Chapter

MULTIPLICITY OF QUEER ACTIVISM IN EAST ASIA: A COSMOPOLITAN IMAGINATION FOR JUSTICES

Po-Han Lee *

Department of Sociology, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

ABSTRACT

As queer activism has rapidly developed in East Asia, there is an emerging body of literature that is looking at each specific socio-political context. One of the common concerns is the effects of globalisation, through which the international LGBT rights discourse and politics have encountered state-sponsored queer-phobia. In this context, this essay reflects on the interviews conducted with queer activists in Taiwan, along with observations made at the Taiwan LGBT Pride from 2011 to 2015 and the sixth ILGA-Asia Conference in 2015. Attending to two intertwined themes – queerness and precarity – as as its expressive and material element, this essay identifies the dynamics of queer activism with an *assemblage* perspective (DeLanda, 2006), which considers the process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of its components and the power relations within and beyond the composition. Such coalitional politics is complex in that it does not aim to set common goals and pave coherent strategies. Rather, as argued in this essay, the 'rainbow coalition' – defined here as an interactive, transnational assemblage of queer social movements – has attempted to incorporate a cosmopolitan ideal and an

* Freeman Building G41, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QE
Email: pl236@sussex.ac.uk

intersectional approach to social exclusion, in order to legitimise the significance of queer activism vis-à-vis emerging reactionary forces in the region of East Asia.

Keywords: assemblage; cosmopolitanism; queerness as resistance; rainbow coalition; transnationalism

INTRODUCTION

The LGBT rights movement and state-sponsored homo/transphobia have become globalised almost simultaneously since the 2000s. Against this background, this essay reflects on the qualitative findings in situ, particularly in Taiwan, in order to rethink and attempt to respond to Baden Offord's questions concerning "the universal nature of human rights, the problem of cultural imperialism and the dynamic of the local and the global" (Offord 2013, 336) in East Asia. As suggested by Offord's argument regarding "extra-legal thinking", an exploration of the everydayness – including the sociocultural and political context – contained within the human rights discourse and values can help us understand how a queer social movement is negotiated, or negotiating, within and outside the society in which it emerges and between its composing parts (Offord 2006; Lee 2017). Most of the data is from my observations and interviews conducted at the sixth ILGA-Asia Conference (Conference) in 2015, along with other random contacts with activists that I had between 2011 and 2017. In so doing, an interrogation of the power and agency involved in making social imaginary and synthesising resistance becomes critically important (Erni 2010), especially when we are aware of the complexities, ambivalences, challenges, and difficulties in terms of "queerness/queering" in Asia (Wilson 2006).

"East Asia" normally indicates a few jurisdictions (such as China, both Koreas, Japan and Mongolia) for statistical convenience,[1] but it can also, in a more general geopolitical sense, be split up into "Northeast Asia" and "Southeast Asia". Notwithstanding this artificial division as the referents to the Global North vis-à-vis Global South – which is a categorisation made in the light of Western modernisation – the two are greatly interrelated. By referring to East Asia in this essay, I pay more attention to China and Taiwan and at the same time look at situations and developments in Southeast Asia in comparison. Hence, my focus on "East Asia" is a geographical sketch rather than indicating a politico-cultural landscape, which is not easily summarized (Lee 2019). Also, I would like to avoid any cultural determinism based on the Occidental/Oriental manifestation and

knowledge production – between the liberal versus the conservative – in order to prevent a strategic splitting at "a geopolitical level in the division of the old Third World into camps of the 'rising' and the 'rogue'" (Rao 2014, 201). In fact, nothing in this classification can describe the diversity in the said area, and none of it is directly relevant to sexual and gender minorities in different situations.

It is argued in this essay that many *queered* beings (not just sexual minority members but also those suffering from gender binarism, ableism, mentalism, racism and nationalism in a broad sense) still hold a vision of *becoming*-cosmopolitan. That is, a dynamic process seeking hospitality/inclusion constitutes – intentionally or unconsciously – an unmapped constellation (on a collective level) of single nomads against the normalcy and any project that produces hierarchical and exclusionary effects. I therefore name them a *rainbow coalition*, but I do not intend to totalise their existence. To conceptualise the transboundary coalition with the Deleuzian perspective of assemblage, this essay first captures the relationship between queer activists of different ideologies and strategies – ranging from mainstream assimilationists to sexual revolutionists – and those conservativists who are defending "Asian values" or other traditional virtues. These particular cases may rarely be considered valuable as part of global sexuality politics, but in a symbolic sense – beyond the mainstream battlefield of LGBT rights – they have offered an alternative imaginary of queer activism, making a path to the law of non-law, the politics of non-politics.

