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ABSTRACT
This article examines what a critical focus on the region can contribute to the study of LGBTQ politics in Europe. It is argued that a regional lens can challenge methodological nationalism in existing studies of European LGBTQ politics. It can also contribute towards a broader examination of the politics of scale in relation to the Europeanisation of LGBTQ politics. The article discusses alternative theoretical approaches to the region and examines the queer affinities of these approaches in turn. The argument proceeds to consider the political effects of these alternative theoretical framings of the region in contemporary LGBTQ politics in Europe. It is suggested that a regional critical lens can foreground sub-national and transnational regional political formations, which otherwise may be overlooked in an uncritical focus on the national scale of LGBTQ politics. A regional perspective can also help unsettle Anglo-American framings of sexual politics.

Regionalismo queer crítico y política LGBTQ en Europa

RESUMEN
Este artículo analiza lo que un enfoque crítico en la región puede contribuir al estudio de la política LGBTQ en Europa. Se argumenta que un punto de vista regional puede desafiar un nacionalismo metodológico en los estudios de la política LGBTQ europea. También puede contribuir a un análisis más amplio de la política de escala en relación a la europeización de la política LGBTQ. El artículo discute abordajes teóricos alternativos a la región al tiempo que examina las afinidades queer a estos abordajes. El argumento considera los efectos políticos de estos marcos teóricos alternativos de la región en la política LGTBQ contemporánea en Europa. Se sugiere que una perspectiva crítica regional puede destacar formaciones políticas regionales subnacionales y transnacionales, las cuales de otra forma se podrían pasar por alto en un foco acrítico sobre la escala nacional de la política LGTBQ. Una perspectiva regional también puede ayudar a desestabilizar el marco angloamericano de la política sexual.

批判性酷儿的区域性与欧洲的LGBTQ政治

摘要
本文检视批判性地聚焦于区域如何能够对欧洲的LGBTQ政治之研究作出贡献。本文主张，区域视角能够挑战欧洲LGBTQ既有的政治研究中的方法论国族主义。它同时能够对于更广阔地检视尺度政治之于LGBTQ政治的欧洲化作出贡献。本文探讨区域的另类理论取径，并依次检视这些取径的酷儿倾向。本文主张接续考量这些欧洲当代LGBTQ政治的另类理论架构的政治效应。本文主张，区域性的批判视角，能够凸显出次国家与跨国的区域政治形构，而这些面向，则有可能在不具批判性地聚焦LGBTQ政治的国家尺度中被忽略。区域的视角，同时能够有助于动摇英美世界的性政治架构。

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Introduction

The region – a foundational concept in human geography – has not received the same level of critical attention within geographies of sexualities compared to other spatial scales such as the city or the neighbourhood. There have been relatively few explicit and sustained attempts to theorise the relationship between region and queer, and there is scope for a more concerted theoretical engagement with the region than exists at present. In this article, I examine what a critical focus on the region can contribute to the study of LGBTQ politics in Europe. Despite the recent growth of theoretical interest in European LGBTQ politics (Ammaturo 2015; Downing and Gillett 2011; El-Tayeb 2011; Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011; Rosello and Dasgupta 2014), there is still an urgent need for more work to theorise scale in relation to the geopolitics of Europeanisation in LGBTQ politics. I argue that a critical queer perspective on the region can make a significant contribution towards such a project. Europe is a contested geopolitical entity and ongoing project of geopolitical imagination and can be approached as a region if we conceive Europe as a region at the continental scale. Further, Europe can also be envisaged as a constellation of regions operating both within and across the boundaries of nation states. The region plays a significant role within contested geopolitical imaginations of Europe (Kuus 2004; Sellar, Staddon, and Young 2009). How Europe is envisaged differs markedly in different regional contexts. How to theorise the region in relation to the contested imaginations of Europe and practices of Europeanisation brings to the fore one of the central questions of this article – what is a region? And, how is it being mobilised within LGBTQ politics?

