

Black swan, white masks: Contesting cosmopolitanism and double misrecognition in a gay tourist town

Abstract

This article discusses the effects that constructions of lesbianism – generated and circulated widely throughout Anglo-American media – had on normative discourses of gender and sexuality amongst British migrants, living in the affluent coastal tourist town of Sitges, in Spain. Marketed as a cosmopolitan location par excellence, Sitges' identity is built largely on its reputation for playing host to an internationally diverse gay community, subsequently understood to evince an atmosphere of openness and tolerance. And yet drawing on the work of Frantz Fanon (1952/1967) and Kelly Oliver (2001), I suggest that the visibility of feminine lesbianism in this context was resignified through those media images, constituting a 'double misrecognition', which saw all female homosexuality paradoxically become invisible at the exact moment representation was explicitly deemed to have been achieved. Far from elaborating a cosmopolitan 'openness towards difference', I argue that the resulting double misrecognition actually substantiated highly conservative gender norms, even as it masqueraded as the opposite.

Keywords

Cosmopolitanism, Fanon, feminine lesbianism, place-marketing, recognition

Introduction

December 2010 saw the worldwide release of Hollywood film director Darren Aronofsky's eagerly anticipated psychological thriller *Black Swan*. The film's story followed a ballerina forced to negotiate the machinations of her destructive, over-bearing mother; of a highly demanding, sexually manipulative director; and those of a mysterious, beautiful rival, as she fought her own rapidly spiralling mental disintegration to play the lead role in an adaptation of *Swan Lake*, for a prestigious New York ballet company. *Black Swan* was a box office hit, winning widespread critical acclaim and bagging numerous awards in the process, including five Oscars and four Golden Globes.

Prior to its release however, *Black Swan* proved a hot topic of conversation for one reason in particular – the widely publicised inclusion of a sex scene between the two female leads, played by Hollywood actresses Natalie Portman and Mila Kunis. Previously, even the most remote intimation of lesbianism on screen would automatically result in a film receiving the highest possible certification. So it was with some surprise that *Black Swan* garnered only an 'R' rating in the United States and the equivalent '15 with parental guidance' rating in the UK. This was regarded in certain quarters as something of a coup and it was tentatively suggested that a more lenient certification offered not only evidence of an increasingly progressive attitude towards the cinematic representation of lesbianism, but consequently therefore, a greater public tolerance towards female homosexuality more generally too (Bendix, 2010). Perhaps unsurprisingly then, the scene came to play a central role in every interview with either actress. In one pre-Oscar interview with Natalie Portman, when asked about the scene, she replied:

'Everyone was so worried about who was going to want to see this movie . . . I remember them being like, 'How do you get guys to a ballet movie? How do you get girls to a thriller?' And the answer is a lesbian scene. Everyone wants to see that. (Entertainment Weekly, 2010)

Everyone wants to see a lesbian scene? What on earth could she mean? Did the mainstream popularity of the movie really occur for the reason that the actress was suggesting? Did this subsequently provide evidence of the rehabilitation of a once

transgressive identity throughout Euro-American popular culture? Has lesbianism been so thoroughly culturally resignified that its representation is not only tolerated and acceptable, but is now a highly desirable, commoditised identity? Well here, I am going to argue, not quite. Instead, I suggest that it is a very particular kind of lesbianism that is being referred to, one that in seeming to suggest the transformation of female homosexuality into desirable mainstream icon of acceptable diversity, does not actually equate to lesbianism at all. And it is this particular articulation of female homosexuality, both evinced and concretised throughout Euro-American media representations – of which *Black Swan* offers a prime example – that I first became aware of during 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork amongst British migrants, living in the affluent coastal tourist town of Sitges, in Spain.

