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SPECIAL: Homophobie und Rassismus

# Leben nach Migration

Newsletter of the Migration Council of Berlin-Brandenburg e.V.

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## Docility and the Regulation of the Subject

**Jasbir Puar** about homonationalism and how minorities find themselves pitted against one another. An Interview by Deniz Utlu

What can we understand by the term “homonationalism”?

For me, homonationalism is not just a way to refer to racist or privileged queers. Even though the term has been used in that way. For me, it is really about negotiating the tension between the idea of the increased visibility and social recognition of gay and lesbian people in consumer spaces as well as legal spaces. But then this increased visibility comes at the expense of subjects who do not fit the desired homosexual image— racialized subjects, poor subjects, even subjects who are not even homosexual, but whose sexuality is viewed as perverse. Take for example the African American woman, single parent of three kids, living on welfare. That doesn’t fit the image of normative heterosexuality, right? But even though she is heterosexual, her sexuality is less desirable than the proper homosexual subject, who has a stable partner, who has a good job, who lives a cosmopolitan lifestyle. You can see that the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality breaks down through this idea of homonationalism.

You mentioned once in an article that “homonationalism” reinforces societal docility. What did you mean by this?

The article was called “The Monster, Terrorist, Fag – the production of docile patriots.” I wrote it with my co-author Amit

S. Rai after 9/11. What we were trying to do was a look at how subjects that are understood as sexually perverse and as racially other actually help to regulate the production of, say, unwanted or undesirable subjects.

Like whom?

Let’s take the example of Sikh American turbaned men. Post 9/11, and even now, there is a lot of anxiety about the turban wearer. And the Sikh man is in danger of being mistaken for a Muslim terrorist.

The construction Muslims as terrorists and as a “racial” and sexual other regulates the docility of the subject, particularly when the subject is forced to prove that he or she is not a terrorist.

But who is the good subject?

I think that here, neo-liberalism and multiculturalism come together to produce different kinds of national good subjects. It used to be the white heterosexual man who was the good subject, but now it is also the white homosexual man who is seen as the good subject. We also have the example of the Sikh American with a turban, who wants to disassociate himself from the terrorist construct -- we can even say terrorist monster fag. He produces himself as an upright citizen.

Can you give me an example?

After 9/11, there were many Sikh Americans who were attacked. My parents are Sikhs and I’m also a Sikh. I know many Sikhs who helped members of their

Kein Wir ohne Uns

MIGRATIONSRAT **mr**  
Berlin & Brandenburg



Jasbir K. Puar is the author of *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press 2007), which won the 2007 Cultural Studies Book Award from the Association for Asian American Studies.

She is currently working on a new book project focused on queer disability studies and theories of affect and assemblage.

community whose houses were vandalised, for example. But they wanted nothing to do with helping any Muslim Americans. And when it came time to help out a Sikh who had been detained because he didn't have the proper papers, all of the good subjects, refused to get involved with the situation. So they drew the line at a kind of national affiliation, because they didn't wanted to be associated with anyone who might undermine their claim to being upright citizens.

And through this disassociation they reproduce themselves as good subjects?

Exactly. The good subject has to keep reproducing himself as a good subject. Which means continually disassociating from the bad subject. That is how good and bad subjects are, in one way or another, cross-reproducing themselves.

The Sikh has to constantly prove that he is not a Muslim.

And that he is not affiliated with someone who could be in any way a terrorist. Or someone in detention. They might even disassociate from a Sikh who is in their own community. This was their way of retaining their middle-class minority status, their model minority positioning. They were still concerned about all of these Sikhs that were experiencing a kind of racial backlash, but they didn't want to undermine their own claim to be good U.S. citizens.

The construction of the good and the bad citizen helps regulate citizens. Where does this construction come from – did it just evolve or was it produced as a tool in the war on terror?

No, this is something that has been happening for a long time. These binaries have always been produced in relation to each other. So there has always been this idea of the "other others". My par-

ents could be viewed as *others*, because they don't fit the normative image of white Americans. But then from my parents' perspective, there is the "other other." The "other others" have always existed, but the situation has been more particular since 9/11. That is to say that this is a specific example, but the mechanism is widespread and is, historically speaking, not a new phenomenon.

How does this mechanism continue to be generated?

It is a collection of state discourses that are about laws and legislation and regulation, it's generated through media discourses and visibility, and through representational politics. Also the consumer-based discourse --how one moves in the world as a consumer. —plays a role.

So it's not like George W. Bush had a consultant who said there was a need for additional regulation mechanisms.