In the next section, I provide a brief overview of how the region has been deployed within existing work in geographies of sexualities, drawing on work from sexuality studies more broadly where appropriate. I outline three key thematic strands of work: (1) the region as non-metropolitan, (2) regional cities as distinct from metropolitan urban centres and (3) thinking the region transnationally. I bring these into conversation with broader theorisations of the region within critical human geography: (1) scalar/territorial approaches, (2) relational approaches, (3) the region as assemblage and (4) regional biopolitical approaches. I consider the relative merits and problems associated with each of these approaches to the region and explore their respective affinities with queer. I argue that the scale/territorial approach is the most discordant with queer as such approaches promote essentialist and often exclusive understandings of the region. By contrast, I suggest that relational approaches offer much, particularly in furthering awareness of the transnational dimensions of both queer and the region. Assemblage approaches have strong resonances with queer in term of the emergent and provisional nature of queer. I suggest that Painter’s ‘regional biopolitics’ approach may perhaps offer the greatest potential for expanding and developing our understanding of the regional politics of queer. Having established a theoretical framework for examining the affinities between queer and the region, I then turn to LGBTQ politics in Europe and discuss how a critical focus on the region can contribute towards understandings of LGBTQ politics in Europe. I examine what is at stake when the region is mobilised in LGBTQ politics in Europe, and the effects of particular geopolitical and theoretical framings of the region. In the conclusion, I identify how a critical focus on the region can be most productive in opening up new insights and new research agendas on European LGBTQ politics.

The region and the geographies of sexualities

The first and most widely discussed formulation of the region in geographies of sexualities is as ‘provincial/rural’ or as non-metropolitan – thereby regions act as a corrective to queer metrocentrism. Phillips, Watt and Shuttleton’s (2000) path-breaking volume Decentering Sexualities challenged the metrocentrism of epistemological frameworks of queer and sexuality studies, and contains a number of contributions that use the region as the starting point for analysis and critique. For instance, in her autobiographical essay on region, religion and sexualities, Chedgzoy (2000) articulates the importance of non-conformist Christianity in her childhood in provincial Wales, and how this shaped her desire. Spurlin (2000) is critical of the metrocentrism of US queer scholarship which has tended to neglect regions such as the

Important, critical interventions by Bell (2000) on rural homosexualities and Raimondo (2003) on AIDS politics and geographical imaginations in the heartland of the USA have since drawn attention to the significance of regional geographical imaginations in the formation of sexual identities and politics. Howard’s (1999) landmark study of male homosexualities in the south of the USA has been followed by Halberstam (2005) and Herring (2010) who have both developed critiques of queer metropolitanism. Baird's (2006) work on sexual citizenship in Tasmania also demonstrated the necessity of thinking beyond the national scale in work on sexual citizenship and showed the importance of the region in these debates.

A second strand of work has concentrated on ‘regional cities’ as a way of complicating and challenging the central distinction between metropolitan and rural spaces that had hitherto characterised scholarship within geographies of sexualities. In their study of migration patterns and life trajectories of lesbians and gay men living in Townsville, Northern Queensland, Australia, Waitt and Gorman-Murray (2011) argue that a focus on regional cities such as Townsville can challenge rural/urban dichotomies as well as the metropolitan bias of the geographies of sexualities. Waitt and Gorman-Murray’s work demonstrates how a focus on regional cities can expand and transform our understandings of the relationship between cities and sexualities. Stella’s (2015) comparative study of the everyday lived experience of lesbians and queer women in Moscow and the regional city of Ul’anovsk shows how the possibilities for, and nature of, lesbian and queer experience in Ul’anovsk are qualitatively different from metropolitan Moscow, in terms of the much smaller scale of the commercial scene and greater concerns about being open in a less anonymous context compared to Moscow. Myrdahl’s (2013) work on LGBQ politics and everyday lives similarly argues for recognition of the value of studying sexualities in smaller cities outside of major metropolitan areas.

A third area of work has crystallised around transnational queer regionality as a critique of methodological nationalism. In her essay on queering Asia and the queer politics of regionalism, Wilson (2006, 1) asserts that: ‘A focus on the region (understood in a post-Orientalist and transnational way) provides an overlooked counterweight to Eurocentric, Western hegemonic frames for gay, lesbian, transgender or queer worlds in Asia.’ Wilson argues that a critical queer regional perspective can challenge dominant Western framings of sexual politics (and their study). From Wilson’s statement, we see that debates about the queering of the region are intimately bound up with the spatial politics of knowledge production. Gopinath (2008) has suggested that what she terms ‘transnational queer/feminist analysis’ can both challenge androcentric framings of the ‘global gay’ within global queer studies and simultaneously challenge the heteronormativity of some feminist thinking on the transnational. Gopinath’s (2008) and Wilson’s (2006) insights can be applied to problematise the scale and reach of the geographies of sexualities, which have been criticised for their Anglo-American centrism, the neglect of issues of race and racism and for failing to adequately engage with non-Western experience and contexts (Brown et al. 2010; Oswin 2006; Phillips, Watt, and Shuttleton 2000; Silva and Vieira 2014; Visser 2013).

