



HAL
open science

Gender, Sexual Identities and Spatial Justice

Claire Hancock

► **To cite this version:**

Claire Hancock. Gender, Sexual Identities and Spatial Justice. *Justice spatiale = Spatial justice*, 2011, Gender, sexual identities and spatial justice, 3, <http://www.jssj.org/article/genre-identites-sexuelles-et-justice-spatiale/>. halshs-01581663

HAL Id: halshs-01581663

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01581663>

Submitted on 4 Sep 2017

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

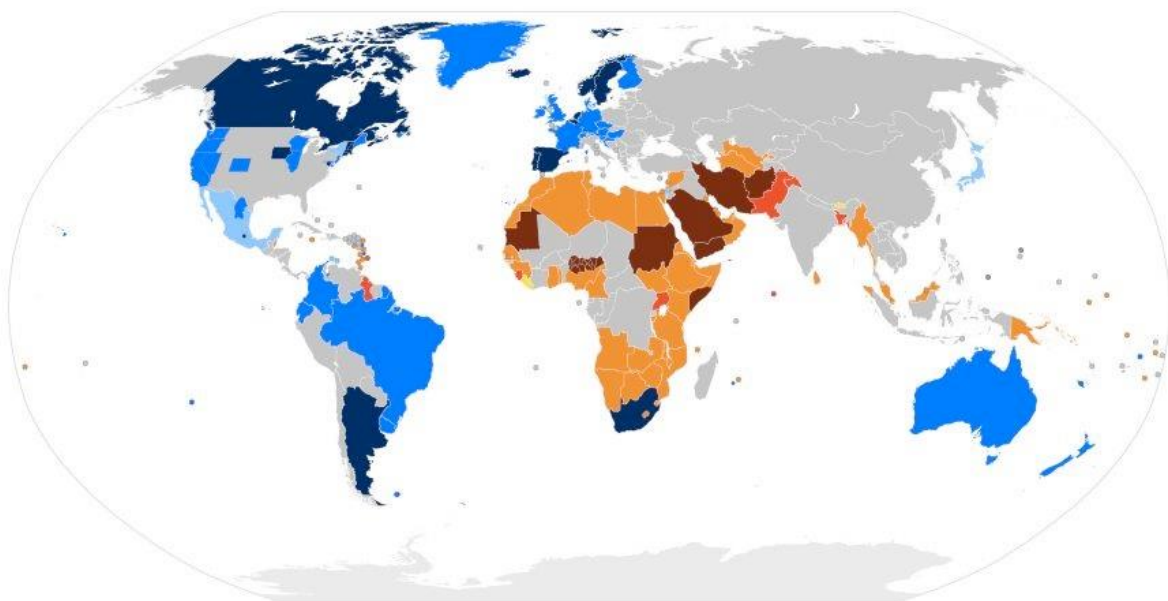
Gender, Sexual Identities and Spatial Justice

Claire Hancock, universit  Paris-Est   Cr teil

Gender inequalities and discriminations on the basis of sexual preference are two obvious aspects of injustice. The burden of poverty falls disproportionately on the female part of the population in all societies, however rich. Reproductive and care work are also unequally divided between men and women, while salaried work for women is often devalued, sometimes denied. The continued physical and systemic violence against gay people and gay activists in many countries is a reminder that sexual identity is a crucial question for geographers concerned with social justice. The aim of this special issue is to explore how gender and sexual identity are articulated in and through space.

From violence to the denial of a "place"

It is only too well known that sexual preferences can, in some parts of the world, expose to various forms of violence, from insult to murder¹, not to forget institutional violence, ranging from discrimination to the death penalty. One of our concerns as geographers, however, is to show that those "parts of the world" are not easy to map, despite the impression given by maps such as the one below, which we borrow from Wikipedia.



¹ As the killing, on January 26th, 2011, in Uganda, of LGBT activist David Kato, reminded the world all too cruelly.