Through the *rainbow coalition*'s unpredictable, yet repeated, process of de- and re-territorialisation, these components provide more opportunities and dynamics in synthesising the momentum for pro-democracy movements across geopolitical East Asia. They may appropriate the human rights language in certain circumstances, but they view with caution the danger and beauty that coexist in the identity politics of vulnerability. In this essay, I start by mapping out global sexuality politics and how it affects the region of East Asia in particular. As Evelyn Blackwood and Mark Johnson conclude in *Queer Asian Subjects*, sexual subjectivities in this area are mutable and multiple; they are "no longer fixed in place, even as state discourses, hegemonic meanings and individual actors work to attach specific meanings to particular bodies" (Blackwood and Johnson 2012, 442). As part of the "global" landscape, research on queer activism in East Asian societies may serve to fill a general gap between Western theories and Eastern phenomena. Therefore, I consider that this is where the assemblage theory should intervene in identifying both the lines of force and the lines of flight in complementarity within general analytics of flows of power.

I employ the term "coalition" and intend to use it not as a descriptor but to mean a composition of Gilles Deleuze's assemblage, further applied by Manuel DeLanda

(2006; 2016). From this perspective, I try to capture the interactions between queer activists themselves and between them and others, including how they respond to the defenders of cultural traditions and how they think of the human rights discourse in the matrix of global sexuality politics. Here, the identified "others" can be state governments, international actors, minority members, and people living in the neighbourhood. Within the deployment of knowledge/power regarding gender, sexuality, citizenship and body, the assemblage of queerness and a social movement for sexual liberation is self-presented as a rhizome. Such an assemblage – both in terms of its discernible parts and as components of a larger coalition – extends to and encompasses different levels of social/sexual encounters. Bearing in mind the complexity and non-reducibility of queer subjectivities as mentioned, this does not prevent us from identifying the connecting points of the components – the *nodes* – and the folds of different planes in terms of dominance versus resistance.

All of the components reinforce and affect each other whenever they are attached to or detached from the assemblage, and meanwhile they retain a great extent of their autonomy, which allows them opportunities for "flight", to form a smaller assemblage – whether they eventually become the apparatus of the larger one or not. As an analytical approach to social transformation, the assemblage theory as applied in this essay contains three main elements: the contextual, the expressive, and the material. More specifically, the contextual element is comparable with Anthony Giddens' definition of *locales*, where the actors' social trajectories are "arrested or curtailed for the duration of encounters or social occasions" (Giddens 1986, 118). Therefore, as an assemblage knotting different singularities on a plane traversed by external and internal forces within and outside the society, the resemblance of queerness performs as a constellation. Its transformation occurs contingently and flexibly in a state of *becoming* but such changes are forecastable as long as we can identify the *capacities* and motions of its components.

STARTING FROM TAIWAN: QUEER EXISTENCE IN GEOPOLITICAL ASIA

From 28th to 30th October 2015, the Conference was perhaps the largest assembly of queer activists and scholars, with the theme *Independent Souls and Bodies*, held in Taipei, Taiwan. Sitting in a corner of the room, where the session regarding transmen's issues took place, I felt like a stranger among all of the activists. They argued over the communities that those presenters claim to represent.

Surprisingly many participants were familiar with the academic language such as hetero- or homonormativity, hegemonic masculinity, human and sexual rights, homonationalism and so forth. Regardless of the criticism from a lesbian feminist activist living in rural Indonesia, another activist from Jakarta emphasised that, "building a community is always the most crucial task, even more important than being visible (in front of society) or entitled with legal rights". A transgender activist from Bangkok continued, "We need to let people know they are not alone". "Is it somehow self-reflexive when you guys share these stories with us?" I was thinking about the motive for *doing* social activism. "Does the intention come from a complex emotion mixed with a desire for self-affirmation through *being needed*?" This question gained affirmation from the audience. I thus went on, "does our *will to resistance* – if we can call it that – also rely on a curiosity to explore our selves?" A Nepalese activist wholeheartedly responded:

> Being part of the activism, and the community it represents, I'm like a media, where not just information but also passion is going through and disseminated. My body becomes a carrier; when it works, my "friends" and I are mutually supportive; it's reciprocal. So, when we all become one – from one point to another – we are influential, even on a minor scale.

Let us return to the stage where these conversations happened. As a referent in East Asia, Taiwan has a special meaning in the region. Sometimes taken as a carrier, a messenger of Western knowledge, Taiwan stands out as a symbol of democratic transition, and plays a role as a mediator between the poles of powerful actors due to its cultural affinity with China and political friendship with the US. With a risk of overgeneralisation, Taiwanese people have however been described as *pariahs* within the matrices of the nation state-based structure of power (Wu 2012).[2] However, I would rather take another perspective: Taiwan is a convergent point of forces, bargaining with its semi-peripheral status in the global sexuality politics as well as international relations in general. Hence this section is about social activism for sexual and gender minorities in Taiwan – including its transformation and the trajectory of developing queerness in Taiwanese society – in a context where the democratic transition took place after the abolition of Martial Law in 1987. Out of an ambivalence towards traditional cultures, namely the prevalence of social harmony, and individualistic lifestyles, many societies in East Asia face similar problems to Taiwan in terms of the "awakening" of cultural nationalism and the re-emergence of sexual conservatism.

