

However, the editors have stopped short of expanding on the term and it is telltale that many contributions do well without mentioning it.

GUIDO HAUSMANN

University of Regensburg

BORBALA ZSUZANNA TÖRÖK

University of Vienna

Decolonizing Queer Experience: LGBT+ Narratives from Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Ed. Emily Channel-Justice. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020. xiv, 205 pp. Preface. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Tables. \$100.00, hard bound.

doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.165

This interesting volume joins a number of recent collections focusing on central and eastern Europe and Eurasia that bring localized queer studies to our disciplines (as Vitaly Chernetsky notes in his reflective preface supplying an intellectual genealogy for Eurasian queer scholarship). It makes a significant contribution to the understanding of our area by uniting under one cover anthropology, history, sociology, and performance studies to convey the richness of queer lenses trained on more than just Russia. That country is the subject of just one essay but its presence as colonizer and as conduit of homo/trans-phobic politics looms over many contributions.

The book seeks to explore queer categories, politics, and performance in the region by attending closely to the non-heteronormative and gender-transgressive people there themselves. Their experience is often trapped by our habits of thinking with global labels (“lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer”) and presumptions about “traditional” versus “modern” values and societies. Tamar Shirinian and Emily Channel-Justice propose in their Introduction that these “globally hypernormalized” reference points do not merely act on Eurasian / east European post-socialist queer subjects but meet with “disidentification” and rethinking by local queer people in their processes of critique (8). Area studies including from our region has the potential to unseat a dominant US queer studies that presumes to set the agenda, frame the terms of reference, and determine whose stories matter (9).

A first section groups three essays around “the categories themselves.” Professor and trans activist Tjaša Kancler opens it combatively, rhetorically confronting western-led gender “mind-colonization” (27), arguing for decolonial radical activism in artistic and academic work. The intriguing trans and lesbian-centered media projects from former Yugoslavia featured in the chapter’s final pages are too briefly explored. More convincingly productive about “categories” in the area are chapters by Tamar Shirinian on Armenian LGBT+ advocacy, and Syinat Sultanalieva on “good” and “bad” girls as chronotopes in Kyrgyzstan. Shirinian’s ethnography of queer activism yields insights into Armenian reception of global LGBT+ identities, their “misrecognition” and processing in an NGO setting. Querying western categories is strenuous work for queer activists in Yerevan but it asserts their authority in the face of “a pedagogical relation to European colleagues” and ham-fisted political

“correctness” (49–50). Sultanalieva’s study of chronotopes (spatial-temporal linkages, usually associated with the Bakhtinian narrative) of “good” and “bad” girls in Kyrgyzstan charts the experience “of queer women in Kyrgyzstan in partitioning their lives” as they negotiate familial honor and shaming constraints while engaged with feminist / LGBT+ activism (57). Taken together this section’s essays propose that attending to peripheral settings and actors richly illuminates the evolution of categories-in-translation.

Section two, “Queer in Public,” explores political and private choices in Ukraine and Soviet Latvia. Channel-Justice’s chapter on leftist critiques of LGBT+ “mainstreaming” in Ukraine gives voice to internal radical critics of local queer advocacy via strategies promoting queer visibility (Pride Parades, rights claims). Through “Europeanization” Ukraine seems committed to mainstreaming LGBT+ rights, but Kyiv’s queer-left critics view state affirmation of queer identities as stoking homonationalism and box-ticking “only when Ukraine is making a claim on a European identity” (88). In his chapter, Roman Leksikov’s interviews with Ukrainian victims of homo / transphobic hate crimes depict a “cruel optimism” (Lauren Berlant’s term; 124). Victims mistrust legal remedies but want retribution, especially after the promises of 2014’s Revolution of Dignity (clearly behind aspirations for justice). This yearning upsets foreign observers who share the supposedly widespread anti-police mood among western LGBT+ activists. Both chapters wrestle carefully with comparisons between the west and this region, but arguably Ukraine’s situation requires deeper in-country understanding rather than more radicalism: perhaps an ethnography of its political class’s attitudes toward LGBT+ citizens? Feruza Aripova’s historical chapter on sodomy trials in Soviet Latvia (1960s–80s) rounds out the section by uncovering the culture of the Soviet *pleshka* (cruising ground) in a major regional capital, Riga, with multifarious queer ties to the rest of the USSR. Those ties show there was no simple “colony” versus “metropole” among densely networked Soviet male homosexuals moving through socialist cities and resorts.