Homosexuality legal	Homosexuality illegal
 Same-sex marriage	 Minimal penalty
 Other type of partnership (or unregistered cohabitation)	 Large penalty
 Same-sex marriage recognized, but not performed	 Life in prison
 Homosexuality legal but same-sex unions not recognized	 Death penalty

Legislation on homosexuality, map downloaded from Wikipedia (article on homosexuality) March 16th, 2011

Homophobia is to be found everywhere, in the West as in the rest, in large cities as well as backwaters, and imagining that it is vanquished by the "inclusiveness" of some particular places is an illusion. Inhabiting one of those "blue countries" that are supposedly havens of tolerance by no means protects against discrimination and violence.

The second reason we, as geographers who care for justice, are interested in the issue of sexual preferences, is that we are more than other social scientists concerned by the claim formulated by LGBT activists for a "place", a "visibility", a "right to the city", that are not purely metaphorical: for them, this refers to the possibility of living without having to hide an aspect of their identities and practices, of being recognized as legitimate in public space, without being threatened with violence. Anglophone geographers have shown how cities, from their housing markets to their offer of entertainment, embody the heterosexual privilege, analyzed in terms of "heteronormativity" (see for instance Hubbard, 2000). In many of the papers in this special edition the authors struggle with how women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people grapple with everyday exclusion in the city.

Where LGBTQ groups and feminists converge is on a refusal to be "rendered invisible" in public space which remains dominated, as it has long been, by white, able-bodied, male heterosexuals, who historically constituted as deviant or anecdotal "Others" all those who did not conform to the norm, did not resemble them or share their sexual preferences. While proclaiming "universal" human rights, they remained impervious to the discriminations encountered by those who did not conform to their understanding of the ideal-typical subject "Man".

Several of the texts gathered in this issue address these questions, and "locate" them very clearly in French society, and particularly in Paris.

Nadine Cattan and Anne Clerval are among the first French geographers to deal with the troubling question of the lesser visibility, in this city, of female homosexuality, though it is necessarily not numerically less significant than male homosexuality. They challenge the idea that there is a lesser tendency on the part of lesbians to "territorialize" their identity, and show mechanisms which determined the emergence, ebb and flow of lesbian businesses in the French capital, their complex relationship with the so-called "homosexual haven" (in fact mostly male), the Marais, and the resources found online to organize parties. To those who might challenge the use of "spatial justice" applied to the claim for places to meet and party, they remind of the crucial role, for a minority that is otherwise all but made invisible, of these places as part of the resistance to minorization, as well as personal fulfilment — though of course the degree of social openness of such places, essentially commercial in nature, might be questioned.

The spatial forms of gay identity have been more commonly addressed, and have led to a questioning of the "commercialization" of identities, as both Marianne Blidon and Renaud Boivin

show in their respective papers. Marianne Blidon uses the concept of "recognition", as theorized by Taylor and Fraser, to show that the spatial recognition gained by gays and lesbians takes place in a neo-liberal mode that implies multiple exclusions based on class and race. In a similar vein, Renaud Boivin explores how spatial "aggregation" of gays in central Paris goes along with forms of gentrification, segregation and exclusion of those who do not subscribe to the gay model prevalent in the Marais: he outlines individual strategies that vary from distancing to adhesion, and as a function of social positions. By so doing, he constructs a critique of gay normalization that converges with Lisa Duggan's idea of "homonormativity", and emphasizes the spatial components of the evolution.

Both these papers therefore contribute to the ongoing debate on intersectionality, by illuminating ways in which different forms of domination are likely to cumulate, intersect, or go in opposite directions, and they show what a specifically spatial reading of intersectionality could be: spaces that manifest and host one form of minority difference (sexual orientation, for instance) may however exclude other forms of difference, to do with class, means, the fact one is a woman or a transsexual, or a member of a racialized group.

