

Beyond Corporate Pride and Mainstream LGBT politics: Queering our Struggles

**This text was written on the occasion of the screening of the documentary "Beyond Gay: The Politics of Pride", co-organized by Antifa Λευκοσα, Dayanisma and Syspirosi Atakton. This was a part of an 11-day long series of events for the 17th of May, the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia.*

Pride marches in the south have been marked by heavy corporate marketing and sponsoring. The purchasing power of the LGBT+ population is celebrated and used for political leverage, implicitly assuring that they can be a monolithic body of consumers, who once accepted by society will conform and integrate into the heteropatriarchal institutions which oppressed them in the first place. Corporate influence is not limited to the marches themselves; it functions in a multitude of ways. Accept welcomes corporations as members, whose representative is granted a right to vote in member meetings equal to that of individuals. Additionally, they are given permission to use Accept's "Full member" logo on their company's advertising material, passing as LGBT-friendly. In a press release by Accept, the issue of pink money from gay tourism is raised to justify the importance of LGBT-rights¹. Such practices pave the way for the incorporation of queers into capitalism and the market economy, and show how private companies can have an active say in shaping the management, objectives and regulations of the organization supposed to represent the interests of all LGBT+ people. Accept claims to demand "equal human rights for all". However, the co-organization of pride marches with the Embassy of the United States and the speeches of racist, islamophobic politicians², demonstrate an unwillingness to acknowledge the violence inflicted on queers by states and corporations. Exploitation of labor, systemic racism, border controls and detention of migrants are just few of the issues which are neglected. Instead, a human rights-based agenda is put forth, focusing on acceptance, sameness and assimilation.

Rights-based approaches fail to challenge heteronormativity, as instead of seeking social transformation, they establish politics of acceptance, recognition, and inclusion into the existing power structures of society. Liberation and equality will not come from queers assuming positions in the military, police or parliament. The military, as a straight institution, stands for hierarchy, authoritarianism, prejudice against the Other, macho values and toxic masculinity. Furthermore, it is part of the repressive apparatus of the state, used to maintain and reproduce its labour power, values and ideology. Young queers who are called to serve in the military are forced to conform to toxic expectations of hypermasculinity, during a time very crucial for some in terms of becoming more independent from their often homophobic families. As such, we defend queer and trans visibility as a necessary and integral part of the struggles against nationalism and militarism. Inequalities are a symptom of the current regime of categorization, pathologization and regulation of our bodies and sexualities, and will therefore not cease to exist unless we challenge capitalism, patriarchy and the state. Instead of focusing on

¹ [Press release by Accept-LGBT, September 2015](#)

² [E.g. ex-interior minister Socrates Hasikos in 2015, stated that "We prefer Orthodox Christian refugees"](#)

inclusion of LGBT people in influential positions in various organizations or unions, it is important to think of economic justice and queer politics together, to prioritize those whose lives will not be improved after the civil union bill, same-sex marriage, or other legal changes. We should not sacrifice our vision for another world in favor of concessions leading towards assimilation, and any constitutional changes should not provide the reassurance that things will get better on their own, destroying any momentum gained by the movement.

State-sanctioned moves toward equality are strategies of governing that do not allow the “empowered” group to further challenge power relations in society. Furthermore, every legal victory of the mainstream LGBT-movement is also a victory for the state, as it assimilates us into the system and reasserts its control over our lives. It is a commonly held belief that strengthening hate-crime laws will reduce hate crimes. Such laws attempt to restrict and penalize individual acts; however, they do not deal with the systemic roots of such behaviors. Racist hate speech is punishable by law, but that has not prevented politicians or the media from scapegoating immigrants or communicating dehumanizing comments without any consequences. Even if specific legislation is passed, implementing penalties is often ruled by arbitrary decisions. A recent example is the reduction of the sentences of a rapist businessman and his accomplice, with their defence being that the two underage victims were not virgins³. If amendments in legislation might be considered victories at all, they should not be the end goals of the movement. The Civil Union bill, which the president of Accept described as a step towards the elimination of discrimination, did not seem to bring much change in the moral panicking concerning homosexuality in the Cypriot society. It was even a chance to witness an eruption of homophobic, dehumanizing comments on online discussions and the streets. People don’t judge right from wrong based on laws, and are influenced by their assumptions and ideologies. The Civil Union bill also potentially benefits only a fraction of the LGBTI+ community, as single queer parents, people in polyamorous relationships or those unwilling to formally commit or marry are excluded from the benefits and services gained by those legally recognized.