No. But the state is responsible in many ways. The state gets to reproduce itself as a kind of benevolent, liberal protector of its citizens on one hand, and on the other hand, it works to divide and fragment national bodies, so that its various parts can be controlled. Bush threw dinner parties at his house, welcoming representatives from all religions to attend, while at the same time there were secret service and FBI people conducting surveillance on mosques in New York City. It's a good cop, bad cop technique. You produce a sense of protection and security and concern for diversity and tolerance. Meanwhile, there is increased surveillance and increased police presence in particular neighborhoods. All of these things happened post-9/11. And all of these are strategies and ways of regulating a population.

The *Leben nach Migration* (Life after Migration) special annual publication on homophobia and racism was produced in cooperation with **SUSPECT**.

**SUSPECT** is a small group of queer-identified people who have developed a non-violent movement emphasizing the interconnectedness between the fight against homophobia and the fight against racism.

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<http://www.nohomonationalism.blogspot.com/>

## Totally Normal: The Story of Homonationalism in Germany

### SUSPECT

**How the attempt over the last decade to assimilate white gays and lesbians has resulted in the exclusion of or competition with other “minority” groups.**

Since the end of the 1990s, the prevailing dismissive attitude “The immigrants have it better” has been transformed into targeted discussions on integration, core values, security and violence. Within this lies the attempt to actively develop a new, collective understanding of German identity. Meanwhile, the predominant gay and lesbian narrative — which has measured the idea of progress through the achievement of equal rights, the legal decriminalization of homosexuality and legal acknowledgement of same-sex partnerships — has left immigrants out of the conversation.

Yet sexual politics hasn’t always taken this approach: other social periods and contexts experienced, by comparison, more radical objectives and participation. Along these lines, Silvia Rivera, a drag queen of color, describes work in the 1970s Gay Liberation Front in New York City, where she worked alongside anti-racist groups like the Black Panthers, transgendered street kids and sex workers. Similarly, in Germany, queers of color founded a number of different movements, but, unfortunately, the history of these groups remains undocumented.

Jasbir Puar uses the expression “homonationalism” as a way to describe the (not always successful) assimilation attempts that have been accompanied by the conceptualization of a “gay-friendly” national identity. This conceptualization, however, is at the cost of those individuals whose affiliation is compromised in the context of war, border tightening and criminalization: this includes old and new immigrants as well as their children and grandchildren, in particular individuals who are identified as Muslim, Roma and Sinti, in addition to other people of color. Also included in this group are those who, based on their real or imagined

sexual or gender identity (too many children, not enough money, non-monogamous, married too young, too patriarchal, too oppressed) no longer fit the national standard. Also along these lines are queer-, trans-, homo- or bisexual-identified people who cannot lean on their social class membership, their whiteness or their conformed masculinity or femininity in order to be accepted as proper, upstanding citizens.

The following article will illustrate homonationalism in Germany through three examples that correspond with three areas of the racist and moral panic that has prevailed in the dominant societal framework.

### Integration: Hatun Sürücü

Almost everyone recognizes the name Hatun Sürücü, a young woman killed in 2005. According to newspaper reports at the time, she was the victim of an “honor killing” carried out by her brother, who mercilessly shot her in the head. The story drew massive attention, perhaps because it fulfilled the requirements of a classic “Turkish” drama: a beautiful young woman who removed her veil and ran away from her overbearing family and then started wearing makeup and building a self-determined life as a single woman. After her death, it was not a women’s rights organization that organized a candlelight vigil, but rather a gay and lesbian organization that had, up to that point, made few gestures in the direction of women, not to mention women of color. In the organization’s statement to the press, the discourse centered around “an archaic understanding of family honor,” “oppressed marriage and familial structures,” and “a false understanding of honor.” This was, in fact, the first attempt by a group to promote its own assimilation through the lens and through the demands of the assimilation of “immigrants.”

### Borders: A Muslim Test

Unprogressive, archaic, pre-modern or repressed are just a few of the expressions that have emerged in the new

# NOHOMO NATIONALISM

by Andil Gosine

wave of media coverage on sexuality and migration. In contrast to individuals who, in the midst of recent conflict and European integration, moved from being labeled “foreigners” to “Muslims,” German society has at the same time been seen as a relative paradise for sexual freedom (albeit with a spoonful of amnesia dosing this present-day understanding). In the debate over the so-called “Muslim-Test” administered in 2006 in the state of Baden-Württemberg, women- and gay-friendliness were terms that were absent from the list of pre-identified German core values. About half of the study’s 30 questions focused on security risks and potential terror threats associated with so-called “Muslim” applicants for German citizenship (e.g. “What are your thoughts on the September 11 attacks?”). The other half of the questions focused on gender and sexuality (e.g. “What would you do if your son came out to you as homosexual?”). The CDU was not the only group backing the test – the Berlin-based Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany (LSVD) also endorsed the study. Consequently, a country that had, until recently, made little attempt to keep its disfavor of homosexuals a secret was now suddenly defending against homophobia. Germany’s largest gay rights organizations also made a clear move in this context to join the ranks of a system that continues to blatantly undercut the civil rights of people of color.