Each of these strands of work has contributed to the enrichment of the field and has opened up research agendas examining the relationship between sexualities and space in different contexts. I maintain, however, that there is considerable scope for a more explicit and sustained engagement with broader theoretical understandings of the region. In the next section, I bring these strands of work into conversation with wider theoretical work on the region.

The queer/region nexus: theoretical challenges

In human geography, the region is most commonly understood as a sub-national territorial unit, whereas in international relations or area studies, the region is more commonly understood as a supranational geographical unit on a continental scale. While regions may provide important senses of identification and dis-identification, and can be territorial units of governance through which
state power is enacted, they cannot be approached simply as taken-for-granted objective realities and units of study. Allen, Massey and Cochrane (1998, 2) argue that ‘[regions] are not “out there” waiting to be discovered; they are our (and others’) constructions’ (Allen, Massey, and Cochrane 1998, 2). Regional identities and regions as territorially bounded units are produced in relation to other spatial scales. Herod (2011, 127) suggests that, of all scales, the regional scale is the one that has: ‘most frequently conceptualised in spatially rather vague terms’ [noting that] ‘regions have been seen to vary considerably in a geographical extent, from rooms in houses (Giddens 1984, 119) to continental-sized areas’.

It is the double-edged use of the region to refer to both sub-national and supranational territorial units and identifications that Manalansan et al. (2014) argue has a queer potential in troubling and challenging existing spatial political categories of analysis and forging new critical possibilities. For Manalansan (2015, 567), ‘[Queer] is about messing things up, creating disorder and disruptive comotion within the normative arrangements of bodies, things, spaces and institutions’. Queer and the region are complex, fuzzy, contested concepts that are often associated with confusion and ‘messiness’ (Manalansan 2015). It could though be argued that there is an affinity between the messiness of queer and the conceptual messiness that surrounds the concept of the region.

To argue for greater theoretical clarity about the region and its affinities with queer does not mean prescribing a correct usage of the concept, but rather to see what certain understandings, uses and mobilisations of the region do within LGBTQ political struggles in Europe and the attempts to understand them. Accordingly, in the next section below, I consider four distinct ways of conceptualising the region based on: (1) ‘scale/territoriality’; (2) ‘relationality’; (3) ‘assemblage’; and (4) ‘biopolitics’, and discuss the queer affinities and potentialities of each in turn.

Scalar/territorial approaches

Territorial or scalar approaches to the region tend to frame it as a fixed, bounded unit, often based on a shared regional cultural identity. Furthermore, as Painter and Jeffrey (2009, 163) remind us: ‘regions are not simply naturally emerging economic or cultural collectivities. In many countries, regions are politically defined territories through which practices of sub-state governance are enacted’. Territorial approaches to the region tend to reproduce a hierarchical notion of scale – which suggest that some scales are of greater conceptual and political importance, weight and power, when compared to others (e.g. the global compared to the local). In this scalar view of the region, we can think about the region at both sub-state and supra-national levels. At the sub-state level, a critical regional lens can offer new critical insights and perspectives that may be neglected if the nation, city or neighbourhood is the theoretical starting point of analysis.

Relational approaches

Relational approaches to regions understand them less as fixed, bounded, territorial entities, but rather as porous and constituted through complex networks of social relations (Amin 2004). Relational approaches, then, foreground questions of mobility. In articulating a critical regional approach to the study of diverse genders and sexualities, Johnson, Jackson and Herdt (2000, 362) argue that: ‘A critical regionality is one that (a) recognises the diverse or interconnections and inter-cultural comings and goings which simultaneously define and undermine regions as imagined communities’. This focus on the flows and connections between regions has the potential to provide a more dynamic and progressive approach. Gopinath conceives the region as constituted through connections with elsewhere, when she argues that:

We can build upon their deployment of the concept of the region by asking how these alternative narratives that emerge from a regional rather than a national frame are not irreducibly particularly and self-enclosed, but rather are produced precisely by the collision of the local, the national, and the transnational. (2008, 343)
Gopinath (2008) importantly seeks to understand how the region is connected to other spatial political units and imaginations.