Making places: Sitges and cosmopolitanism

My fieldwork aimed to bring place-marketing ideas of cosmopolitanism into dialogue with a newly emerging sociology of ‘lifestyle migration’ (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009a, 2009b). Lifestyle migration has been defined as the increasing relocation ‘of [relatively affluent] people within the developed world’ (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009b: 608), which has ‘grown as a result of very particular historical and material conditions, particularly globalisation, increased mobility, flexibility, and increased relative wealth’, that have often been overlooked in the ‘more general literature on migration’ (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009b: 609, 620). To do so, I planned to focus on the way that subjective differences were negotiated within a context in which identities that might previously have been negatively-valued bases of inequality, like homosexual identities, for example, were supposedly equally highly-valued. Whilst it soon became clear that homosexuality especially was seen by the British participants with whom I worked as a celebrated marker of progressive cosmopolitanism, it was precisely that recognition itself, and the form that its representation took, which formed the basis of social exclusion in a way that I had completely unanticipated.

Sitges lies on the Eastern coast of the Spanish mainland, around 35 kilometres South of Barcelona, deep in the heart of Catalunya. The town is perhaps most famous for its reputation for being cosmopolitan, for being a place where ‘anything goes’, a line that it is heavily marketed along. Sitges, you never cease being told, is different. It is an idea that

confronts you everywhere you go, and not least because Sitges' locational identity has been explicitly, and not to mention very successfully, constructed as such through the efforts of the local Ayuntamiento (town council). Within their promotion of the town, the Ayuntamiento have consciously built upon macro-level shifts in place-marketing discourses, which from the 1990s onwards saw a new emphasis placed on 'cosmopolitanism' (Rushbrook, 2002: 183; see also Binnie et al., 2006: 28; Young et al., 2006: 1687).

The ideological origin of cosmopolitanism is most often traced back to the Ancient Greek philosopher, Diogenes, who, in the 5th century B.C. when asked where he came from, is said to have replied 'I am a citizen of the world' (cited in Nussbaum, 1994: 2). Diogenes refused to be bound by his immediate locality, instead claiming allegiance to a humanity reaching far beyond it. This concept was more fully developed by the Stoics, who argued that attachments to locality and in particular, to the City State, which had been central to Ancient Greek formations of citizenship and [masculine] identity, led only to enslavement (Breckenridge et al., 2002: 10; Nussbaum, 1994: 3; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002: 12). Contemporary accounts most often suggest that after a hiatus during the Reformation, when philosophy was taken over by debates opposing the secular and the religious, Enlightenment-based thinking returned to the concept of cosmopolitanism principally through Kant, whose famous essay *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay* (Kant, 1795/2010), built on the ideas of Diogenes and his followers (Breckenridge et al., 2002: 10; Nussbaum, 1994: 3).

Kant believed that the then contemporary extension of global trade he bore witness to, necessitated the maintenance of similarly global 'good relations'; relations which reached beyond geographically bound, territorially-defined, nation-states (Kant, 1795/2010; Nussbaum, 1994: 3; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002: 12). In order to function peaceably, Kant argued, they would need to be established on the basis of a new juridical category to run alongside the continuation of Statist rule – cosmopolitan rights distributed via a world citizenship (Kant, 1795/2010: 57; Waldron, 2000: 228–30). Interest in the concept then waned somewhat until its contemporary resurgence, but since then, different disciplines have explored it in different ways.

While political philosophy for example, has run along the lines of a Kantian model of cosmopolitanism as a liberalist world citizenship, sociology has tended towards a cosmopolitanism emphasising the impact of globalisation on links between state and society (Mitchell, 2007: 2). Within anthropology, cosmopolitanism emerged, at least in part, through work considering transnational migration (Mitchell, 2007: 3). Competing critiques and definitions have proliferated, from evoking an elitist, 'unrooted' cosmopolitanism, one supposedly constituting an intellectualised 'aesthetic stance' (Hannerz, 1990: 239), to a 'subaltern' cosmopolitanism, propounding a 'bottom up', 'vernacular ethnic rootedness' in opposition, one that need not automatically 'negate openness to cultural difference or the fostering of a universalist civic consciousness and a sense of moral responsibility beyond the local' (Werbner, 2006: 497; see also Appiah, 1998).

