The longing for full intimate citizenship

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FEMCIT’s research question

“what have been the impacts of contemporary women’s movements on gendered citizenship in an increasingly multicultural and diverse Europe?”
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Gendered Citizenship in a Multicultural Europe – Integrative Analysis


Contemporary Women’s Movements
The FEMCIT intimate citizenship team

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The concept of intimate citizenship is concerned with

- “the control (or not) over one’s body, feelings, relationships; access (or not) to representations, relationships, public spaces, etc.; and socially grounded choices (or not) about identities, gender experiences, erotic experiences” (Plummer, 1995)

- the processes, practices, and discourses that regulate and shape the exercise of agency in intimate life – specifically: the laws, policies & social relations that regulate and shape experiences of self-determination, belonging and recognition in intimate life
How have women’s and other movements for gender and sexual equality and change impacted on intimate citizenship in multicultural Europe?

- an historical study of the claims and demands of movements for gender and sexual equality and change (women’s & LGBT movements) in relation to intimate life (1968-2008)
- a critical analysis of law and policy concerning intimate life
- a biographical-narrative study of everyday experiences of intimate citizenship
“Most different” comparative methodology
Bulgaria: post-Communist/totalitarian state
Norway: social democratic, “woman-friendly” welfare state
Portugal:
“southern European”,
Catholic, post-dictatorship state
United Kingdom: north-western European (neo)liberal/social investment welfare state
Movement claims & demands

4 main inter-related areas of claims-making & intervention by women’s and LGBT movements re. intimate citizenship:

- Partnership
- Reproductive rights and parenting
- Sexual and gender identities and practices
- Gender and sexual violence
RECLAIM THE NIGHT

NOSOTRAS DECÍDIMOS ABORTO LIBRE

FRI ABORT ER EN KVINNENES RETT

Дон’t do it, Di!
Law & policy analysis

Law and social policy (social security, housing, taxation etc...)
- Marriage
- Divorce
- Non-marital Heterosexual Relationships
- The Regulation of Sexual Practice
- Same-Sex Partnerships
- Parenting and Reproduction
- Homosexuality and Anti-Discrimination Legislation
- Immigration, Nationality and Intimate Relationships
- Single People and Solo Living
- (Trans)gender Recognition
- Care
- Tissue and Organ Donation
Historically...

Law & policy in all four countries have:

- operated with highly constrained, gendered and heteronormative assumptions about the form and nature of legitimate intimate life
- intervened to promote procreation within, & formation & maintenance of, married, heterosexual couples
Recently...

Law & policy in all four countries have seen:

• a decline in support for gender inequalities in intimate life, and in the privileging of marriage
• increasing recognition of diversity in intimate life
• remarkable shift relating to same-sex sexuality and relationships.

But

• the timing, pace and extent of these changes differs across the four countries
• those who are uncoupled, non-monogamous, not cohabiting, non-procreative, and/or sharing lives with friends (to whom they not legally or biologically related) are ignored/marginalized in law & policy
Biographical-narrative analysis

- Biographical-narrative interpretive (BNIM) study of the lived experiences and narratives of intimate life and citizenship of people living outside conventional families in the 4 capital cities (67 interviews)
- single people; people in a non-cohabiting relationship; lesbians/ gay men/ people in same-sex relationship; people living in shared housing;
- from majority (26) and minoritized/ racialised (41) groups (Roma – BG & PT; Turkish – UK & BG; Pakistani – NO & UK; Sami – NO; Cape Verdeans – PT).
The biographical-narrative interpretive method

• Focus on life histories, lived situations and narrative
• And the relationship between the individual and her singular, biographical experience and complex psychic life, and wider socio-cultural processes and contexts – “subjectivity in historical context”
• Asks an initial single narrative inducing question – “can you tell me the story of your life and personal relationships, all the events and experiences that have been important to you?”...
• Analyzes the “lived life” (biography) and the “told story” (narrative) and the relationship between them (Wengraf, 2009)
Biographies of intimate life

- Interviewees in all four cities were living their intimate lives in a wide-range of ways which are largely unrecognized by policy-makers & often marginalized by families & communities – e.g.
  - in non-cohabiting (LAT) relationships
  - sharing homes and lives with people to whom they are not biologically or sexually related
  - striving for both autonomy *and* connection, stability *and* the capacity for change
Impacts of the movements on experiences of intimate citizenship

- Clear impact (43 of 67)
- Traces of impact (11 of 67)
- No impact (13 of 67)
Failures of full intimate citizenship

Numerous accounts of:

• lack of respect for and recognition of intimate life choices and relationships
• violation of self-determination, personhood and autonomy – being “stolen”, trafficked, forced, coerced, and unwillingly channelled into marriages / sexual relations
• disruptions to bodily integrity – partner violence, violence from parents and carers, rape and sexual assault
• disruptions to psychological integrity and well-being = failures of intimate relating between 2+ people, of communities and social groups, and of the state
• The very ability to speak of these experiences, however, might, in part, be attributable to the movements we have studied
Impact?

• Considerable evidence of the difference that movements for gender and sexual equality and change had made on our interviewees’ experiences of intimate citizenship ...

• Feminist discourses & ideas about gender & sexual equality, LGBT rights & sexual liberation, and legal & policy changes relating to intimate life that were successfully pursued by social movements, had had a tangible and clear impact on the lives and subjectivities of the overwhelming majority of the women, and of many of the men we interviewed, and there were “traces of impact” in the stories of many more

• But there were cross-national differences related to the strength and focus of national movements...

• And people living outside conventional couples & families are grappling with a set of powerful, intersecting norms that construct and regulate intimate life, and that it can be risky to challenge
Intimate citizenship regime

- The constellation of legal, social and cultural conditions of intimate citizenship that prevail in any particular nation state, at any particular time

- Intimate citizenship regimes develop historically, in path dependent ways, and comprise the laws, policies and cultures that regulate and construct everyday lived practices of intimate life

- in ways that are more or less:
  - familial or individualized
  - patriarchal or gender-equal
  - heteronormative or sexuality-equal
  - racist/ ethnic majoritarian or “multicultural”
The normative constitution of intimate citizenship regimes

- Through a number of interconnected norms:
  - The hetero(sexual) norm
  - The procreative norm
  - The norm of gender differentiation and hierarchy (in many places, and historically, the patriarchal norm)
  - The couple norm

- Running through these norms are cross-cutting tensions between the individual and the familial, between autonomy/self-determination and dependence/determination by others

- These norms are internalized, and enforced by sanctions – positive and negative

- These norms – and their constituent expectations and injunctions - imbue intimate practices that conform with them with a “sense of rightness” (Berlant and Warner)
The longing for full intimate citizenship

“the (as yet unachieved) freedom and ability to construct and live selfhood (encompassing psychic and embodied experience) and close relationships (sexual/love relationships, friendships, parental and kin relations, and household companionship and community) safely, securely and according to personal choice, in their dynamic and changing forms, with respect, recognition and support from state and civil society” (Roseneil, 2010)