### Criminality: Hate Crimes

In the last few years, the drama surrounding “homophobic immigrants” has increased particularly in gentrifying inner-city neighborhoods in Hamburg and Berlin. The same attitude has emerged in other major western European cities like Oslo, Copenhagen, Amsterdam and London, where the latest scenes of moral

panic surrounding hate crimes have occurred. In 2008 alone, numerous demonstrations took place against hate crimes in Berlin. There were calls for boycotts against “southern” shops (at times directly against “Muslim” businesses). Violent incidents became a means of capital in gaining media attention and state support. This is particularly the case when the validity of assertions is under dispute. Even the gay crisis hotline, which had positioned itself as another expert group on the topic of “homophobic immigrants” was accused within the gay community for falsifying ethnicized statistics on offenders.

### Racism Scandal at Christopher Street Day 2010

Judith Butler’s refusal to accept the Civil Courage Award was an important move in exposing an increasingly racist discourse within German sexual politics. While gay and lesbian associations have to date not taken a critical stance on the issue, the heightened debate has worked to strengthen coalitions between heterosexual immigrants and queers of color, who will also come to voice in this collectively produced newsletter. As queer- and trans people of color, we feel encouraged and invigorated by these new coalitions. We will need these partnerships in order to effectively put an end to racism, homophobia, transphobia, militarization and criminalization.

## The Interplay Between Racism, Homophobia and Transphobia in the Lives of Queers of Color

As black people and people of color, we are confronted with different means of racist expression. Racist discourse prevails as a system of power and of oppression on all societal and social levels. Sex, gender and sexuality are no exceptions to the rule. The predominantly accepted gender roles are grounded in a racist paradigm, just as is the understanding of sexuality or a non-gender-ambiguous body. As queers of color, we experience forms of racism that are inextricably connected with our sexuality, our gender identity and our sex. Rather viewing the interface and overlap between racism, homophobia, transphobia and sexism as different forms of discrimination, these constructions must be addressed in light of how they condition and mutually support one another.

## “Black Bodies,” Homophobia and Racism

European heteronormative understandings of masculinity and femininity are, at the core, racist constructions. The gender lines that are drawn via this understanding do not only serve to create a binary gender/sex role system, but further anchor an understanding of gender identity in the concept of whiteness.

*In competitive sports, the body and one's physique is naturally positioned at the forefront. The more time one spends working out, building muscle mass or losing weight, the greater the chance of success. And there you stand before a white clique and have to listen to how they know everything, that they pretend to have forgotten to explain what they know about black muscles, endurance and reflex-racist theories. And naturally, your sexuality and your non-heteronormative appearance is too much for your blond opponent in her fashionable sport-skirt. As a black queer/lesbian woman, I consciously decided against a career in professional sports.*

## They Will Hate it When We Unite

Gender, sexual unambiguity and sexual identity/orientation all have a color. In response to the culturalization of homophobia, transphobia and sexism, the self-

formation of gender and sexuality without internal contradiction is a white privilege. In addition, people of color are often accused of being the antagonists in the fight for gender and sexual diversity. Sharing the position of our brothers and sisters of color is, in light of this, of utmost importance to us. At this point we need to approach the concepts of heteronormativity, transphobia and homophobia as a problem that impacts society as a whole.

*In my work (and in the work of many other queers of color) in an anti-racist, queers of color organization, it often happens that, amidst the argument “Oh, the immigrants are much, much more homophobic than WE are,” I forget my own identity as a trans/queer person of color. This is because I spend most of my time thinking about the “of color” part of my identity. My queer identity is often ignored, by both white non-trans or heterosexual people, as well as by white queers.*

## White Allies

Over the last few years, white LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) organizations have assumed the role of “saving” queers of color from their “ultra-homophobic” families of color. With a complete lack of understanding, these groups seek to understand the problem of racism within the white LGBT framework. White allies who are aware of the privilege that comes with being white are imperative to the creation of a collective non-homophobic, non-transphobic, non-heteronormative society.

