitudes about people with same-sex affection, who are regarded as the spectre haunting their island. An interesting fact the author exhibits is the term which Greeks use to denote homosexuality: "the Ottoman way" (*Othomaniko*), indicating its identification with arch-enemies and strangers,⁶ thus marking gays as internal outsiders. As a conclu-

⁵ Jeffrey Weeks in his Foreword cites Ken Plummer: "Researching sexuality made you morally suspect".

⁶ Roman writer and encyclopedist Cornelius Nepos from the first century AD seems to be the first one to use the phrase "The Greek way/custom" (*mos Graeciae* or *mos Graecorum*) for denoting pederasty. In the same manner, the French have in the XVI

sion, Karayanni evaluates and theorizes on the consequences of mental and physical pain of sex "dissidents" as a result of discrimination.

Chapter eleven focuses on the case study of Australian white lesbians and gay men who take care of indigenous children. Damien W. Riggs demonstrates how a properly conducted (paradigmatic-)case study contributes to the development of theory and testing of hypotheses, and thus to the growth of knowledge about a particular community and the society in general. The author begins with the elaboration of the argument presented in the well-known paper by Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research."⁷ Riggs shows that this method is a particularly suitable tool for research of non-heterosexuals and people who deviate from the dominant norms on gender, through the case study of "Ben" (a pseudonym of the research participant), white gay Australian, who was the guardian of an indigenous boy. The role of the case study method in mapping the contours of groups that are subject to multifaceted marginalization is particularly emphasized.

In the last chapter, "Sexy subject, unflattering questions", Anna Einarsdottir exhibits her findings and experiences related to interviewing fifty same-sex couples who have entered into a civil partnership on their intimate and sexual life. One of the first obstacles she encountered was the concealment of the studied population, which made the sampling and reaching the participants particularly problematic. The topic of research required an intrusion into the private sphere and "digging out" of the deeply personal experiences of the respondents, which was a very stressful experience for all the participants. A particularly interesting topic the author deals with is the impact of researcher's sexual identity (which was in her case placed to the foreground) on the course and the dynamics of the interview.

In conclusion, this book will certainly be of interest to scientific researchers of human sexuality and students of humanities who are particularly interested in issues of sexuality. It could also be of use to health professionals, therapists and counsellors who offer support to LGBTQ people in the face of stigmatization to which they are exposed in their communities, and could provide a lot of information to activists who fight for a better status of sexual minorities in the society.

and XVII centuries called homosexuality "The Italian vice" (*le vice italien* – a sarcastic comment by Louis XVI: "La France devenue italienne!" is well known), in the XVIII century they used the phrase "English vice" (*le vice anglais*), in the XIX century they called it "Oriental/Arabic ways" (*les mœurs orientales, les mœurs arabes, les mœurs levantins*), and finally "The German vice" (*le vice allemand*) since 1870 and continuing into the XX century. A Zürich legal text from 1422 designates the practice by the verb *florenzen*, suggesting that the city of Florence had developed a particular reputation in this regard. Later, Martin Luther referred to homosexual relationship as "Italian marriage", implying that the practice arrived to Germany from Italian (Catholic, "corrupted") Carthusian monasteries. The Albanians termed pederasty *madziipi*, from *madziip* – "Gipsy", implying that the wandering people brought it from the outside. President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, in the spirit of the aforementioned, stated in April 2012: "Before we came in touch with the Europeans, we had some few homosexuals" (see: Wayne R. Dynes *The Homophobic Mind*, available at: <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/BIB/Hompho/index.html>, last accessed: May 7th 2013).

⁷ *Qualitative Inquiry*, April 2006 12(2), 219-245.