The paper by Bettina Van Hoven discusses mainly heterosexual constructions of masculinity, in terms of spatial injustice: in all countries, a large majority of prisoners is male, and for similar crimes women are much less likely than men to be sentenced to imprisonment. Confronted with this gendered injustice, how are imprisoned masculinities constituted, and what roles enable inmates to put up with detention? This paper on the negotiations of masculinity in prisons interrogates the gendered and sexual identities available to a generally marginalized and systemically excluded population in an environment where a sense of citizenship and belonging is entirely circumscribed. For Van Hoven prison brings into question the conventional wisdoms concerning masculinity as they are expressed in everyday culture. It is an important article in this collection because it brings into relief the norms associated with masculinity and presents a tool for laying open the construction of this ideal-typical subject "Man" in the city.

The recognition/redistribution dilemma runs through most of the papers presented here. Monique Bertrand's research on women's roles in African cities shows concern both for the discrimination they suffer in terms of land property, a redistributive issue, but primarily challenges the way women, in the discourse of NGOs and international agencies, are cast as "local" agents, assigned a role in a space that is confined to proximity, but never thought of as agents of change at the national level—clearly a case of misrecognition.

Two of the papers presented here explicitly engage theories of recognition, one of which deals with gay and lesbian rights in France, the other with poor migrant women in Southern Spain. Blidon's paper shows how the physical settings offered same-sex couples contracting civil partnerships either grant them full recognition, or make them second-class citizens, excluded from the social and political ritualization of marriage. Zeneidi argues that migrant women are able to cope with the hardships of discrimination on the workplace thanks to the recognition they gain as providers for their families, much as they put up with being housed in guarded barracks provided they are given the freedom to cross borders and access to Europe.

Despite these theoretical convergences, we regret that, as texts came in, a form of segregation occurred between, on the one hand, articles dealing with women's issues, and the spatial injustices they encounter, mostly in countries of the global South, and on the other hand, the injustices suffered by members of "sexual minorities", mostly in the global North (though Renaud Boivin's doctoral dissertation, that also includes work in Mexico, may in the future overcome this divide). This segregation might give the erroneous impression that in France, all issues of sexism have been overcome, and that struggles only concern the recognition and visibility of sexual minorities—or maybe even, that such struggles are "luxuries" that poorer countries cannot afford. We want to caution against this impression, and the extremely dangerous smugness with which many European

countries nowadays locate whatever forms of sexism they identify on their territories with racial minorities (Muslim in particular), as though it were a form of import brought in from the South by immigrants.

In a geographical perspective, this reminds us that a scientific approach consists, not in going to verify that sexism or homophobia are actually to be found where we suppose they are (and where the hysterical demonization of Islam would have us look for it), but in teasing them out from where they are hiding (perhaps not all that well...), in national institutions, strongholds of power, in the so-called "national representation" that fails dismally at representing French diversity.

A conference held in January 2011 in Amsterdam settled on the phrase "sexual nationalisms" to speak of the tendency, in many European countries, to give a sexual content to European "values" used to lambast immigrant populations². One of the conclusions was that, whether nationalism is formulated in terms that are essentially heterosexual, as is the case in France, or stresses the rights of homosexuals, as in the Netherlands, a common tendency is to blame on a racialized Other, more and more systematically a Muslim Other, forms of sexism or homophobia of which Christian Europeans considered themselves exempt. It is useful here to record scholar of secularism Jean Baubérot's retort, during his hearing by the French parliamentary commission given the task of gathering evidence and reporting on the issue of "full veils" or burqas in France, that "it is a paradox that an Assembly constituted by 80% of men, from parties that pay not to comply with the laws instituting parity, is giving lessons to Islam" (quoted on p. 428 of the commission's report, made public on January 26th, 2010).

