



## Immigrants, workers unions and gay/lesbian scenes: The not entire Sexual Revolution

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### review of

Shield, A.D. (2017) *Immigrants in the sexual revolution. Perceptions and participations in Northwest Europe*. London: Palgrave MacMillan. (PB, pp. 287+viii, ISBN9783319496122)

### Claim and introduction

The aim of the 'Genders and Sexualities in History' series is to 'accommodate and foster new approaches to historical research in the fields of genders and sexualities' (Springer, 2017). The following review shall give readers an idea of how the currently Denmark-based social scientist Andrew D. Shield lives up to the claim of 'promoting world-class scholarship' by describing and analysing straight as well as gay and lesbian immigrant stories in Denmark and the Netherlands from the 1960s to the 1980s.

The book starts with the story of the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated in 2002, and continues with more recent events such as the sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2016 or the shooting at a U.S. gay club – and guides the reader to what seems to be behind the buzzword of integration today: It is about the (endangered) Western values that are currently invoked in

Europe against the alleged threat of Islamic migration, as a potential victim of which the political right has recently discovered the LGBTQ<sup>1</sup> community.

A key background for the book is that Denmark and the Netherlands (as sample countries where the legacies of the 1960s to 1970s women's and sexual liberation movements have had the greatest impact) highly effectively integrated women's and sexual liberation movements into laws and social norms. This historic backdrop, in particular by its focus on the rights of women and gay men, is currently used by politicians and journalists alike to draw a line between the 'native' population and non-Western immigrants [4]. What is described as a 'lighthearted' comparison of two countries at the beginning is later thoroughly investigated and analysed, with a wide range of literature contrasted with empirical data collected and generated in the two focus countries. In the light of the book title, the Netherlands is described as the 'gay' country, whereas Denmark is described as the 'gender equal' country. While we might criticise that other Nordic countries are left out, the comparison works well due to the specific countries of origin of the described migrants, and the Danish and Dutch language skills of the author are an asset, especially with regard to local sources such as contact ads in newspapers or flyers, which were not written in English at the time (and to some extent still aren't). The second part of the introduction provides a wide range of background information on visible versus non-visible groups, as well as a differentiation between colonial and post-colonial groups, labour migrants, refugees and others that do not fit any of the previous categories. The information on post-WW2 migration is clearly structured and described in detail; however, the portrayal of the earlier heterogenic Europe starts in 1523 and attempts to cover four and a half centuries on four pages, which only works if the reader refers to the extremely detailed footnotes – and thus only succeeds in interrupting the 'flow' while reading the introduction. For what is to come in the book then is primarily a description of male individuals migrating for labour and potentially finding love as well. From this perspective (migration for love), at least up to the 1950s, others have argued that it was predominately women who left their home (Kaplanis et al., 2018). Regarding the bigger picture, it is not only politics and media that tend to

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<sup>1</sup> The question of which acronym to use is an ongoing and so far unresolved one. In one of his first footnotes, Shield himself defines his understanding as the adjective for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (or trans\*), queer, as well as pansexual, intersex, and (undefined) 'more'. In the last chapter, he does refer to the acronym LGBTI (I for intersex) from a particular legal case, closing with the statement that these gender identity labels and practices are in continuous flux, and referring to the 'alphabet soup of LGBTQPAI+ discourses' [254-255]. While the latter acronym still falls short of including the current academic discussion on polyamory as a sexual orientation (cf. for example Klesse (2014)), the version used for the current review is the one used by Shield (therefore 'LGBTQ').

simplify the issue, (migration) science, too, often fails to highlight the different intersectional facets. Another example of a detailed differentiated approach to migration studies is for instance provided by Gatt et al. (2016).

### **Perception: Workers of the world, unite(d)?**

The first part, 'Perceptions', starts with the methodological approach: interviews as method of choice. Shield clearly states his affiliations by quoting authors who work with a similar approach. On the content level, the figure 'three trajectories after liberalization' brilliantly illustrates how the attitudes of migrant workers started to diverge with the start of the era of family reunification (1973-1980s): While some lived continuous liberalization and others made a conservative turn while retaining some liberal ideas, yet another group turned into a conservative direction (Shield, 2017: 75). Although only drawn from a small number of studies, this graph is one of the key findings of the book and it would be worthwhile to test it beyond the two focus countries.

The fourth chapter on Danish sexuality and gender norms starts with a snapshot of the year 1972, and goes further into two aspects that were briefly mentioned before: content-wise, the trade unions are introduced, who are described as major players in establishing ties between foreigners and locals as the book progresses. Methodologically, newspapers are presented, thus adding a media analysis. In addition to the foreign workers' journal that was published in several languages, mainstream press is quoted to reconstruct conflicts between the Danish population and foreign workers. The selected sample is sufficient for the chapter; for extended research, a full media analysis on the *Fremmedarbejderbladet* (The foreign workers' journal) would seem worthwhile.