Whilst there is not the space to discuss all of these different positions and the nuances between them in greater detail here, perhaps the most important point to emerge from these debates has been recognition of the fact that both 'groups and individuals perform their own sense of cosmopolitanism dependent on context – their own particular locations in various axes of power, as well as the broader structuring forces of global capitalism and geo-politics' (Mitchell, 2007: 9). Rather than contingent forms of distinct capitalisms, it is precisely these 'broader structuring forces' of global capitalism, which have informed the specific articulation of cosmopolitanism that has proved vital to its association with place-marketing (Rushbrook, 2002: 187). This has particularly been the case within so-called 'second-cities', like Manchester (UK), Toronto and so on – those that lie outside of the more widely recognised centres of global trade and finance, like London, New York, or Tokyo (Binnie et al., 2006: 3). Being able to articulate a cosmopolitan identity through emphasising an openness towards ethnic and cultural diversity, usually by focusing on art and cultural activities, has been crucial to these restructured notions of place-marketing as urban developers seek to characterise locations 'as cosmopolitan as a way of attracting "global talent", financial capital and tourism' (Glick Schiller et al., 2011: 402).

In this formulation, cosmopolitanism has come to represent 'one of the most desirable forms of contemporary cultural capital', becoming a fully explicit angle of urban regeneration in the process (Rushbrook, 2002: 183; see also Binnie et al., 2006: 28; Young et

al., 2006: 1687). The notion that places can be 'cosmopolitan' has subsequently become part of Western vernacular, a representation which imagines specific locations as enabling the kinds of 'exciting encounters with difference' seen as being vital to attract, foster and retain the so-called 'creative classes'; those people both able and willing to negotiate such encounters, those deemed perhaps, to be the most likely to live cosmopolitan lifestyles already (Young et al., 2006: 1687, 1689; Binnie et al., 2006: 3, 24).¹

The concept of 'difference' in this sense is crucial, because being tolerant of, being able to live with such 'differences' is understood to represent an ability to adapt, to be open to innovation and novelty, not only at the level of those relating individuals, but subsequently therefore, at the level of (socio)economic production too (Binnie et al., 2006: 2). Indeed, it was forcefully argued by Richard Florida, one of the main architects behind the proliferation of this idea and its adoption by urban planners in sites across the world, that the 'creative classes' – young, trendy and politically progressive people, working in high-tech and/or creative industries, would be at the forefront in the 21st century, as 'creativity' (loosely defined) would become the driver of economic growth (Florida, 2002, 2005).

Critics have since questioned the validity of Florida's claims, arguing that places in which his ideas directly influenced urban planning and social policy – Detroit in the USA, for example, have seen little benefit and that it is in fact the other way around; the so-called creative classes are drawn to areas of high economic growth, rather than being the reason for it (Boren and Young, 2013; Hansen and Niedomysl, 2009; Markusen, 2006). Nonetheless, there are places that have undoubtedly benefitted from the incorporation and extension of such beliefs, and in terms of successful place-marketing especially, cosmopolitanism has subsequently become commoditised, something to be consumed (Beck, 2004: 150).

Sitges in particular was well-placed to take advantage of these shifts for several reasons mobilised in its place-marketing; its artistic history following its prominence as a location within the late 19th century Catalan modernist movement; its proximity to Barcelona – a city renowned for its own cosmopolitan credentials; the relatively large and highly diverse migrant community it has attracted; as well as the town's enduring indigenous 'Sitgetan' community conveyed most strongly through a strict adherence to an annual calendar full of

traditional fiestas and carnivals. But Sitges' cosmopolitanism, its difference, has crucially also been an identity built upon its reputation for playing host to one group in particular: a highly prominent and internationally mixed gay community. This has proven to be such a vital part of the story of Sitges not least because increasingly within cosmopolitan place-marketing discourses, alternative sexual identities have in one sense become conflated with ethnicity, so that the claim to embrace sexual diversity constitutes a highly-valued example of embracing cultural/ethnic diversity more generally, so that 'gay culture occupies a pivotal role within the production and consumption of urban spaces as cosmopolitan' (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004: 40; see also Brown, 2006: 133; Rushbrook, 2002: 183).²