The components of the sexual rights and gender equality movement, against this background, have been stimulated to re-merge, re-territorialise and re-form an assemblage that is larger than it used to be – a *rainbow coalition*. I have found that in such a coalition each component or actor – either as an individual or as organisation – is pursuing not just visibility and empowerment but also greater influence in terms of social, political, and policymaking agendas through exchanging, accumulating and converting various forms of capital through interactions. In line with the anxiety about being Taiwanese in the face of all of the forms of oppression and domination from the West, from China, and even from the awkward existence of the ROC (Republic of China) government, the rainbow coalition relies on but also inversely provides soil for a *cosmopolitan* identity of Taiwaneseness to grow (Lee 2017). It is an ideologically driven process of self-liberation from the current difficult situation of Taiwan on the international stage – since the United Nations (UN), the symbol of "international community", expelled the ROC government in the 1970s – which most of the Taiwanese desire.

A social movement for sexual and gender minorities in Taiwan has been accompanied by a sexual liberation movement and a women's rights movement since the 1990s. It has faced competition in terms of knowledge production and strategy prioritisation within the heterogeneous groups, especially when the discourse of "LGBT rights as human rights" was imported. Despite several triumphs in terms of legislation and policies, voices for rethinking the familial values and stable gender roles have arisen again. All of these factors have complicated the inputs into the larger context of historicity in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War and the existing triangular relationship between China, Taiwan and the US in terms of geopolitics. This is where I started to theorise "Taiwaneseness". Most of the social movements that emerged after the Martial Law was lifted sway between a cultural root from Confucian communitarianism and an appeal to a liberal individualistic lifestyle. The Taiwanese have struggled to pursue emancipation from all sorts of domination, but at the same time, they hope to retain certain presupposed "virtues" in their tradition. Such ambivalence formulates a special version of cosmopolitan identity, owing to a perception of negative hospitality (Skrbis and Woodward 2007) in order to be distinguishable from the Chinese in China.

Taiwan's queer existence signifies a hybridity of various forms of nationalism of different "imagined communities", which makes the *Taiwaneseness* encoded with multiple and indefinite meanings through a process of self-producing and reaffirming its existence on a global scale. For the social activism representing the queer bodies and their lived experiences, it is inevitably involved within this cultural and political phenomenon: debates about what counts as democracy, the

rights and duties of a citizen, and the solidarity of a "community of the governed" (Foucault 2001). A *rainbow coalition* becomes critically observable. Researching and attempting to map out the trajectory of a social movement is not an easy task, because it can be too complex in many ways. Therefore, I started with the Pride parades in Taiwan, since the Pride event has always played a symbolic role as a convergent point of collective forces for sexual and gender minorities. The Pride 2011 was themed "LGBT Fight Back! Discrimination Get Out", in response to an earlier event in the same year. A curriculum programme on sexual health and gender equality proposed by LGBT rights organisations faced great opposition from homo/transphobic groups.

Since 2012, when the Pride started to popularise the idea of "Marriage Revolution: Marriage Equality, Partner Diversity", more direct confrontations have occurred between the conservative groups and queer activists. The conservative groups – as the renaissance of sexual conservativism – consist of people who appropriate and mix the ideologies of Evangelic Christianity and sex-negative Confucianism regarding gender roles, family formation, responsibilities in terms of parenting and reproduction, and sexual repression. Such a phenomenon has become more furious, and Ying-Chao Kao, a well-known activist sociologist of queer activism, has described it as "beyond a 'culture war'" in capturing the economic and political factors behind the facade of such pro-family ideologies.[3] In 2013, queer activists brought up another agenda, "Seeing Homosexuality 2.0 – Companion for Sexual Refugees". "Refugees" in such a narrative refer to those whose sexual practices or erotic desires do not conform with but suffer from both heteronormativity and homonormativity – that is, the marginal of these minorities, such as people engaging in polyamory, sadomasochism, open relationships and intergenerational intimacy, as well as sex workers and consumers. Such a radical liberationist perspective was for the very first time formally introduced to the public, turning subcultures onto the streets, which provoked many gay people's shame and embarrassment, as expressed on social media. Discernibly, there exists a great incoherence between the coalitional constituents.

"RAINBOW" COALITION IN TAIWAN AND ITS SYMBOLIC MEANINGS

Such a rupture and hence "estrangement" of queer activism has stimulated many *new* gay-led LGBT organisations to be formed, which aim explicitly at distinguishing themselves from those non-normative ones. They are against not

only the conservativists but also the radicalists. This has alerted the *represented* "single" queer community to face squarely the "multiplicity" of such a social movement, in which different groups of people living in Taiwan realise the variable extents of self-determination although all of them have undergone *a* similar journey of democratisation regardless of where they were originally from. People sought subjectivity in their national/cultural selves in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War. Between Chinese unification and Taiwanese independence, "being Taiwanese" per se became a self-problematised question; however, one thing that can be assured is that almost everyone is asking how to better realise *who I am* and *how to be who I am*, when their multiple identities are sometimes inconsistent with others living on the same land. Such ambivalence can also be found in queer activism and many other social movements in Taiwan. In this context, social activists may resort to a "cosmopolitan" perception of *becoming-Taiwanese* or *becoming-non-Chinese* in a fluid, dynamic sense.