What Shield lacks to describe is why media coverage plays such an important role in shaping the public discourse on an issue. He uses the term 'media framing' without explaining it [104] – for those who are not familiar with this theoretical approach: 'Framing refers to the active process of selective emphasizing of information and position' (Matthes, 2014: 11). So mainstream media construct public discourse<sup>2</sup>, and, to make matters worse, they are mostly interested in dramatic headlines and stories to increase sales (especially in the case of privately owned and profit-oriented media as opposed to public broadcasting). On top of that, media can be used to address messages to individuals or groups, which is

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<sup>2</sup> This argument was valid in the 1970s – with the rise of social media and the result that consumers can now also be producers and distributors of content on channels like Twitter or Facebook, this is no longer completely applicable for the year 2018.

illustrated by a specific example: The author describes the publication of three lethal incidents between Pakistani men and Danish women in the Urdu pages of the *Fremmedarbejderbladet*, which may have been motivated by two different aims: either to inform their fellow communities to be aware, or to send out a word of warning to men to remain faithful to their Pakistani wives.

Overall, in this first focus, 'Perception', Shield illustrates that the unification idea as proclaimed by Marx and Engels has survived more than a century in aspects like the founding of workers unions and (to some extent) providing some support for the new colleagues. A sexual, emotional and/or legal unification between Danish and foreign workers rarely succeeded, and if so, only in small numbers. For further research it would be interesting to see if that has changed with the aftereffects of the latest migrations since 2015.

### **Solidarity: Reserved for the equal**

The second section deals with 'Solidarity' and describes the years 1974 to 1980 for the Netherlands, and the years 1974 to 1985 for Denmark. Social movements are no longer dominated by 'Old Left' stakeholders such as trade unions or traditional working class and left-wing parties, but the 'New Left', a much more inhomogeneous group: women's and feminist groups, anti-war activists, environmentalists, anti-colonial as well as immigrant rights groups, plus race-based civil rights groups formed alongside those demanding greater sexual liberation, which were fragmented subgroups promoting freedom and greater discussion of women's sexuality, premarital sex, sex education, pornography and erotic art, public nudity, partner swapping, and, gay and lesbian liberation<sup>3</sup>. Shield describes two left-wing foreign worker organisations in great detail, using literature as well as historic sources such as folders, and enriches his findings by two interviews held in 2014. Milestones mentioned in the chapter are historical events like a protest and hunger strike by Moroccan workers or the protest against the Grey Wolves, a radical right-wing Turkish group. The following Chapter 6 focuses on one of the groups described as 'New Left'. It vividly illustrates the tensions between the dominant European notion of feminism and lesbianism, and those who had similar goals but felt left out since they did not fit the middle-class women who represented and/or led the discourse: black<sup>4</sup>, migrant, and refugee

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<sup>3</sup> Shield refers for this statement to Mineke Bosch for the Netherlands and Annette Waring and Arthur Marrwick for Denmark [118, 139].

<sup>4</sup> While Shield uses the term 'black' in this chapter, in the introduction [6], he refers to the term 'woman of color', which in the Dutch case is used not only for women of Afro-

women – a discussion that still goes on today. On a larger scale, the chapter title is what may be considered the key statement although it is expressed in the negative: ‘Not a word about the oppression of women by men’ illustrates that for many feminists, the uniting element was not the fight for LGBT rights or against racism, but the fight against the patriarchal system [163]. But the goal of activism differed for other women, often determined by their background or origin.

### **Participation: social media writes his\_story**

The section ‘Participation’ starts with yet another different methodological approach: An analysis of contact ads in gay magazines, which are presented as the ‘social media’ of the pre-internet period [178]. For most of the analysis, the sample is well chosen<sup>5</sup>, and representative (750 out of ca. 3,500 ads). What is missing is a description of why those samples were chosen. Before presenting the results of the media analysis, Shield gives a short but dense introduction on homosexuality in Denmark and the Netherlands from the 1920s onwards, including the Dutch colonies at the time.

While one might expect an analysis in charts or percentage shares because of the relatively large sample of contact ads, Shield presents his analysis in selected quotes and their contextualisation. The author proves his in-depth knowledge of the zeitgeist and refers to various sources to explain the statements in the quotes; what he does not provide, however, is any quantitative data. It would have been interesting to see for instance the percentage of people who ‘outed’ themselves as individuals with dark skin or nationalities other than Danish or Dutch. In the case of the choice of qualitative aspects, some sort of methodical base would have helped to understand the selection process of the samples – Mayring (2014) would be an adequate method for this specific matter. In addition, the rate of men vs. women posting ads would have been interesting. To add a minor point of criticism, it might have helped to understand why those magazines appeared from the 1960s onwards by contextualising the Kinsey report – or, to be more precise, the way the report influenced the public discourse on homosexuality. For further reading, Eder (2009: 211-242) for example can be recommended. As a historian, Eder illustrates

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American descent, but also for Moroccan, Surinamese, Antillean, Moluccan, Papuan, Turkish, Hindustani, etc. women.