The flaunting of tolerance towards sexual diversity has not only proved vital to the marketing of particular locations, but the successful re-branding of places achieved on this basis has extended beyond specific locations by linking them to wider regions across the world (Giorgi, 2002: 57). The idea that acceptance of homosexuality functions as an index of modernity in this narrative fits neatly into a broad neoliberal ideology that values cosmopolitan credentials, because it is (ideologically at least) at once able to make a place particular and thereby act as a form of cultural capital, whilst at the same time be positioned as a transnational form of identification linking people and places across both space and time. In order for this to have occurred, it means that, within this particular discourse, homosexuality has been rendered explicit, made visible and to some extent, both ideologically and legislatively normalised. It was without a doubt the single most important aspect of the claim that participants, as well as its place-marketing, made for Sitges' cosmopolitanism.

The gay community in Sitges is both prominent and highly visible; rainbow flags hang from shop fronts, posters advertising gay nightclubs adorn the walls and during high season when gay tourism especially reaches its peak, the sheer numbers of men wandering the streets of the town holding hands or being intimate in, well, *other ways*, shall we say, are impossible to ignore. As is the acceptability of such visibility, the freedom they possess to do so. It is precisely the fact of homosexuality being rendered explicitly visible that was understood, not least by the Britons with whom I worked, to convey an atmosphere of openness and

tolerance constituting Sitges' 'difference' as a location, making it more than merely a 'place', but signifying an entire way of being. It soon became clear however, that gay men were very much *primus inter pares* and that although relatively a tiny minority, lesbians (as much as imaginings about them) occupied a strange space for the British migrants with whom I worked. Inside cosmopolitan homosexuality being gay and being a lesbian were ultimately very different indeed.

Negotiating homosexuality: Gender inversion and 'authenticity'

One afternoon soon after I arrived, I was in a bar run by an Englishman. As we were chatting I asked him about the place across the street. It was evidently a gay bar – rainbow flags draped either side of the entrance – but the doors and windows were covered with what looked like heavy, dark, velvet, and it was one of the few places which was impossible to see inside. I had been meaning to call in, but as I was still trying to find my feet, I wanted to check that it would not cause a potential problem:

'Do you think they'd mind me going in there? The gay guys, would they mind [I nodded towards the bar across the road], in there?'

Bob was wiping down the bar top. In reply, he stopped, put one hand on his hip and flapped the other, which was holding the dishcloth, at the wrist. Affecting an 'effeminate' voice, he replied:

'Not in there, they love women!'

Flapping his hand back and forth even more he coquettishly pursed his lips. I couldn't help but laugh at the unexpected and slightly incongruous sight of him playing 'camp'.

'Seriously?' I asked. 'They wouldn't mind?'

He reverted to his usual way of being.

‘No, no, you’ll be fine. They love women . . .’

He went back to wiping down the bar top.

‘ . . . it’s lesbians they can’t stand.’

Lesbians and women were then, it seemed, two entirely separate species. Regardless of the reality, not once did anybody, during the entire fieldwork period, raise the possibility that gay men were anything other than ‘camp’ or effeminate. Lesbianism, on the other hand, was fundamentally split into two separate positions; one deemed to be ‘authentic’ by participants – the masculine or ‘butch’ lesbian, whilst the other, the feminine lesbian, was deemed ‘inauthentic’ – and, not merely by default. To be an ‘authentic’ lesbian was absolutely fundamental to participants’ conceptualisations of female homosexuality and relied upon being understood to be physically a woman, whilst externalising what were culturally regarded as being masculine traits; taken together this signalled an exclusively homosexual orientation. Again and again ‘lesbian’ and ‘masculinity’ were firmly conflated.