Based on my interviews with activists from different groups and organisations, many of them have gradually shifted their focus from countering the conservatists (activism) to dialoguing with the public (advocacy). Those who are attending to feminist and queer politics have become more involved in other everyday struggles, incorporating gender and sexuality issues into other forms of subordination and thus democratising intimate citizenship. They would rather bypass those persistent objectors. Besides a distribution of work into institutional and extra-institutional politics by different organisations, queer activists show their allying position with other social struggles, such as the labour movement, the environmental and antinuclear movements, the disability rights and mental health movements. However, more notably, these social movements for different minority rights are further legitimised by allying with the pro-democracy (rather than the simplified understanding of "pro-independence") stance such as the Sunflower Student Movement in 2014 and the Anti-Textbook Revision Movement in 2015. These two, manifesting *Taiwaneseness* against both China's (the Republic of China as well as the People's Republic of China) spectres of authoritarianism, however, became patriarchal as a result when certain participants attempted to equate democracy with nationalistic independence and stuck by the masculinity-exclusive imaginary of 'sovereignty' by casting out the voices of the subordinated others. Thus, although the notions of human rights, Asian values and Western modernity all become challengeable for internationally excluded Taiwanese people, the discourse of *Taiwaneseness* can be no less dangerous if it fails to acknowledge the diverse perceptions of becoming and/or being a Taiwanese.

Congruently, *Taiwaneseness* per se, within a narrow view of international relations – the relations between states – is, as a queer existence, side by side with

sovereignty-based normativity, feeling self-contradictory between normalisation and self-determination. As for the status quo, nothing is fixed and stable. Living with Chinese traditions, Japanese legacies, Western influences and indigenous cultures, the conceptualised *Taiwaneseness* is non-reducible to a national cultural identity; instead, it is more like a sense of solidarity for a group of different peoples who cooperate and compete with each other but also live together and oppose the post-Westphalian norms. Interestingly, queer activists have combined the queerness of being Taiwanese and their sexual identities to coin the concept of "rainbow citizens" (*caihong-gongmin*), which has mitigated its original radicalness into a resonance of "peaceful self-determination" and "social harmony of diversity". Echoing the mainstream ideologies of multiculturalism and transitional justice in the notion of contemporary *Taiwaneseness* (Wang 2004), queer politics in Taiwan has been gradually transformed from confronting the heteronormative society to requesting democracy and coexistence (Hsu 2015). A mixture of political and sexual identities became more apparent when the queered/inscribed "rainbow citizens" were integrated into and recognised as part of the "rainbow people" (*caihong-renmin*) at the new president's inauguration on 20 May 2016.[4] "Rainbow" has become a symbol of Taiwanese solidarity as a whole, proclaiming a common destiny of the different peoples living on the same land.

As for a rainbow coalition, besides the democratic transition as the contextual element, and the unsettled Taiwaneseness as the expressive element, the last integral part – the material element – is the movement's power, convertible from the popular support and leverage influence in contentious politics as well as the momenta for resistance. In addition to the subjectivation of sexual and gender minorities by law, which conferred upon these members certain rights and legal recognition, assembling all of the unprivileged in society to counter the powerful can be strategic and tactical. It is and should be viewed as a multiplicity "which is made up of heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns" (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 69). Arguing for the necessity of such a coalition, I find – and most of my informants agreed – that a larger alliance is better at promoting its leverage effect against the conservativists in the light of the characteristics of *Taiwaneseness*. "Rainbow" as a cosmopolitan identity, an emancipation process, and solidarity of the community of the governed, signifies not only a shared ambivalence but also a sense of "community" against international powers. A process of re-territorialising the original LGBT rights movement has reached out to collaborate with other marginalised social and/or minority groups. This has translated the social marker of their "minority" status into a sense of "injustices", according to which it is given various referents, of different subjects, which are plural in form.

DEPLOYMENT OF SEXUALITY AND CULTURE IN EAST ASIAN SOCIETIES

During the Conference, what intrigued me the most was the strategies, beyond a legalistic approach, shared by the activists from other East Asian societies that might suffer more from "global sexuality politics" (Langlois 2015) than Taiwan, as the latter "stands out as a beacon" in the said region (Jacobs 2014). Since 2013, when the UN launched the *Free & Equal* campaign throughout the world, almost every UN-related agency has worked on "educating" governments on how to treat these minority members properly through formal and informal dialogues, such as the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) *Being LGBTI in Asia* – a regional project "aimed at addressing inequality, violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status, and promoting universal access to health and social services".[5] Described as the "neglected human rights challenge of our time" (Ban 2013), we may already envisage the difficulty of such a struggle because of the controversies around the issues of non-normative sexual practices, erotic desires and gender expressions.