While relational approaches to the region have come to the fore within human geography, a number of writers have argued that embracing the relational does not necessitate the abandonment of territoruality. For instance, Morgan (2007, 1248) argues against the privileging of either territorial or relational approaches to spatial organisation, but instead of the need to go beyond this binary, arguing that: ‘political space is bounded and porous’ (see also Dell’Agnese 2013). We therefore need to recognise that while regions are constructed and imagined, they can also be significant points of political identification and central to the operation of state power (Painter 2013).

Assembling the region

In order to progress the debate about spatial organisation beyond the relational vs. territorial binary, a number of authors have argued that assemblage offers a productive way of conceptualising spatial organisation in a more open, fluid and holistic way (e.g. Allen and Cochrane 2007; Anderson and McFarlane 2011; Davies 2012). Cochrane (2013) suggests that understanding the region as assemblage means recognising the provisional nature of regional assemblages and the multiplicity of different actors that come together to form such assemblages. The assemblage approach is seen as being productive for rethinking the region because it foregrounds materiality and objects and how they help to shape the spatial organisation of politics (Davies 2012). The focus on the emergent and provisional nature of spatial/political organisation resonates with understandings of queer as fluid and resistant to fixed, identity categories. Puar (2007) has argued that assemblage enables an understanding of queer as contingent and emergent, rather than coalescing around fixed identity categories. In this sense, the notions of fluidity and non-fixity within assemblage theory have the potential for a queerer non-identitarian view of sexualities and sexual politics that is not hindered or limited by spatial imaginings that posit essential connections between location and identity. A focus on the region as assemblage also draws critical attention to the role of infrastructure and technology in the production of regional contexts that shape the possibilities for LGBTQ political struggles.

Regional biopolitics

Foucault’s concept of biopolitics draws attention to the practices of governance of populations. Painter (2013) acknowledges that Foucault’s notion of biopolitics was framed primarily at the scale of the nation, but argues that within the European Union (EU), the sub-national regional scale is assuming greater significance, meaning that it is appropriate to speak of regional biopolitics within the EU. Painter (2013) examines the notion that ‘old industrial’ EU regions such as the North East of England have ‘redundant’ or ‘backward’ masculinities and gendered norms which are exclusive of diverse genders and sexualities. He contrasts ‘old industrial regions’ with global city regions which he argues have weak class solidarities but are more supportive of sexual diversity. Painter’s (2013) contribution is a rare example of regional analysis in contemporary critical human geography that specifically addresses sexual politics, alongside class. His argument is therefore welcome in examining the interconnections of sexuality, economics and regional uneven development – though there is always a danger in fixing some regions and class formations as more ‘advanced’ than others when it comes to gender and sexual politics.

Latour (2005, 185) has argued that: ‘scale is the actor’s own achievement’ and there is consensus that the region should be approached as the product of political contestation, rather than as a neutral framework for analysis. Scalar/territorial approaches demonstrate the importance of the region as a locus of belonging and identification. The scalar/territorial approach, however, is subject to criticism because of the dangers of essentialism associated with fixed regional identities. Relational approaches help us see region-making as a contested political process and foreground how regions are the products of relations, flows of people, ideas, capital and connections with
regions elsewhere. The assemblage approach is valuable in putting emphasis on the provisional and emergent nature of regional formations and the role of infrastructure in the production of regions. The regional biopolitical approach perhaps offers the greatest potential for understanding the affinities between queer and the region. It makes visible the state in ways that are not always clear in some discussions that tend to frame the region in terms of a cultural region, rather than a scale of governance. Agnew (2013) has argued for a pluralistic approach to the region and to use the theoretical perspective that is most appropriate to the issues under discussion. So rather than prescribing a definitive, correct queer theoretical perspective on the region, it is perhaps more productive to examine the political effects of certain usages and deployments of the region in LGBTQ politics in Europe. In the following section, I argue for the relevance of a critical regional perspective in understanding LGBTQ politics in Europe.