As one participant informed me:

‘I’ve read research that, there’s this research, I can’t remember where, but it showed that gay men and women, in their brains, are closely related chemically and men are with lesbians. Err . . . straight men with lesbians I mean! [He laughed.] They did this research and it showed that, it’s this part of the brain, lesbians have it like straight men, it’s why they’re more aggressive. So it’s not so much about who you want to have sex with, it’s more about chemicals in the brain. I mean, why do you think it’s always lesbians fighting in gay bars? It’s never the gay men, always the lesbians fighting, gay men never fit that bill!’

I asked him:

‘But . . . what about feminine lesbians, ones who aren’t so masculine, I mean? Do you

think they're not really lesbians, not in the same way?'

'Well, I think . . . I do think that butch lesbians are more real, definitely, yeah. But then what's interesting, is to think about why they choose that image, why do they do that? Like I said, it's about chemicals in the brain and what-have-you. But . . . it's difficult. I don't . . . I mean, I guess the feminine ones, they've never really had an identity in the same way. I mean, ok, in the 90s you had lipstick lesbians for a bit, but it never really took off. I mean, I guess it's maybe that those lesbians don't really need an identity, you know? Not in the same way, because it's more natural isn't it? Women can hold hands, two girls can hold hands, they can be intimate in that way with each other and no-one bats an eyelid do they? If two men do it, well . . . '

'What, it's like, more radical or something, in a way you mean, two men?' I asked.

'In a way, yeah, exactly. But I think that it's also more that lipstick lesbianism kind of segued into, well, people could get into it who hadn't been part of the scene before because they didn't conform to that image, like I was talking about earlier. It became like, it wasn't only for butch lesbians. It definitely helped that the scene became, you know, there were cafes and bars, it was about a lifestyle, it was cleaner and brighter, it wasn't just all about sex . . . '

Butch lesbians in this formulation, are more 'real'; their sexual identity was understood by participants, in other words, to equate to an exclusive homosexuality which was subsequently deemed to be authentically so. They chose to express a masculine identity, but at the same time it was not really a choice at all because it was 'chemicals in the brain' that determined it. But although 'butch' lesbianism was a 'real' identity in this context, it was also definitively working class, which precluded it from being able to articulate or make cosmopolitanism legible in this context. Feminine lesbianism had a peak, this participant suggested, in the 1990s, but it was not a real identity because it was not about 'chemicals in the brain', it was not even about sex. Instead, it was a lifestyle choice, one able to build on that supposedly natural inclination women have to go to clean, brightly-lit cafes and hold hands with one another.

It has been argued that this tendency to link masculinity and female homosexuality is long-established, and that across Euro-American culture the idea holds so fast that, regardless of actual sexual identification, any woman deemed to be masculine is automatically categorised as a lesbian (Faderman, 1991: 41; Halberstam, 1998: 52, 59). Conflating female masculinity with lesbianism in this way not only denies the fact that there may well be female masculinities that cannot be so easily equated with non-normative sexuality, but also underwrites the idea that properly constituted masculinity is tied in an essential way to the male body (Halberstam, 1998: 46). And as the quotes above show, this idea was certainly prevalent amongst the people with whom I worked. There is also, of course, a wide range of literature that explores butch–femme identities, but most often in relation to one another.³ Here, I have chosen not to introduce this literature because the aim of the article is to analyse the way that the participants with whom I worked conceptualised masculinised and feminised female homosexual identities in opposition to one another, instead.

To do so, I focus on a feminised form of lesbianism ‘constructed in relation to heterosexuality not as an autonomous or independent sexual identity’ (Gill, 2009: 152–3). Feminine lesbians represented in this way ‘denote heterosexual women “experimenting” . . . with other women. Girl-on-girl action is presented as exciting, fun, but, crucially, as entirely unthreatening to heterosexuality’ (Gill, 2009: 153; emphasis added; see also Diamond, 2005; Wilkinson, 1996). And it was precisely this trope of the overtly-sexualised ‘hot-but-non-threatening’ feminine lesbian that constituted the only means through which the participants with whom I worked could comfortably discuss lesbianism. Clearly something interesting was going on, something that I wanted to try to understand. I asked one participant how she imagined lesbians. She mouthed with a grimace that lesbians were ‘butch’:

‘So, if I showed you a picture of, say, Shakira⁴, and said “She’s gay”, you wouldn’t believe me?’