After the US made LGBT rights one of its foreign policy priorities, the Secretary of State John Kerry appointed Randy Berry as the first Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBT Persons in February 2015. During an intensive schedule in the first year, including a trip around Asia from 30 January 30 to 13 February in 2016,[6] he singled out Indonesia, along with Russia and Uganda, as being of special concern, during a speech on March 14 (Lavers 2016). Two days later, Mr. Berry obtained the Special Recognition Award from the *OutRight Action International* (OutRight)[7] for "championing human rights for LGBTI people around the world".[8] On 4 March 2016, Ismail Cawidu, the spokesperson of the Indonesia's Communications and Information Ministry, announced the drafting of a bill banning websites that spread LGBT propaganda "apparently under pressure" from the House of Representatives Commission. In an interview, the Commission's chairperson, Mahfudz Siddiq concluded that, "LGBT issues can damage national security, identity, culture and the faith of Indonesians" (The Jakarta Post, 2016). Homosexuality is not illegal, except for the prohibitions upon Muslims in the provinces of Aceh and South Sumatra, and a vibrant transgender culture has traditionally been accepted. However, things have changed radically recently.

The Defence Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu described the LGBT rights movement as "modern warfare by Western nations". The Vice-President Jusuf

Kalla, enraged by a "fight for equal marriage rights", has urged that funding be reduced for the UNDP and other international projects, although the activists have stood up and clarified that they are not demanding any partnership and matrimonial right (BBC Asia, 2016). Earlier in February, Suzy Yusna Dewi, a member of the Indonesian Psychiatrists Association, defended a decision to re-classify homosexuality and transgenderism as mental disorders for the reason that they are *curable* "through psychiatric treatment" since sexualities and gender identities are "triggered" by environmental factors. Insisting on the infectiousness of such problems, he finally confessed that the significance of such a decision lies in upholding "Indonesian traditions, which…should not bow to the influence of foreign values that may not fit in with our values" (Yosephine 2016). Since a homo*internationalist* approach has now been taken by the US government as one of its pivotal diplomatic policies (Nath 2013), it is thus observable that sexualities in Indonesia are *deployed* through a "thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions" (Foucault 1980, 194). Nevertheless, "when we framed it in rights, there had not been progress," sighed an activist from Indonesia (Mosbergen 2015).

Besides Indonesia, here is another story. The Malaysian highest court has supported a ban on cross-dressing, following the sodomy trials against Anwar Ibrahim, the leader of the *Pakatan Rakyat* opposition (Menon 2015). Moreover, its Prime Minister, in a public speech, paralleled "the Islamic State and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community," which are both considered as brainwashing the younger generation "behind the facade of human rights to approve their acts which deviating from Islamic teaching" (Wee 2015). The other straightforward concern derives from the following: "What the Chinese government is afraid of is not human rights… but the human rights lectures". A Chinese lawyer that I met at the Conference made this remark. He asked, fairly speaking, how a state would like to be taught "how to be a good governor" if people themselves do not expect to be told "how to be a good person". Regardless of the appropriateness of making such an analogy, at this point, the biopolitical deployments upon personal bodies, desires and even identities is thus conflated by and enfolded with dualistic standards of sexual and gender norms that become negotiated and exchanged between domestic and global politics. The acts of countermeasure – a form of *self-defence* in response to international interference with domestic affairs – are directed to compromise those who do not conform to the nomos of the imagined community following the assumed victimisation of losing cultural sovereignty and/or national independence.

Queerness, which is supposed to be indefinite and plural, has hence become a determinate and distinctive threshold in circumscribing a "state of exception", as a battleground among genres of statecraft (Weber 2016). These are more than a classic case – under the banner of health, wellbeing and science – that are intentionally preventing, or at least countering, the so-called homo*colonialism* (Rahman 2014).[9] With respect to the tension between "the liberal West" and "the primitive *others*" and that between the mainstream and the *other-others* in those "primitive" societies, the flows of knowledge and power constituting a wilful countermeasure against LGBT identity politics have "overshadowed the role of Western actors in spreading homophobia" (Langlois 2015, 393) in the field of international human rights politics.

Through these interactions, internationally and domestically, an *assemblage* composed of a twofold deployment of sexuality becomes "a matter of a certain manipulation of relations of forces" (Foucault 1980, 196). Separated by the universal norms, the discreet queerness immanent in different bodies and selves, including those of the invisible and the unspeakable (Deleuze 2007), is thus subjectivised and classified by the solely legitimate international lawmakers – the states. Hence, each component of the "assemblage" should be taken as multiple singularities rather than as a representational and universal whole. That is to say, the politics of otherness (queerness) embodies the violence of de-*faulting* the unwanted and undesired status quo, such as the perceived awkward existence of Taiwan and other queerphobic countries, due to their "political incorrectness", through an international *outlawing* process or a human rights advocacy without acknowledging the need of belongingness. In this light, the process of othering the non-normative – either by self-representing as the righteous of modern humanity or by defending the sovereignty of traditional virtues – has resulted in a vicious circle that oppresses the queer bodies and souls in everyday life.