*As a white ally, it is my responsibility to seek and understand the connections between racism, homophobia, transphobia and sexism, and to work to bring visibility to these issues in different contexts. White people are not impacted by these constructions in contrast to so-called immigrants and people of color. When we talk about white privilege, we don't see at as simply the privilege of avoiding racist violence on a daily basis, rather that we use racism in practice. This racist violence is always interwoven with gender (social sex-role), gender non-conformity, social class, etc.*

It is crucial to convey this perspective in white-dominated queer groups and spaces, particularly because these groups often do not appear to be included

**Life After Migration**  
Annual special on Homophobia and Racism  
A cooperation between MRBB and SUSPECT (see information box on page 6)

The texts from pages 3 – 8 were originally compiled by members of SUSPECT with editorial support from Life After Migration

On 09.06.2010 Judith Butler turned down the Civil Courage Award at CSD e.V. in Berlin. In the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of Life After Migration, we published Butler's speech of declination along with an interview with Judith Butler.

Out of this came the idea for a special report that would be a cooperative effort between MRBB and SUSPECT.



Queer and trans people of colour and allies crashing the alternative Pride event in Berlin, June 2010.

among the groups who support racism in a structural sense, when they in fact should be included in this sphere.

### The Interpretive Authority on Gender and Race

*I can still remember the faces of the art academy's committee members as I opened the jpeg file. It was a photo of my butt in the same setting as the vagina in Gustave Courbet's painting, "The Origin of the World." I had entitled my photo "The End of the World." For me it was a queer intervention, which, in hindsight, I still think is an important statement on the heterosexism I continue to experience in the art world. Before I could answer any questions, the institute director interrupted with a horrible reaction. He was appalled and could not begin to understand my approach. Despite my effort to clarify that the art world appeared to be, by and large, indifferent to heterosexual attitudes, most of the instructors were in agreement that an artistic intervention*

*of this nature would not work in Germany, where, as they said, the idea of "gender" had already been dealt with years ago. In retrospect, I realized that the institute director, who had always prided himself on the strong contingent of "foreign" students at the school, was ultimately asking the committee members, in reference to my photography, what types of students should be admitted to the institute in the future.*

For people of color who initiate a queer intervention in a predominantly white, gender-conforming, heterosexual context, it quickly becomes clear that their right to exist is denied, whether in symbolic or actual terms. Highlighting predominant heteronormativity, transphobia and homophobia in these contexts threaten to damage white European pride. At once the alleged moral superiority is lost at the hand of the racialized "other" — ultimately, gay-friendliness, as the latest self-described European core value, is being used as a way of guarding against "less progressive" people of color, Muslims in particular.

### Transpeople and Queers of Color Caught Between the Lines

Beyond a symbolic threat or gesture of exclusion, a life-threatening situation can arise at the intersection of racism and transphobia. The racial profiling that exists in the government and justice sectors, along with the legal and societal pathologization of transpeople, build the framework for this reality.

*In the case of transpeople of color, transphobia is often not separated from racism. Is this policeman stopping me because I have brown skin and black hair, or is he stopping me because of my suspicious gender?*

Nevertheless, or, better yet, precisely due to this attitude, transpeople and queers of color are set up to constantly experience and at the same time criticize societal setbacks. We want to initiate a movement that strengthens and unites people of color in resistance!

## It's not just about homo-politics, but about social justice

### Interview between SUSPECT and an Activist of Color

#### *When did you first realize that you were heterosexual?*

I was socialized through heterosexual experiences. But to say that I am heterosexual took somewhat longer in my case, because I had had a homosexual experience at the age of ten. Incidentally, I share the opinion, along with friends of mine who had similar experiences, that quite a few Turkish/Kurdish boys from our generation have a homosexual experience in their past – but of course it's not something you talk about. I hung around with a lot of gay people during my youth, and today that's still the case. What it means is that I'm regularly presumed to be homosexual or at least bisexual. I would say that, ultimately, I am a heterosexual who has had homosexual experience in my childhood, but if whether or not it stays that way for my lifetime – I keep that completely open.

#### *How would you define yourself?*

Actually I think the best way to describe myself would be as a non-heteronormative man of color. I have a very strong anti-racism and, to a lesser extent an ethnic identity. That doesn't mean that I don't position myself as a Muslim or a Turk or a Kurd when it is necessary in a situational context. In the past, I was identified one or two times as queer, but up to this point I haven't claimed it as part of my identity. I am more often read as a heterosexual man, and I don't know whether it would be an appropriation or an inflated association if I chose to identify myself as queer. So I'm very careful with how I use the term.

#### *Are there queer people in your family or among your group of friends?*

I have a distant cousin from Holland who is gay. My brother told me that he did eventually come out. When I heard that, I was so happy, that at least one person in our family had come out. I've always intended to try and find him so that I can show him my solidarity. But we haven't seen one another for fifteen years and he has no idea how I think and how I live. If he ever needs allies in the family, I would definitely stick my neck out for him.