‘Ah well, Shakira? She isn’t a good choice is she? She’s filthy!’⁵

‘What about . . . Jennifer Aniston?’⁶

‘Actually, I probably wouldn’t believe that either because I know so much about her history of failed relationships with men.’

‘What about if they were posing together, like properly together, on a magazine cover, would you think they were gay then?’

‘I don’t think I would, no. Because it’s . . . you’re used to that aren’t you? I probably wouldn’t even notice it, to be honest!’

‘You wouldn’t think they were lesbians?’

‘No, no I wouldn’t. I think, two women together, two hot women, that’s kind of . . . I think of that as being, well, a bit saucy, you know?!’

‘Why?’ I asked.

‘It’s like it’s hot . . .’ she said, ‘ . . . but it’s not really real.’

Representations of feminine women hinting at sexual intimacy proliferated to such an extent, she argued, that it was easy to overlook. It certainly did not equate in participants’ everyday imaginings to an exclusively homosexual identity, but functioned instead as a kind of ‘sexy’ addendum to female heterosexuality. As I will discuss below in relation to the town’s first ever gay Pride event, it was simultaneously the proliferation of such images throughout Sitges’ place marketing, which was seen to augment the town’s cosmopolitan credentials by operating precisely as evidence of the acceptance of female homosexuality, which was then thoroughly taken for granted. And it was this very contradiction which had a discernible impact on how feminine lesbianism could – or more correctly perhaps could not – be lived as an embodied identity within the town. Because in this context what you looked like was read through the terms of the normative gender paradigm to unfailingly define what you are, what Halberstam has called the cardinal rule of gender remained firmly fixed

in place – one had to be ‘readable’, that is, ‘at a glance’ (Halberstam, 1998: 23).

Consequently, as the quotes outlined above have shown, to be read normatively as a woman – to be feminine – and yet to express same-sex desire, was not to be recognised as authentically and exclusively homosexual, but was instead to be re-imagined as an overtly sexualised extension of female heterosexuality.

The sexualisation of (necessarily feminised) lesbian representations has been discussed before; Blackman, for example, has suggested that this ‘heterosexualised’ lesbian image has come to proliferate at a time when flexibility is paramount, helping to ‘construct an image of the heterosexual woman . . . as flexible and open to change, with the rigid lesbian who clings to her so-called pigeonholed labels as dreary and restricted’ (Blackman, 2009: 130). This ‘hetero/lesbian’ figure, Blackman argues, purports to offer women a form of agency in a postfeminist world wherein the ‘heterosexual woman tries lesbianism whilst waiting for a man who is good enough’ (Blackman, 2009: 125, 128–9). The crucial factor here being that as ‘much as they can come out, they can always go back in’ again; lesbianism operates as a ‘temporary interruption to the solid and indomitable march of heterosexual desire’, which remains privileged amongst all else (Blackman, 2009: 125; see also Rubin, 1982; Vance, 1982: 282). The distinction this then creates has direct effects on how people are able to embody or actualise their sense of self and personhood; the butch lesbian becomes ‘the shadowy Other’ in this context, fully-fixed into that classification and denied agency through it (Ciasullo, 2001; see also Blackman, 2009: 131; Gill, 2009: 152; Skeggs, 2004: 292–3).

And yet it has also been suggested that such representations are not necessarily wholly negative and may perhaps ‘open up a potentially positive and “hospitable” space for some – particularly white, middle-class and femme – lesbians in popular culture’ (Dittmar, 1998; Gill, 2009: 152). But what none of these positions explicitly consider is the position of the feminine lesbian who proclaims an either/or identity – what of the feminine lesbian who is not heteroflexibly inclined? It is my contention then, that the feminine lesbian is as equally fixed, equally ‘Othered’ by those representations, precisely because her sexuality is not deemed to be an authentic or ‘stand-alone’ identity; shadowless and invisible behind the ‘shadowy Other’ precisely through being read – and only read – as the heterosexual, neo-liberal, flexible adventurer. This was crucial, and not least because all ‘sexualities are socially