<sup>5</sup> For the Netherlands, Shield chose one spring and one fall issue of a specific contact magazine in the years 1965 to 1979 (i.e. a total of 500 articles out of approximately 2,500 existing ones); and for Denmark, one spring and one fall issue in the years 1971-1977 (a total of 250 articles out of approximately 1,000 existing ones). The additional analyses of further magazines (another Dutch one as well as a pan-Scandinavian periodical) seem not to follow any selection procedure or rule.

how the publication of the first empiric report on sexual behaviours highlighted the gap between moral ideals and sexual practices, and how, as a consequence, a wide range of films and advice literature, as well as relevant magazines, found their way to their consumers.

These two aspects should not devalue the lively and vibrant description of the homosexual scene, which continues in chapter 8 up to the 1980s. The method of choice is semi-structured interviews conducted with 57 individuals with, in terms of origin, different backgrounds (born Danish or Dutch, people from former colonies, former refugees and asylum seekers). In the introduction, the author broaches the issue of whitewashing – an often-overlooked aspect in academic literature on the topic of homosexuality in that period. Yet another critique in academia is that the discourse is dominated by able-bodied and cisgender individuals (individuals whose gender identity aligns with sex assignment at birth (Lange and Moore, 2017), which also applies for Shield's book. Although Shield clearly states that all his interview partners were male, we might criticise this near-exclusive focus on male homosexuality – it would be interesting to include more of the female (lesbian) point of view, too. And the current discussion does not end there. Jeppesen (2010) for example describes how aspects of global anarchist movements and queer politics add aspects like intersectionality and counterpublics to the theory and practice of the issue (see also Villeséche et al., 2018).

The selected samples give a good idea of the diversity within the gay scenes – with different aspects such as colour of skin, religious identification, urban or rural socialisation<sup>6</sup>, family ties, financial background, migrants of the so-called first or second generation, education, and housing. This clearly shows that the lowest common denominator of all these live stories is the sexual orientation of the individuals. This is what Shield summarises well, although he does not directly address it: there is no one story of gay immigrants and the local population during the sexual revolution; every individual has his/her own story.

## **Epilogue on epilogue and book**

This book review starts with the placement of the book in the wider academic discussion. And yes, it does broaden the current discourse by focusing on Denmark and the Netherlands, but it does more than this. By illustrating how the

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<sup>6</sup> In the introduction of an issue dedicated to historic migration research, Wadauer (2008) stresses the importance of migration from rural areas to urban centres – not only within state boundaries, but also beyond national borders.

so-called first generation of immigrants dealt with all kinds of non-normative sexuality in a changing world from the 1960s onwards, it helps the reader contextualise current media-generated debates on (Muslim) immigrants and their (assumed) attitudes towards queerness – and gender and sexuality more generally. The key question posed at the beginning is not exactly answered, since the book does not – as indicated on page 4 – analyse sources on/by politicians and journalists, but the experiences of straight migrants being confronted with homosexuality, as well as experiences of homosexual migrants, among other immigrant perspectives.

The title of the book and the actual content of it are matching well, as it does exactly what it says on the tin: It gives a comprehensive, well-investigated, dense insight on immigrants into the Netherlands and Denmark in the sexual revolution. The strength of the book is its methodology – the triangulation of literature review, media analysis and interviews provides the publication with a broad empirical base; the sample sizes chosen and analysed, as well as the number of conducted interviews are at least within, if not exceeding academic standards – with, in the case of the media analysis, the minor weakness of failing to tell us why the specific samples were chosen. Readers who are looking for grand theory or a middle range theory in which the content is embedded may be disappointed.

Bearing in mind that the use of predominately male sources represents and reinforces the predominately male-dominated discourse, *Immigrants in the Sexual Revolution* nevertheless is a must-read for scientists in the field and should also be considered as advice literature for journalists as well as politicians who shape public opinions on the matter. It could also serve as a starting point for fellow researchers to further explore the field: more (and bigger) countries with similar but different migration histories such as Germany, France, Spain, or the United Kingdom would be worthwhile objects of investigation. For the final statement, Shield himself summarises his third section, ‘Participation’, with a quote that can be considered valid for the whole book, and which provides all of ‘us’ in the field with an operating procedure for further research and analysis: ‘Overall, the narratives [...] challenge us to consider that nascent “queer migration” theories must be integrated into colonial, post-colonial, asylum, and labour migration histories’ [240].

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