The region and LGBTQ politics in Europe

In his review of Downing and Gillett’s (2011) edited volume Queer in Europe, in which each chapter presents a discussion of queer politics within a specific nation state, Sikora (2014, 2) suggests that this framework is problematic: “nationalization” of queer, its alignment with national borders, may inadvertently risk a reterritorialization of the free transnational flows of queer ideas and may ultimately contribute to a “homonationalization” of queerness. Sikora’s (2014) argument echoes long-standing critiques of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). In this context, the region can serve as a theoretical counterweight to the uncritical adoption of the nation as the starting point of analysis. Using Gopinath’s (2008) approach to transnational feminist/queer analysis means seeing how regions are embedded in networks beyond the nation state. It also draws critical attention to important geographic differences in gender and sexual politics in regional contexts away from the metropolis within a particular nation state.

The crisis in the Eurozone makes a regional perspective desirable in helping to understand the relationships between uneven regional development and LGBTQ political struggles. As Hadjimichalis (2011, 255) argues: ‘the foundations of the crisis are embedded in uneven geographical/regional development, which characterises the socio-spatial structure of the European Union (EU)’. Widening regional inequalities within Europe shape and constrain the everyday lives of sexual dissidents and shape the possibilities for the conduct of LGBTQ politics. A focus on regional inequalities and how they impact intimate lives is therefore timely. Moisio et al. (2013) have argued that the economic crisis in Europe has also prompted intense debate about cultural differences within the EU. Gender and sexual politics are one important means through which these cultural differences are being articulated within contemporary European politics. For instance, Herzog (2009, 1305) has argued that: ‘the entire complex of issues surrounding European identities and citizenships, with all the accompanying assumption about appropriate inclusions and exclusions, now rests with remarkable frequency on sex-related concerns’. Likewise, Colpani and Habed (2014, 88) speak of ‘the sexualised making of a certain idea of Europe’. Sexuality is therefore coming to play a key role in how distinctions are being drawn between Europeans and non-Europeans. Ayoub and Paternotte (2014, 233) argue that LGBT movements within Europe have embraced the European scale and have been successful in ‘transform[ing] Europe into a privileged space for LGBT rights and a club whose members must at the very least, address the fundamental rights of LGBT people’. This statement immediately raises urgent questions about privilege and those ‘European Others’ (El-Tayeb 2011) who are excluded from the particular idea of Europe in which LGBT rights have been articulated and secured.

In the following section, I discuss how the region has been mobilised and articulated within European LGBTQ political struggles, examining how each of the four approaches to the region is mobilised within European LGBTQ political struggles and theoretical work. I consider the political and theoretical effects of deploying these distinct understandings of the region.
Mobilising the region in European LGBTQ politics

In her comprehensive overview of historical research on European sexual cultures and politics, Herzog (2009, 1297–1298) notes that the region is often invoked in research that draws cross-national comparisons: ‘There are often similarities evident in the cultures of contiguous nations, such that scholars frequently invoke the idea of “Scandinavian” or “Mediterranean” regional cultures when trying to make sense of sexual beliefs and practices’. We can see that a regional focus could have value in enabling cross-national comparisons with the potential to produce new critical insights. The assertion, however, of a regional queer perspective, as Kajinic (2012) suggests, may be intensely problematic if it reproduces essentialist thinking and flattens significant intra-regional differences in queer lives and reproduces hegemonic geo-temporalities, i.e. a Western critical gaze on the ‘Balkans’ that reproduces dominant geopolitical imaginations of this region (Todorova 2009) as ‘less European’ (Kahlina 2015). Thinking about the region in a territorial or scalar framework that conceives the region as a container of social relations could also overlook the links and flows between regions. Furthermore, scholars working on post-socialist European contexts, such as Fejes and Balogh (2013) and Kulpa, Mizielinska and Stasinska (2012), share concerns that certain regional labels such as ‘The Balkans’ and ‘Eastern Europe’ are often freighted with problematic geopolitical meanings and (dis)identifications. We have seen that a scalar/territorial approach can be highly problematic – particularly so in regional contexts where regional labels have such a problematic geopolitical legacy. Work by Kulpa and Mizielinska (2011) on queering time in relationship to LGBTQ politics in Central and Eastern Europe also attests to the necessity of thinking temporality with regard to the region – reminding us how scalar/territorial approaches to the region can fix meaning to certain regions as being more advanced compared to others in the status of LGBTQ people (see also Binnie and Klesse 2012, 2013; Kulpa 2014).