negotiated' (Weston, 2009: 142). But in a context like Sitges, where the visibility of celebrated – and especially sexual – differences was privileged, being able to have one's sexuality be successfully read formed the basis of social participation within the town. And it is in this sense that I will argue that feminine lesbianism offers a clear-cut case of 'double misrecognition' (Oliver, 2001: 38), which led to what participants felt was the exclusion of lesbian participation in the town's first ever gay Pride festival. But first, we need to take one step back to look at misrecognition itself, misrecognition as described particularly by the philosopher Charles Taylor.

Charles Taylor and 'The Politics of Recognition'

Taylor had been fascinated by the rise of identity-based politics following the tide of counter-cultural, civil rights, feminist and anti-war movements that swept across the Western world from 1968 onwards, and in 1994 he published a famous essay, 'The Politics of Recognition' (Taylor, 1994). In it, Taylor argued that to be afforded positive recognition was a fundamental right, the denial of which constituted a potent form of oppression that he termed 'misrecognition' and famously described as:

'The thesis . . . that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can be a form of oppression' (Taylor, 1994: 75)

Taylor's engagement with political-philosophical theories of recognition was incredibly influential and sparked a resurgence of work considering its themes. One of Taylor's main interlocutors was Nancy Fraser, whose major criticism was that articulations of recognition like those of Taylor's had the tendency to airbrush out conflicts over redistribution (Fraser, 1997, 2000). Where for Taylor all conflicts, including those concerning economic maldistribution, were best understood as iterations of struggles for recognition more generally, Fraser argued that while identity politics and claims for more equitable economic

redistribution are 'fundamental to social justice', they are nonetheless 'irreducible to each other' (McNay, 2008:66)⁷. In essence, Fraser argued that Taylor's 'subjectivist' approach ignored structurally-determined, material inequalities. Furthermore, she suggested that when identity-based neo-Hegelian approaches to recognition were taken, matters of economic redistribution were displaced on the basis of a reified conception of (both collective and individual) identity (Fraser, 1997: 112; 2000: 108, 110). Such simplistic, reified understandings of identity were problematic, not least because they were built on a unitary understanding of the self that overlooked the multiplicity of identities that each individual embodies in different contexts at different times (Fraser, 1997: 152).

For Fraser, the answer lay in (heuristically, at least) separating out oppression based on identitarian misrecognition from that of economic maldistribution. She then outlined two distinct types of remedy: the 'affirmative', aimed at ameliorating inequalities post-facto, thereby maintaining the system/structure that produced them, as opposed to the 'transformative', which aimed instead to correct inequalities precisely through altering the system/structure itself (Fraser, 1997: 15, 23; see also McNay, 2008: 147; Oliver, 2001: 50). Fraser cited political debates concerning homosexuality as a concrete example of the differences between the two approaches, so that gay-identity politics, aiming to revalue gay and lesbian identities, are what Fraser would call 'affirmative' (Fraser, 1997: 23). Queer politics, on the other hand, in seeking to undermine the heteronormative opposition between homo/heterosexuality completely, thereby deconstructing categorical distinctions based on sexuality for everybody, would be 'transformative' (Fraser, 1997: 24)⁸. Political issues of recognition could subsequently be resignified as struggles over 'status' (McNay, 2008: 148; Fraser, 1997: 11–12; 2000: 107).

In one sense both authors were writing about recognition at the level of macrolevel political discourse and particularly in relation to ideas about multiculturalism, which had become newly prominent from the beginning of the 1990s. Nonetheless, they were also sensitive to the fact that such ideological manoeuvres bear real material weight, and affect the way that people are either enabled to, or prevented from, living their everyday lives. Recognition, in the aforementioned quote from Taylor, operates, in other words, both at the level of State legislation as much as it is constituted by inter-subjective interactions between people on a

micro-level; a shift across scale that very definitely resonated within Sitges too. People negotiated their social relationships, recognised or related to one another according to the different categories, those representations of 'acceptable' differences, upon which Sitges' cosmopolitan discourse had been explicitly and consciously built. Despite the all-inclusive rhetoric that Sitges' cosmopolitanism suggested, there were very definitely those defined within Sitges' cosmopolitan discourse as 'non-cosmopolitan' – people deemed unable to reflect the kind of highly valued diversity through which cosmopolitanism here was constituted.