By glamorizing same-sex marriage, mainstream LGBT movements and international organisations such as ILGA risk normalizing an exclusionary and privileged institution, instead of pushing for economic and social transformations which would benefit everyone. The focus of the Accept-LGBT mission statement: “- on marriage, inheritance, and adoption rights for all citizens”⁴, is evidence of its exclusionary and anti-intersectional politics. "Citizen" is an exclusionary term, used by states to preserve rights and benefits for those granted full citizenship, and justify discrimination and abuse against “non-citizens”, such as refugees, for the sake of preserving rights and benefits to those recognized as citizens. Advocates of same-sex marriage have argued that same-sex marriage with EU citizens could serve as an access-route to citizenship for queer migrants and refugees⁵. However, only a fraction of refugees would benefit from this. Instead of

³ [Case of businessman Akis Lefkaritis and Nicos Nicolaou](#)

⁴ [Accept-LGBT, Mission Statement](#)

⁵ [Theorising LGBT rights as Human Rights: A Queer\(itical\) Analysis](#)

trying to make immigration and asylum processes more queer-friendly, we should oppose the centrality of marriage in regulating citizenship status and the violence of borders overall.

Queer refugees face two main obstacles in the European asylum process. Non-normative identities are pushed to conform to western heteronormative stereotypical understandings of gender and sexuality for their application to be accepted. Asylum seekers are confronted with assumptions about their identities, and are rejected if their experiences are judged to contradict them⁶. For example, one applicant in Cyprus was rejected because he did not avoid military service in his country. In another case, an Iranian lesbian refugee was rejected because she was married to a man, and therefore could not be a lesbian⁷. Additionally, they are asked to provide evidence of their persecution in their country of origin. Given the nature of living under fear of persecution, their individual experiences in non-normative sexual practices is often limited, therefore providing sufficient evidence is often impossible. In almost all member-states of the European Union, statistics about queer asylum applications and their acceptance rates remain invisible.

The politics of mainstream LGBT activism necessarily employ identity-based methodologies which center around categorising genders and sexualities in order to then work towards representation and assimilation. As a result, these methodologies cannot be anything but exclusionary. Where does the gender-ambivalent and sexuality-fluid individual fit into the mainstream LGBT activists' program towards representation? Where does the queer migrant body fit into their assimilation program? Once we think about the difficulty of arguing for the representation of incoherent and ambivalent genders and sexualities in a system which is built on ideas, practices, and institutions which consistently safeguard and reproduce patriarchy and heteronormativity, we realise that queerness and heteronormative society are irreconcilable. Queerness destabilizes existing categories and their meanings, and exposes how terms like male, female, homosexual, heterosexual, and so on, do not exist naturally and they are not self-evident. Through the lens of the queer glance, identity is turned inside-out and revealed in the form of an exoskeleton, supporting the heteronormative categorization of knowledge.

Radical queer politics move beyond LGBT politics by resisting the weight and oppression of identities created outside of us but prescribed onto us in a definitive manner. While labels are ascribed to us as single issues (such as woman, lesbian, black, fat, disabled, neurotic), oppression does not function in a similar isolation, but usually comes in the form of a multiplicity of systems which interact to regulate our lives. The 'politicization' of queerness through such intersectional approaches has been met with resistance from certain strands of the queer community, which claim that rather than allowing the queer movement to be as expansive as possible, intersectional queer perspectives bring with them definitions, thereby constricting queerness and create the possibility for exclusion.

⁶ (In)credibly Queer: Sexuality-based Asylum in the European Union

⁷ In Cyprus, an Iranian lesbian refugee struggles for sanctuary

However, we must keep reminding ourselves that the term queer, as it was used in a pejorative sense before it was reclaimed, was political; the AIDS crisis was political; the reclamation of the term queer was political; and the violence faced by queers daily is very real, and, of course, political.

The categories of identity may be socially constructed, but they are felt in very real ways, in the sense that they can determine one's financial security, political power, the extent and intensity that one's life is bordered and policed, one's mental health, and so on. As such, the queer movement cannot, at least not yet, acquire its most idealised form, as that would risk glossing over actual oppressive political realities. It cannot revel in post-identity discourse at a time when the trans woman of colour continues to face harassment on the street, or when teenage boys continue to be disowned by their families for coming out. Rather, the queer movement must be aware, active and mobilised against racism, ableism, sexism, transmisogyny, capitalism, and so on.

Queerness is also a site where the emancipatory potential to create new, queer, spaces and practices is located. These arise in response to the exclusion of queers from mainstream straight culture and their further marginalization within gay and lesbian communities. For example, even though queer migrant bodies are sites where the racialized, ethnicized, and gendered disciplinary measures employed by the state and their agents come together with ideological and material struggles, these bodies nevertheless have the potential to create new spaces characterised by non-normative family formations and hybrid cultural arrangements. Additionally, queer migrants assigned female at birth contain the potential for challenging the heteronormative understanding of the family as a reproductive unit and of femininity as essentially the prescription for mothering.

What ultimately resonates from the insights of intersectional queer politics is, firstly, that a struggle towards liberation is necessarily a struggle against class inequalities and capitalism, racial and ethnic discrimination, nationalism and fascism, homophobia and transphobia, ableism and fat-phobia, and so on. Secondly, that the inclusivity of a movement does not come by moving beyond identity (an argument analogous to that of being 'colourblind' and advocating for #alllivesmatter), but by making sure that all categories to which we subscribe never solidify but remain in constant formation. Finally, we must strive for solidarity on all fronts, and ensure that our movements become as inclusive as possible.



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