In contrast, a relational approach can be productive in challenging these problems of regional essentialism. A relational approach to the region brings critical attention to the circular flow of ideas, capital and activists and the geopolitics of these flows across and between different regions in Europe (Binnie 2014; Mesquita, Wiedlack, and Lasthofer 2013). In some regional contexts, relational understandings are mobilised by activists to articulate regional queer solidarities that are simultaneously transnational. For instance, Kajinic (2012, 203) examines how in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, the region is being used as a productive space/focus for the articulation of regional queer solidarities that cut across and challenge the framing of LGBTQ politics in narrow nationalistic terms. In her study of the political imaginaries and cultural activism, Kajinic (2012) argues that the regional dimension was significant in terms of the networked links and connections between actors in the organisation of queer cultural festivals in Zagreb and Ljubljana. In the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, regional cooperation between LGBTQ activists has its roots in feminist anti-war activism and resistance to masculinist, homophobic nationalisms. Dioli (2009) has also spoken of the embrace of the regional identification ‘Queeroslavija’ as a conscious rejection of nationalism and as a means of imagining queer solidarities with activists within the region. Regional alliances and the regional dimension of political organisation are important features of contemporary LGBTQ activism in South East Europe, but this is itself bound up with geopolitical interests, particularly when it comes to the promotion of regional cooperation by external human rights organisations. For instance, Butterfield (2013a, 2013b) provides an insightful discussion of the regional dimension and networking of LGBTIQ activism in Croatia and other successor states of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Assemblage thinking can help us capture the provisional, emergent nature of European spatial–political frameworks. Specifically, it draws critical attention to the role of material infrastructure in the shaping of regional politics. It also draws attention to the processual, emergent nature of regional sexualised space. Eleftheriadis (2014, 163) draws critical attention to queer festivals in Europe as emerging ‘as the result of affinities, relationships, and networks’. In his attention to the role of technology in shaping the production of queer activist event spaces in different European contexts, he notes that ‘queer movements tend to involve decentralised network formations supported by technological means of communication, such as mailing lists and social networks. These demonstrate how Europe is equally
practiced through extra-institutional digital networks’ (Eleftheriadis 2014, 161). Such an approach can help focus on agency and how agency is conceptualised within regional political struggles within Europe. His research on queer festivals and transnational queer activism characterises such events and the role of digital communications in ‘shap[ing] the emergence of these queer transnational counter-publics’ (Ibid., 162). Balzer and Hutta’s (2014, 189) discussion of transactivist networking in Europe can also be understood in terms of relations between horizontalism and verticality. Horizontalism refers to heterogeneous networks of grass-roots community activism, whereas by verticality, they refer to European institutional frameworks that shape the production of policy discourses about and governance of intimate life. The focus is on understanding the relationship between these two framings as transadvocacy became more institutionalised at a European level in the late 2000s. In studying transnational advocacy and queer movements in Europe, however, it is important to note the role of the EU institutional level in helping condition the possibilities for mobility of such activists in the first place. Hence, we can point to the mundane effects of EU airline policy. These have brought down the cost of international air travel within the EU (Dobruszkes 2013) and facilitated intra-EU mobility (see, for instance, Burrell’s (2011) work on mobility, low-cost airlines and Polish migrants in the UK). This suggests the importance of the banal effects of Europeanisation that are often overlooked in the study of transnational LGBTQ activist movements in Europe.