MULTIPLICITY OF VULNERABILITY AND COSMOPOLITAN IMAGINATION

Learning from the Western model of affirming sexual identity and sexual citizenship, most queer and LGBT rights activists in East Asia (particularly in urban areas) have been purposefully establishing a trend of social change for more visibility and participation by employing the discourse and language of human rights. The intent is clear. They are doing so in order to connect to a global community, a transnational network of non-normative individuals, attempting to

deterritorialise the deployments of gender stereotypes and sexual taboos in the societies in which the activism is located. Yet, the Executive Director of the *APCOM*, Thailand, has urged activists to evade the artificial opposition between the developed (North) and progressive (Occidental) versus the developing (South) and conservative (the Oriental). By referring to the *Pinkwatching Israel* movement against Israel's pinkwashing actions when talking about the situation in Brunei, he accentuates the damaging effect of a misled focus on "how to boycott, reject and detest the diplomatic strategies of any country" and advocates looking more upon "what is going on within local communities and rural areas". According to the Director of the *Sangsan Development Project* in Thailand, more than 300 youths who are documented as "incomplete citizens" are sexual and gender variant living in Mae Hong Son and Tak Provinces, bordering Myanmar. For these youths – who are homeless, landless, or even stateless – what matters is "not an identity-based rights" but "how to live a life without fear". Recalling Judith Butler's remark in an interview with Sara Ahmed (2016, 485, emphasis added):

> There is…vulnerability in taking the risk, knowing one will be called a name, or worse, but there is also a vulnerability in the name of which one acts, and which informs one's very acting… and that being affected is not a fully passive condition. *Vulnerability can be the condition of responsiveness*.

Unliveable lives out of precarity may sufficiently justify a powerful claim of human rights in relation to empowerment and social justice, as long as the rights here are defined "as the limits of the exercise of power… related to [a] certain strategic configuration in the society" (Foucault et al. 2016, 21). Nevertheless, another important question is how to critically evaluate the risk embedded in a political agenda based on the precariousness induced by the condition of "maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection" (Butler 2009, p. ii). That is, the politics of *resemblance* in representing sexual and gender minority members' powerlessness would strategically subsume the heterogeneity of personal struggles and lived experiences by taking up "a sort of 'convenience' that has been freed from the law of place and is able to function, without motion, from a distance" (Foucault 1994, 21). In order to avoid and dismantle the controversies posited by the biopolitics of precarity (Watson 2012), advocates become more careful with their "wording" when encoding their needs into the rights language by taking into

account the fact that "there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe" (Butler 2004, 32).

As for the subjects as rights-holders, for example, rather than resorting exclusively to the rights of LGBTI persons, the activists from Southeast Asia prefer to refer to the rights related to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) and simultaneously urge localism in expressing sexual desires and gender characteristics instead of directly appropriating the imported identity labels for sexual and gender minorities. With an awareness of the need to deal with an ungeneralisable status quo for people in different situations, they recognise the significance of applying the intersectionality perspective when initiating strategies, for instance, the *Common Language* in China and the *DBQueer* in Taiwan for "queer crips" who suffer from multiple marginalisation and compulsory heteronormativity and able-bodiedness, or *Salt* for queer Christians in the Chinese context where religious freedoms are restricted. As Deleuze once boldly contested, there are no "human rights but life rights" because "life goes case by case" (Deleuze 1996, 40). Thus, in Southeast Asia, an effective assemblage of queerness is actualisable only by creating "the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference", to use Lorde's (1982, 266) words. The politics of powerlessness hence converges and crystallises the resistance and struggles through assembling people at different margins of society against all forms of subjugation.

Reflecting – through the materialisation of queer individuals' disadvantaged situation and "political incorrectness" – upon the expressive properties of social activism in certain Southeast Asian societies, many of those whom I encountered at the Taiwan LGBT Pride from 2013 to 2015, especially those international participants, expressed their envy of Taiwan's carnivalesque style of queer activism, and some of them considered that the anti-subordination social movement would be better to remain *merely cultural* especially when the rule of law – the law of formalist majoritarian democracy – is unreliable. This resonates with "the silent change" concluded by a legal scholar who engaged in queer legal theory in China for years. By comparing two cases related to transgender rights and legal identification ruled respectively in Hong Kong and China,[10] he commented that the rule of law – just like the non-rule of law – in and by itself is too ambiguous and manipulatable. The former judgement is more hostile to the transgender conditions when interpreting "relevant laws", whereas the latter shows more sympathy to its plaintiff when "there is actually no law". Legal institutions are thus a "double-edged blade" if the society surrenders all power to organs governed by the state. He considers that "non-law" – or, a lack of law – evades the adversary influence of legal professionalism upon sexual and gender minorities when "we can imagine how bad the law would be if it exists".