"The personal is political": opening spaces of political subjectivation

One might expect feminist groups to be alert to such facts. In fact, as Susan Faludi points out in a recent preface to her 1991 classic *Backlash*, Western feminism seems to have lost its compass, and fallen victim to the same sort of commercialization that some papers in this issue describe in the LGBT minorities:

"In the years since feminism's revival in the early 1970s, American women have sped across so much ground that we can scarcely recognize the lives our grandmothers lived. We have won so many contests, leveled so many barriers, that the changes wrought by the women's movement are widely viewed as irreversible, even by feminist's most committed antagonists. Yet, as women near the finish line, we are distracted. We have stopped to gather glittery trinkets from an apparent admirer. The admirer is the marketplace, and the trinkets are the bounty of a commercial culture, which has deployed the language of liberation as a new and powerful tool of subjugation. (...) We live in a time when the very fundamentals of feminism have been recast in commercial terms." (Faludi, 2006: XIV)

It is important, obviously, not to make light of what financial independence may have meant and means for many women. In her text about Moroccan migrants, Djemila Zeneidi points out that for those women, acquiring material goods such as a mobile phone and a handbag, having their own bank account, function as potent symbols of autonomy and contribute to their sense of self-esteem. However, waving a credit card about in fashion stores is surely not the acme of female emancipation magazines would have us believe.

Another shortcoming of some feminist groups, in France in particular, is the way they have allowed themselves to be enlisted by the current government in the crusade against Muslim headscarves. By so doing, they are forgetful of early struggles against the bra or high-heeled shoes as symbols of female subordination, and the fact that it has now become widely accepted that these symbols may actually be reclaimed as empowering by some women who choose to wear them.

Images of the popular uprisings which have taken place in the Arab countries and in Iran during the first months of 2011 showed that in the crowds, veiled women were demonstrating alongside men,

² See sexualnationalism.org

which should help us to rethink stereotypes of "Muslim women" as victims, unable to act or speak. The text by Lucia Direnberger, in our Public Space section, discusses women's place in Iranian public space, generally, and questions the iconic status given to the young "martyr" Neda during the 2009 demonstrations: why was the image of a young woman as victim, silenced, and probably not an active participant in the movement, picked rather than one of the many active female demonstrators? Not only were there many of them, but they were also articulate, and this paper gives a voice to many Muslim feminists of whom many, in Western Europe, believe their veil talks for them, and they have nothing audible to say.

Safaa Monqid gives a say to women from deprived neighbourhoods of Rabat, Morocco, who have much to tell of the constraints on their daily mobility outside the home and the difficulties they face in asserting their right to the city (difficulties that are both economic and to do with social norms that confine them to their local area). However, the paper also shows how strongly these women engage with their neighbourhood, which they use as a preeminent social resource, and the strategies deployed by the younger women in particular to gain access to the centre of the city.

Djemila Zeneidi also met Moroccan women, among those who are used as guinea pigs in a much vaunted policy of "chosen immigration" on the part of the European Union, the "contracts in origin" which bring to the South of Europe, as disposable agricultural labour, mostly women, considered more docile, and with family responsibilities (betting on the fact a woman would not abandon her children in her country). While the scholar is appalled by the conditions in which these women are made to live and work, what they themselves consider a major injustice is not being hired again for the subsequent harvest, since this deprived them of a migratory experience they find gratifying despite everything.

As we pointed out above, several of the texts presented here use theories of recognition, either Taylor's or Honneth's, understandably so, since sexual minorities have historically been, in the US in particular, active in "identity politics", along with racial minorities, clamouring for "recognition".

Nancy Fraser has underlined the dangers of the "identity model", which displaces economic inequalities, and tends to essentialize identities fraught with internal tensions (as shown by the Black Feminists, or the Queer movements). She argued that theories of identity, based on psychological analysis that are fully functional at the individual level, are problematic when applied to groups. She also saw a way of overcoming this difficulty and avoiding these pitfalls by making recognition an institutional issue, and considering it as a question of equal status, not identity: i.e., parity of political participation, and institutional equality, in society. The example she uses to illustrate this point is relevant here: she says that without a right to same-sex marriage, there is an institutional inequality between homosexual and heterosexual couples, that is an injustice and needs to be addressed. What is at stake here is not the recognition of specific rights linked to a specific identity, but the recognition of equality, as fully-fledged members of society and of the body politic.

The idea that the recognition of diverse "communities" in society is actually detrimental to social justice rather than an integral part of it is extremely popular in universalist France. It is telling, for instance, that a book by US scholar Walter Benn Michaels entitled *The Trouble with Diversity* (2006) in the original was translated into French under the title *La diversité contre l'égalité* (Diversity against equality).