The final section, “Decolonizing Queer Performance” reviews marginalized narratives and queers in Kazakhstan, Latvia, and Russia. The entire volume’s most explicitly “decolonizing” work is found in Zhanar Sekerbayeva’s excellent chapter on gender-transgressive motifs in Kazakh folklore. The essay exposes the construction of Kazakh “folklore” via imperial Russian and Soviet experts using European lenses of modernity to domesticate and simplify some truly uncanny Kazakh legends of monstrosity and gender-crossing. To decolonize our readings queerly, Sekerbayeva strips back layers of Russian / western influence and puts the Central Asian imaginary at the forefront of her analysis, while teasing out the troubling gender and sexual implications of blood-sucking hags and maiden-warriors who win a bride. Another innovative chapter comes from Kārlis Vērdiņš and Jānis Ozoliņš who chronicle the “cruel optimism[s]” and queer performances of two gay personalities in rural, post-Soviet Latvia. In the ethnically divided, demographically declining countryside Janis, a poet/publisher, and Gints, a singer/drag artiste, manage queer identities in the face of limited local tolerance and the Riga gay scene’s sneers (159–61). In a book about “decolonizing,” more could be made of the colonial hangovers in the dreams of these modestly heroic queens, but

the authors vividly show us how post-socialism made new rural queer lives possible. Finally, Polina Kislitsyna's biographical ethnography of Russian homo- and bisexuals and their experiences of religion probes an overlooked margin in the region's LGBT+ life. Yes, there is considerable repression based on Christian and Muslim dogma, intensified after socialism, but affirmative communities of religious queer people function successfully too. Kislitsyna documents her subjects' internalization of religious homophobia and their strategies of spiritual validation in this compelling chapter.

The volume is a tremendous contribution to an emerging field, from a group of young and mostly precariously supported scholars doing truly intrepid, courageous work. Occasionally, it would have benefited from more demanding peer review, and a more consistent return to the core theme of "decolonization." This book should nevertheless be on our gender, social, and political studies reading lists, because its example and arguments will inspire further exploration in queer studies.

DAN HEALEY
University of Oxford

The First World War as a Caesura? Demographic Concepts, Population Policy, and Genocide in the Late Ottoman, Russian, and Habsburg Spheres. Ed. Christin Pschichholz. *Gewaltpolitik und Menschenrechte*, Vol. 3. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2020. 247 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Figures. Tables. Maps. €44.90, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.166

This collection of a dozen articles by leading scholars of the late Ottoman, Russian, and Habsburg empires is the result of a culling of thirty papers delivered at the Lepsiushaus Potsdam and the University of Potsdam in 2016. It circles the wagons around current concepts of the hybrid term genocide, as first coined by the Polish writer Raphael Lemkin in 1944 with reference to the German atrocities in the east during the Second World War. Lemkin's term was enshrined in Article II of the United Nations Genocide Convention four years later as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

Sadly, the Article did not define perpetrators of genocide. Thus, we are left with the problem of defining genocide and calling out its practitioners. The field is wide open. In November 1641, for example, a group of Irishmen killed 100 English Protestants in what came to be called the Portadown Massacre. At about the same time Zhang Xianzhong's army murdered perhaps 1 million people in the Sichuan Massacre. Both are listed as genocide. In our time, the Canadian prime minister called the brutal murders of undisclosed numbers of First Nations, Inuit and Metis, mostly women and girls, a case of "race-based genocide" by undisclosed perpetrators. At the same time, he declined to apply the term for the Xi Jinping's regime savage oppression of Xinjiang's Muslim Uyghurs, suggesting that the word genocide in this case was "extremely loaded." All the i's first had to be dotted and all the t's crossed, he argued before a genocidal "determination" could be made. The book under review is a step in the long and tortuous road of helping people such as Justin Trudeau reach that "determination."