In a context where a plea for legal protection is premature, sometimes sexual and gender minority members' freedom and wellbeing may derive from "the vacuum beyond the governments' sights" – a negotiated space between queer members and others in society. "No news is good news," said an activist from the *TEA Group*, Thailand, "what if the so-called *democracy* is based on a popular ideology which is homophobic?" The strategy of being *merely cultural* – bypassing the government – now has a twofold meaning in this context. One implies the negotiation within the society without the government's intervention, and the other anchors the hope on a supranational authority and translocal dialogues (see Delanty 2009; 2014). In this regard, the contested concept of *Asian values*[11] still has its place, as argued by an activist from *Sayoni*, Singapore, despite its illegitimate articulation of justifying a totalitarian government and oversimplifying the diversity in Asia. In fact, "people do not really disrespect these values". Ineludibly involved in such a context, queer activists, when contouring a cosmopolitanism imaginary, refer more to the strand that is presented "as a doctrine about culture and the self" (Scheffler 1999, 255) than to the Eurocentric one totalising the notions of moral hospitality in terms of global identity/citizenry politics against local nationalism.

On the one hand, activists from Southeast Asia endeavour to consolidate the solidarity bonding a community that "transforms singularities into members of a class, whose meaning is defined by a common property (the condition of belonging)" (Agamben 1993, 9). Nevertheless, they – particularly those from grassroots organisations in rural regions – anticipate an intercultural affect rather than arbitrary "support" from foreign governments, which would at times disservice and negatively affect the fruits of local activism. On the other hand, the properties must become contributable to the assemblage cosponsored by ontological precarity and queerness. A salient example is the *Statement on the ASEAN Community Vision 2025* adopted in November 2015 by the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus.[12] "An ASEAN citizenship is forming, as advocated by different marginal groups at the ASEAN Civil Society Conference and ASEAN People's Forum," said an activist from the Philippines, "the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus is promoting a supranational and transcultural cohesion by creating a new identity: *I'm an ASEAN*". Apparently, their version of Asian values is very different from the ones sponsored by the allied governments. Being an "ASEAN" (or Southeast Asian) is an equivocal concept, which still appreciates social cohesion and harmony. It is a political strategy that seeks to "peacefully" settle the conflicts between the non-normative and the normative in society, by drawing on resonances and reflections from diverse marginal communities in order to, acquiescently or expressively, enlarge the alliance based on an "indefinite friendship".

These formal connections and informal encounters between activists and the people they represent perform discernibly as a "coalition" composed of dispersed communities that "form the backbone of many social justice movements". (DeLanda 2006, 33) These components are heterogeneous but interrelated, autonomous but interactive, detachable but multipliable to circumvent and obstruct the hegemony internalised in everyday life and selves (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). A reservoir of resistance "by definition escapes pastoral power" (Foucault 2007, 212) which is formed, as a *community of the expelled* acting within the space left for the unwanted and undesired – due to queerness, cripness, indigenousness, and moreover, statelessness – that are "invisible" from the governmental *gaze*. Such coalitional forces in different local settings are channelled to those with whom these activists live rather than powerful agents of knowledge and institutions, demonstrating a "constellation of voices… of singularities, prolongable by certain operations, which converge… upon one or several assignable traits of expression" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 84 & 406).

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I intend to parallel the queer activism in Taiwan and in other Southeast Asian settings. The former, combined with an *awakened* sense of community against international powers, engages in building its hospitality and liberal attitude towards political cosmopolitanism, whereas the latter suffers gravely within the framework of the nation-state – oppression from "the imagined community", which leaves little room for exceptions and hopes to evade international politics. The latter, according to a researcher from the *iSEE*, Vietnam, intends to gradually intergrade non-normativity – to cultivate "a culture for subcultures", for example, the queer bike rally in Hanoi, the PRIDE Film Festival in Shanghai, and the Pink Dot event in Singapore. In this light, there exists the rule of no law, an apolitical politics, inasmuch as queer people can, in Foucault's words (1997, 160), "escape as much as possible from the type of relations that society proposes… and try to create in the empty space where [there] are new relational possibilities". This is particularly important – vernacular mobilization of human rights in Chua's (2015) phrase – in places where a "gap buffer" is necessary between the governed, the governors and the international community. Some may argue that a postcolonial reading may assist in scrutinising the landscape of the *politics of otherness* (queerness) within societies that are wary of the resurgence of imperialism and the *politics of powerlessness* (precarity) by the everyday strugglers living on the margins of society. However, the Conference, as an intersecting point

of lines of forces of queer activism drawn from variable contexts, provides us with several political implications produced by the rainbow "coalition".

