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(Multi)Cultural citizenship and Eurovision spectacle in post-communist Europe

This paper investigates how recent transformations of sexuality displayed at Eurovision song contest and societal attitudes towards it in two ex-Soviet countries (Russia and Ukraine) shape the reconstruction of the boundaries of taste in the post-communist nations, and how this in turn enables them to reconfigure their own position within the New Europe. I argue that post-Soviet attempts to engage with the culture of sexual and aesthetic excess characteristic of Eurovision are twofold. On the one hand, they involve intracultural dialogue. Here I draw attention to how the performers mediate between state delineations of the limits of the sexually permissible (cf. recent examples of homophobia, such as the prohibition of the Gay Pride parade in Russia) and popular, grassroots currents within which sexual 'deviance' and excess is openly explored. Thus, the Eurovision performances constitute a bridge between rigid, official conceptions of the national self and alternative non-mainstream identities. In this context, the long-standing role of pop culture and its relationship with 'high art' in the building of (post)Soviet national consciousness must be accounted for.

On the other hand, I analyse the intercultural and transnational aspects of Eurovision. Here post-communist performances of excessive and aberrant sexuality can be read in terms of an implicit dialogue with West European constructions of 'bad taste' and the emergent notion of Euro-trash. Thus, post-communist Eurovision performances are treated as a 'double voiced' act which self-consciously parody western imaginings of an exotic, yet sexually promiscuous East (hence the frequent inclusion of ethnic 'pastiche' alongside sexual excess).