

**Carl F. Stychin, *Governing Sexuality: The Changing Politics of Citizenship and Law Reform*. Oxford: Hart, 2003. Pp. x, 162.**

In this book, Carl Stychin explores a number of struggles for recognition of same-sex sexualities within European spheres of citizenship. His aim is not so much to systematically trace out the trajectory of any particular rights struggle, as it is to offer a series of points of access for us to inquire into both the possibilities and the limits of citizenship discourses for those who seek to challenge hetero-normativity.

Stychin's provocative thesis is that whenever we deploy citizenship claims to achieve recognition for same-sex sexualities, we invite heightened levels of social scrutiny into our life choices: the technologies of citizenship amplify demands for hetero-normative assimilation, normalization, and disciplinarity (in the form of capitalist participation, monogamy, normalized gender roles, etc.). Stychin is careful, however, to remind us that disciplinary pressures inevitably engender unpredictable eruptions of resistance—in just the same way that hetero-normative oppression provides the impetus for the Pride movement. As such, “[t]he ability of law to manage and to discipline is never totalising, and subjects are not necessarily as docile nor as unimaginative as we may sometimes think” (113). Thus, the question is not whether those of us involved in struggles surrounding same-sex sexualities should engage in “assimilative” citizenship politics in exchange for the practical benefits that accrue to those included within citizenship’s ambit, or, instead, struggle to maintain “transgressive” sexual identities that are actively corrosive to hetero-normativity. Framing the debate in this way is unhelpful because *all* identity politics (consider contemporary struggles of bisexuals for recognition in gay communities) replicate the “normalization accompanies inclusion claims” pattern visible in citizenship discourses, regardless of where we decide to draw the particular lines around that inclusion (e.g., the polity, the LBGT community, etc.); and all normalization provokes unanticipated forms of corrosive resistance, which in turn produces a corresponding set of emerging identities. Where we should focus our efforts instead, Stychin suggests, is on understanding the complexity of the interaction between inclusion and normalization. Such an understanding is important partly to avoid the unnecessarily divisive name-calling of the transgression versus assimilation debate, but also partly to help us imagine new ways for thinking about “how law might be used to facilitate (or at least remain neutral towards) an endless variety of ways of living, less constrained by a heteronormative world order” (4).

The book opens with a general discussion of a number of the inclusion/exclusion binaries that constitute citizenship—a discussion that will prove an essential guide to the rest of the work for the reader unfamiliar with the explosion of academic discourse on citizenship in the past decade, and in particular with the critiques of citizenship talk by post-structural feminists and queer theorists. In this discussion, Stychin basically reiterates Judith Butler’s contention that all inclusion both excludes and disciplines those whom it includes—but that there remains an important distinction between an inclusion that seeks to naturalize and obscure its boundary drawing and normalization

processes, and an inclusion which attempts to render its own boundaries and disciplinary effects both contingent and explicitly open to political challenge. As Stychin puts it:

[T]he interesting questions in relation to sexual citizenship turn not on whether citizenship disciplines, or whether it can serve as a means of resistance or empowerment, for undoubtedly the language of citizenship and rights can do both simultaneously. Rather, of interest is *how* citizenship discourse might be deployed, a quintessentially *political* question going to issues of strategy and the role of legal discourse (14).

The book proceeds to examine this question through a series of vignettes of European debates surrounding same-sex sexuality inclusion claims in, notably, Britain's Third Way, French Republicanism, the decisions of the European Court of Justice, and the discussions surrounding EU accession of Romania. In each case, Stychin cites from transcribed public debates to offer examples of how the language of citizenship produces both empowering and disciplining effects on those making (and those contesting) inclusion claims. For those of us more familiar with North American sexual citizenship politics, these debates provide fascinating distorting mirrors from which to reconsider our own experiences.

Sitting somewhat unexpectedly in the middle of these vignettes is an intriguing discussion of the role of mobility across borders in discourses of sexual citizenship. As Stychin has persuasively argued elsewhere, there are close parallels between traditional mainstream anxieties over border control and anxieties with respect to homosexuality:

[T]he figure of the illegal alien provides a useful analogue to the homosexual. Both are produced as outside the bounds of normalcy, and of law, and they are strangers; but also the most dangerous strangers of all, in that they are *essentially* different, but also able to "pass" undetected in the absence of close surveillance (99).

Because of the centrality of these metaphors, Stychin celebrates what he calls the remarkable "hegemonic shift" in the recent changes in one of the key intersections between these two anxieties, the repeal of homosexual exclusion in immigration laws around the world at the turn of the century. Yet, he is quick point out that these repeals have, consistent with the pattern he establishes throughout the book, actually increased the surveillance to which homosexual bodies and relationships are subject at the border—a surveillance justified by reference to the tropes of disease (e.g., AIDS) and "immigration fraud" (e.g., scrutiny of same-sex partnerships for legitimacy, as defined against hetero-normative standards).

By the end of Stychin's book, the reader has encountered a variety of forms and modes of claims for recognition and inclusion for same-sex sexualities in European legal settings, has seen how some of these claims both relate to and spill across borders in complex ways, and has witnessed many compelling examples of how with inclusion and recognition inevitably comes disciplinarity and normalization. Unfortunately, Stychin does not offer us much of an indication as to what we should

do once we understand the complexities he has elucidated, beyond taking satisfaction in the hopeful prediction he offers that we are likely to see in the near future a proliferation of critical voices in sexual citizenship politics that will challenge how we govern ourselves through law.

Stychin suggests that this book “marks the end of [his] intellectual journey on these particular themes” (140). When I finished the book, however, I had the distinct impression that this was just a beginning.

Sean Rehaag

---