This is typical of a French tendency to pit forms of domination against each other, and to see minorities as competing against each other. In France, as has been shown by the Fassin brothers, it is not so much "identities" that are clamouring for recognition as forms of discrimination; hence a definition of minorities as groups based on "the shared experience of discrimination" (Fassin and Fassin, 2006, p. 251). Hence also what has been termed the "minoritarian paradox", the obligation to "speak up as in order to refuse being treated as" (p. 253), or in the terms of Joan Wallach Scott, "the need to assert and to refuse difference at the same time" (Scott, 1996, quoted in Fassin et Fassin, 2006, p. 252).

Jacques Rancière provides an elegant way out of this very French conundrum, the "endless debate between identity and universality", by emphasizing that "the only political universal is equality" (1998, p. 116). He writes:

"When groups who are victims of injustice seek redress for a wrong, they usually refer to humanity and its rights. But universality does not reside in those concepts. It resides in the argumentative process which demonstrates their consequences, that says what results from the fact that the worker is a citizen, that the Black is a human being, etc." (1998, p. 116).

Rancière argues convincingly that the "construction of cases of equality is not the result of an identity or the demonstration of the specific values of a group", but "a process of subjectivation" (p. 118). The claim is not for specific rights for women or sexual or racial minorities based on their identity or their specificity, but for a recognition of equality, and equal status as subject of the political, for each member of these groups. Rancière calls the logics of political subjectivation "heterology" or "logics of the other", because "it is never the mere assertion of an identity, it is always also the refusal of an identity imposed by another" (p. 121).

These thinkers' contributions seem highly relevant to spatial justice for several reasons. First, it seems to us that one of the criteria of "parity of participation" is visibility in public space, as claimed by women and LGBTQ groups, and that spatial strategies are crucial to the assertion of equality, as well as the articulation of wrongs. Secondly, in the terms of Rancière, what is at stake is the construction of a "space of subjectivation", a space to exist politically and be heard as an equal, that is not a mere metaphor but actually, as all the papers in this issue show, implies a physical access to public space, a "place of one's own" in the city.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Teresa Dirsuweit for her assistance in editing this special issue. Thank you also to Philippe Gervais-Lambony for promoting the idea, and to all those who helped to make it, in different ways: Laurent Chauvet, Melanie Mauthner and Muriel Froment-Meurice for their translations, Lynda Amara, Aurélie Quentin, Karine Ginisty and Frédéric Dufaux for their help preparing the texts and their invaluable expertise for putting them online.

About the author : Claire HANCOCK, Lab'Urba, Université Paris Est-Créteil

To quote this article : Claire HANCOCK, « Genre, identités sexuelles et justice spatiale » ["Gender, sexual identities and spatial justice", traduction : Claire Hancock] **justice spatiale | spatial justice**, n° 03 mars | march 2011, <http://www.jssj.org>

References

- FALUDI S.**, *Preface to the 15th anniversary edition of Backlash. The Undeclared War on American Women*, Three Rivers Press (CA), 2006.
- FASSIN D., FASSIN E.** (dir.), *De la question sociale à la question raciale ? Représenter la société française*, Paris : La Découverte, Cahiers libres, 2006.
- FRASER N.**, « Rethinking Recognition », *New Left Review*, n°3, pp. 107-120, May- June, 2000.
- PURCELL M.**, « Excavating Lefebvre: The right to the city and its urban politics of the Inhabitant », *GeoJournal*, (58), 99-108, 2002.
- RANCIERE J.**, *Aux bords du politique*, Paris : Gallimard, Folio Essais, 1998. (First edition 1992, translated as *On the Shores of Politics*, London ; New York: Verso, 1995.)
- SCOTT J. W.**, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, Cambridge ; London: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- SCOTT J. W.**, *Sexularism*, The Robert Schuman Centre Distinguished Lecture, European University Institute, Florence, Italy, 23 April 2009.