Most significantly, various types of progress by relevant social movements are not reducibly interpretable as any kind of "hegemonism of possessing minorities" (Said 1979, 97) by both the Occidental/Oriental and normalcy/abnormality dialectics. Hence, the *rainbow coalition* is thus a conceptualisation of multiple motions and affects, by which it identifies a set of commonalities and variables between queer social movements in different social locales that frame the cultural and political environments for the lines of forces and lines of flights to intertwine. According to the three elements of an "assemblage" as an analytical tool, I have tried to capture these social movements' interconnectivity beyond the national sovereignty-based normativity and delimitation (expressive, also see Walker 1997) and their actualisation of the collective forces of resistance (material) against the common challenges from the polarisation of geopolitics and monopolisation of sexual and gender norms (contextual). In this light, a shared cosmopolitan imagination of *justices* – in a pluralistic sense – as well as a series of corresponding strategies become crucial, either for linking all of the socially excluded groups or for transgressing the global politics of sexuality and human rights. They, altogether, offer the "unwanted" a space to assemble.

The "coalition", as a transboundary circuit, directly opposes the exclusionary and hierarchical limits of current queer activism and should be viewed beyond the traditional understanding of a "collaboration" of different social movements. In so saying, an intended formation of a collective identity, such as *Taiwaneseness* or *ASEAN*, or the recourse to "human rights" cannot be simply criticised with a decontextualised reading of queer politics. As Offord once remarked, an insight into the sociocultural settings where queer activism emerged and social change happens actually "brings together self-reflexive and empirical methodologies in response to hegemonic challenges posed by the translation of human rights, sexuality and subjectivity across Western and Asian contexts" (Offord 2013, 346) and even between diverse Asian societies. Therefore, the dynamics of these encounters and the processes of reterritorialising the part or the whole of the social movement, which is plural both in form and in essence, present the spontaneities and contingencies of new social movements beyond identity politics (Melucci 1980; Offe 1985) and the metamorphosis of sexual and gender norms translated between domestic and international planes in geopolitical East Asia.

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1 See United Nations Statistics Division, Composition of macro geographical (continental) regions, geographical sub-regions, and selected economic and other groupings. Retrieved from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm (13 March 2020).

2 Rwei-Ren Wu's *Pariah Manifesto* has aroused a wave of polemics in Taiwan. He sees statehood as the inherent need to self-affirm Taiwanese people's existence. However, such an insistence on fulfilling the desire for national sovereignty, even though this kind of discourse gets much popular support in Taiwan, may overlook the "lack of the self" that derives partly from the differentiation within the society rather than just external oppression.

3 Ying-Chao Kao gave a series of speeches around Taiwan when the "war" between queer activists and "pro-family" organisations became aggressive and mobilised during the legislative review of the draft bill for marriage equality in late 2016.

4 See Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association's statement on the inauguration of new president. Retrieved from http://hotlinesouth.blogspot.co.uk/2016/05/20160520-520.html (17 March 2020).

5 See the official website of the project. Retrieved from https://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/programmes-and-initiatives/being-lgbt-in-asia.html (15 March 2020).

6 The trip includes countries such as Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, and Japan.

7 The OutRight, formerly known as the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, is one of the biggest LGBT rights organisations and was founded by Julie Dorf in 1990. Since then the organisation has not only contributed to the activist guide of the *Yogyakarta Principles in Action* in 2010 but has also cosponsored the "shadow reports" of many states in the UN human rights bodies and has now been accredited with consultative status in the UN.

8 See the official page of the Celebration of Courage 2016. Retrieved from https://www.outrightinternational.org/events/celebration-courage-2016 (17 March 2020).

9 Momin Rahman's critique of "homocolonialism" is developed along a trajectory

originating from Jasbir Puar's (2007; 2013) homonationalism and then Dipika Nath's (2013) homointernationalism.

[10] Both cases were decided in 2008. They are, respective, *W v. Registrar of Marriage* (Hong Kong) and *Gao, Tingting v. Dongfang Hospital* (Nanjing).

[11] At a public speech to UN member states in 2008, Singapore and Malaysia jointly submitted "Asian values", which mixes – awkwardly but consonantly – the communitarian hierarchy (nation, community, and family, then individual) of the Confucian ethical system, the colonial legacy of the British Empire in law and Judeo-Christianity, Islamic and Hindu cultures. Particularly in Singapore, which is multiracial, a direct reference to *Chinese* culture was intentionally prevented. In fact, this notion was first coined by Mahathir Mohamad (former Prime Minister of Malaysia), and later advocated by Lee Kuan Yew (former leader of Singapore) and it has gained popularity in China and Indonesia and partly in Japan. See Barr (2000; 2004); Langguth (2003).

[12] It was organised at the 2011 ASEAN Civil Society Conference of the ASEAN People's Forum in Jakarta, Indonesia, representing queer activists from eight states: Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.