A biopolitical approach to the region can help draw attention to the ways in which the EU’s promotion of LGBTQ rights can sometimes serve to underpin problematic geopolitical ambitions. For instance, Ammaturo (2015) argues that this mobilisation of gender and sexual politics in the name of ‘European’ values is intensely problematic and may constitute a European homonationalist project, which draws critical attention to ‘the ways in which sexual difference is increasingly absorbed into hegemonic apparatuses’ (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014, 1). The notion of a European homonationalism can therefore be thought of as a form of regional homonationalism. The concept of homonationalism like the related concept of homonormativity is not without its critics and it is beyond the scope of this article to offer an in-depth discussion of the relative merits of either concept. For the present argument, I am more concerned with the regional framings of homonationalism in contemporary critique. It is instructive to read Moss’s (2014) critique of the deployment of the concept of homonationalism in Eastern European contexts in his discussion of the conflicts around Split Pride in Croatia. He suggests that it may be less appropriate to deploy the concept in this particular regional context, where he argues that heteronationalism, not homonationalism, is the dominant political force. Given Moss’s critique, we need to acknowledge Kahlina’s (2015) engagement with homonationalism in her discussion of LGBTQ politics in Croatia and Serbia, which suggests that other scholarship is deploying the concept to examine the relationships between nationalist and LGBTQ politics in the region.

A regional biopolitical framework can draw critical attention to gender and sexual politics in terms of broader biopolitical questions regarding the regulation and management of EU’s populations. Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco (2014, 2) draw on Mbembe’s (2003) discussion of necropolitics as building of Foucault’s concept of biopower as ‘a tool to make sense of the symbiotic co-presence of life and death, manifested ever more clearly in the cleavages between rich and poor, citizens and non-citizens (and those who can be stripped of citizenship’ Puar (2007) has expanded on Mbembe’s concept to create a notion of ‘queer necropolitics’ by which she means ‘differences between queer subjects who are being folded (back) into life and the racialized queernesses that emerge through the naming of populations’ (Puar 2007; quoted in Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014, 2). Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco (2014, 2) use the concept of the queer necropolitical to denote the distinctions drawn in contemporary politics between ‘queer subjects invited into life and queerly abjected populations marked for death’. This means we need to recognise the way in which LGBTQ politics at the EU level can be folded into hegemonic political projects, while at the same time other queer subjects are denied European citizenship.

A regional biopolitical framework also draws attention to the policing of borders – and therefore the geopolitical importance of border regions which have become a particular focus for EU spatial policy (Bialasiewicz et al. 2013); and correspondingly the focal point for gendered and sexualised anxieties
about distinctions between the European, non-European and not-fully European (Andrijasevic 2009; Cassidy 2013; Davydova 2013). Paasi (2011, 62) suggests that: ‘borders are often pools of emotion, fears and memories that can be mobilised apace for both progressive and regressive purposes.’ Both feminist and critical race scholarship have long been attentive to the ways that these specific emotions and fears have been projected onto racialised, gendered and sexualised bodies (e.g. Cantu Jnr, Naples, and Vidal-Ortiz 2009; Luibheid 2002). Feminist scholarship has drawn attention to borders as key sites for the regulation of women migrants, and shown that gender relations take on a distinctive pattern within border regions in Europe (Cassidy 2013). We also need to recognise the distinctiveness of border regions while simultaneously acknowledging that bordering is now seen as a practice which operates often far removed from the territorial or physical border (see also Amoore 2006, 2011).

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that a critical focus on the region can be productive in the study of LGBTQ politics in Europe for a number of reasons. It can further critiques of methodological nationalism, by offering an alternative spatial theoretical framework to the nation which does not uncritically take the nation state as the taken-for-granted starting point for analysis and critique. It also helps foreground spatial political contexts such as sub-national regional political formations and territories, which may be overlooked in an uncritical focus on the national scale of LGBTQ politics and how the prosaic experiences of queer lives are affected by regional political identities and state practices. A critical focus on borders and other formations of the region, however, has the potential to unsettle dominant Western framings of sexual politics.

Relational, networked and assemblage approaches may appear to be better suited for understanding the connections between mobile people, objects and infrastructure compared to scalar/territorial approaches. At the same time, it is important to recognise the ongoing importance of scalar/territorial approaches and how the region can function as an important locus of political identification and contestation within LGBTQ politics. Painter’s (2013) notion of regional biopolitics foregrounds questions of governance and practices of stateness, and could be productively developed further by engagement with work on queer necropolitics to examine the control, policing of migrant bodies and queering migration within European border management practices. Despite the recent exciting growth of critical interest in the geographies of sexualities in a range of European geographical contexts, outside of the Anglo-American contexts that have dominated enquiry in this field, there is need for more work examining the geopolitics of scale and context within the study of the sexual politics of Europeanisation.

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