#### *When did you realize that there was something wrong with the power relations between queers and non-trans heteros?*

I think it began when I started hanging out with gay men. But there was also a market in our neighborhood where some of the gay men met up each weekend. I felt completely at ease around them, but I noticed how my peers, especially young guys my age, reacted to this scene. For me it was a simple reality, one that influenced my younger brother, too. He grew up with an awareness of my connections with gay men. The tension was something I noticed even more when I first found myself in the position of defending people. I became aware of the mechanisms of oppression that exist. Later on, when I was at university, they had the students' union (Asta) groups where some queers were active, and we worked together in this capacity.

#### *Our society is full of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. When did you decide to join the fight against these attitudes and systems of oppression?*

Different factors led me to the understanding that these phenomena cannot be considered as separate entities. First and foremost, when I was studying and had access to post-colonial theory, and books like *Can the Subaltern Speak German? (Spricht die Subalterne Deutsch)* opened my eyes. From this moment on, literature from the post-colonial feminist and the multicultural feminist perspective have been the most influential in my life.

#### *What are your political activities, including those as an ally?*

I think that I will never be able to limit down my political activities in the sense that my academic activism is always a part of this, just as is the actual political work I do on the ground. My day-to-day life is incredibly politicized, and I try, to the extent that it is possible, not to miss any opportunity to express my criticism and represent less comfortable positions. This takes a lot of strength and energy, and, in some cases, real courage.

#### *As a father, how are you raising your*

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### About the MRBB

The Migration Council of Berlin-Brandenburg (MRBB) is an umbrella organization for 76 member organizations. It sees itself as representative group for the collective interests of "Immigrants" and their allies and is an advocate for legal, social and political equality. Focal points of the MRBB include participation, education, media and empowerment. The MRBB newsletter is published monthly and is used as a medium of information sharing between all direct and indirect members, in addition to functioning as a means of disseminating information on interested parties. Members partake in a monthly editorial meeting where they discuss ideas for newsletter content. Potential articles and story proposals can be submitted to [presse@mrbb.de](mailto:presse@mrbb.de).

## Leben nach Migration

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*children in regard to power relations and various forms of discrimination?*

This is a very essential question in my everyday life. My approach so far has been to try to create an environment where the presence of people of color and any so-called "deviation" from the white, heterosexual, gender-conforming man, is seen as normality. The kids will be raised bilingual, Turkish and German, and we will try to raise them "free" of an ethnic identity. That is to say that just because they speak Turkish doesn't mean they should be defined as Turkish. I try to share my own identity with my children as comprehensively as possible, and I explain where I am involved and why I am politically active. Ultimately want to keep explaining to them, particularly through concrete examples, that there are diverse ways in which we can identify ourselves.

*Do you share the perspective that it is sometimes easier for queers of color to form alliances with non-trans heteros of color instead of white queer/trans organizations?*

Of course I share this perspective (laughs). From a racism-critical perspective it is interesting to ask: Why are things that way? Why is it so specific to race and racism? It seems that shared experiences of racism in the present-day context in Germany seems to more effectively connect people than do the shared experiences related to sexual identity. The ultimate root cause is not something I can describe. One possibility is the link to the historic tradition of anti-racist movements, which were always more diverse than movements like white feminism, the gay rights movement and more recently the queer movement. But

it pleases me that hetero/queer/trans people of color have banded together in anti-racist work.

*Have you noticed parallels between the so-called majority white queer scene and the white mainstream gay scene?*

There are parallels, but there are also differences. One side has the tendency to openly exclude based on race, while the other (which emphatically describes itself as anti-fascist and anti-racist) has the tendency to, in a somewhat tokenistic and coded way, acts as if it is part of the anti-racist politic. This is done explicitly in relation to anti-Muslim racism, which in Berlin is currently both directly and indirectly correlated with the process of gentrification. In the meantime I would actually prefer to live in Charlottenburg or Dahlem, where the relationships are clear. Where I know where middle-class whites stand and where I stand as a man of color. And there's no tokenism or hypocrisy here. They are sometimes easier to deal with than the "supercool" queers who come here, barge into our neighborhoods and then go to Prinzenbad and either make fun of the young people there or sometimes feel intimidated by them. Another parallel is social class (laughs). Most of them are likely to be middle-class. Finally one more thing that I've noticed: most of the queers are young, while the people in the mainstream tend to be older. So then I have to ask: why are queers — and this includes the young Antifa-activists — mostly on the younger side? And where do they end up when they are older? Oddly, they seem to disappear when they get older (laughs).