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HUMANITNÍCH STUDIÍ
Univerzita Karlova**

Evaluation of the MA Thesis *Mapping Bisexuality in the Czech Asylum system* by Briana M. Roberts

In this thesis Briana Roberts examines the role and effects of bisexuality in Czech asylum law through an analysis of select UN, EU, and Czech legal documents, three Czech Supreme Administrative Court cases and four interviews with Czech LGBTQ and asylum experts. The thesis is very fluently written and demonstrates a good grasp of the theoretical and empirical material analysed. I particularly commend the sensitivity and nuance in describing the processes of rendering bisexuality in asylum procedures invisible, inauthentic, or inconsequential. Here the thesis draws on a small set of critical scholarly texts on the role of bisexuality in asylum law in Anglophone and Scandinavian countries with a larger refugee intake than the Czech Republic (that ranks bottom within the EU in this respect.) These texts inform the theoretical ‘framework’ which is a set of analytical foci (language, visibility and credibility, passing and ‘discretion requirement’, absences and erasure) distilled from the existing literature that also constitute the coding categories and frame the analysis.

While these foci provide a tight fit of the empirical analysis with the exiting literature (indeed each analytical section starts with what is established), it is not entirely clear how these categories or issues are (inter)related. Together with overlaps of the ‘background’ and literature review chapters this leads to repetitions and sometimes obscures the author’s own voice and analytical work – a voice that come through, for example on pages 62 and 75 and in the final three pages of the concluding chapter. Here I like Roberts’ ideas around ‘selective “visibility”’ (81) that begins question a simple opposition of bisexuality’s presence or absence (Strauss and Star’s ‘Layers of Silence, Arenas of Voice’ is a further possible resource to work with a more complex understandings of presence/absence for a future publication).

Formally, the thesis would have benefitted from a last round of revisions to eliminate repetitions (e.g. p. 9, 18 but also between background, literature and analysis), the addition of subsections and -headings in the literature review and final discussion (chapter 7), and putting Czech original in footnotes (rather than the main text) to improve readability, build the argument and lead the reader through the text. Changes and constraints due to the pandemic might explain what appears a little rushed.



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Further, a sentence on historical development of integrating gender and sexuality into UN, EU and national asylum legislation and guidance would be desirable to contextualise the Czech case. Reference could be made to theorizations of bisexuality in gender studies (why the undated reference to a website by R. Ochs, rather than her published work and/or other work that considers bisexuality's epistemological potentials such as M. Storr's work or C. Hemmings' *Bisexual Spaces*?) for a critique of the very logics of identity, recognition and adjudicating deservingness that buttress current asylum systems as Roberts suggests in closing.

In view of these comments, I suggest that Briana Roberts expand on the following interrelated queries: First, what are the main issues regarding the role of bisexuality emerging through the analysis, and *how do they relate*? Are these factors working cumulatively, or are some processes subsumed to or able to destabilize others? Comment on this in light of two provocative observations: the possibility that racism and Islamophobia are more decisive for asylum decisions than is (bi)sexuality (as in the expert comment that Czechs 'don't mind the sexual minorities; we do mind the non-white, non-Catholic minorities' (p. 69)), and the rulings of the Supreme Administrative Court that have protected bisexual asylum applicants over regional courts on the grounds of likely prosecution in their countries of origin. (The map or cartography of bisexuality in asylum becomes much more dynamic in this light!)

Second, are their places where the analysis conflicts or resituates what has been argued in the literature for the role of bisexuality in Northern and Western European asylum systems?

Third, is there indication in the fieldwork of anxieties that bisexuality could destabilize gender and sexuality categories (as argued by K. Yosino)? In what ways might critical theories of gender and sexuality and intersectionality (a concept that emerged from legal analysis) which highlight more fluid practices and identifications assist a reform of asylum law, training and procedure?

Overall, the thesis is competently written and informative, I recommend the grade 1-2
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