Amongst the British migrants with whom I worked – and undoubtedly reflecting the material representation of Sitges-as-cosmopolitan within the town's place-marketing material – these non-cosmopolitans were written out of the discourse according to (often overlapping) categories of race and class. In Taylor's terms these constituted concrete forms of misrecognition; certain groups of people who were being prevented from being able to contest negative representations of themselves, or were denied positive recognition in the first place. And yet in another sense, these groups were, nonetheless, still thereby defined. Forming the 'constitutive outside', they were, in other words, the negation through which cosmopolitanism was here delineated (Butler, 1993: 13). Whilst not wishing to downplay the challenge this posed to the belief that in Sitges all subjective differences would be not only tolerated, but positively celebrated, by focusing on the imaginings and representations of lesbianism here, I want to suggest that another form of misrecognition can be added to the debate; one that relates directly to the work of Frantz Fanon, and Kelly Oliver's own reading of his work.

Fanon, Oliver and 'double misrecognition'

Taylor's neo-Hegelian formulation of recognition outlined above, clearly owes a debt to Frantz Fanon and perhaps his most famous work – *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 1963). In it, Fanon argued that, within colonial contexts, the imposition of the dominant colonisers' image of the colonised gets internalised by the colonised themselves, so that it becomes a potent tool of oppression allowing dominant groups to 'entrench their hegemony by inculcating an image of inferiority in the subjugated' (Taylor, 1994: 97; Fanon, 1963). Yet it is

to his earlier work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, the premise of which foreshadowed *The Wretched of the Earth*, that I turn to here (Oliver, 2001: 38; see Fanon, 1952/1967).

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon drew on his own experiences of living as a black man in the 'white' world of Paris in the early 1950s, as he sought to bring together both social and psycho-analytical understandings of recognition. Specifically Lacanian elaborations of recognition – built out of Hegelian foundations – rely, Fanon argued, on the belief that the alienation resulting from a split between the inner psychic world and the outer world of society, is constitutive of subjectivity, the means through which the ego gains agency, however illusory that may be (Fanon, 1952/1967). What they cannot account for, however, is what Kelly Oliver in her engagement with Fanon labels the 'double misrecognition' experienced particularly by victims of racism (Oliver, 2001: 38).

For Fanon the defining moment comes, perhaps, when he is on a train in Paris. Across the carriage he sees a small child grasp his mother's hand more tightly, draw himself into her body more closely, fix him with a wide-eyed stare and cry 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' (Fanon, 1952/1967: 112). In that child's gaze Fanon finds not the alienation constitutive of his subjective identity, but encounters a kind of reverse mirror stage; in that child's gaze he recognises a secondary effect; that there is no place of loving acceptance in the world that surrounds him. And so Fanon argues, for the oppressed, as the dominant culture demands that they identify with the position of 'other', the result is melancholia, 'the cultural loss of their own lovable and loved ego' (Oliver, 2001:37). It is a double misrecognition, which becomes crystallised in that moment when an individual gains recognition of himself through the eyes of the dominant culture – precisely through which he is explicitly 'Othered' in the first place. White domination leaves Fanon with a choice to make in order to exist at all; identify with a whiteness he can never fully inhabit, put on the white mask, or recognise himself as black and internalise the dominant culture's negative representation of himself; become inferiority, that is, incarnate (Fanon, 1952/1967: 18, 34–5, 100).

I am not seeking, of course, to equate the position of a black man living with the legacies of colonialism in 1950s Paris and living contemporarily as a feminine lesbian in an affluent

Spanish coastal tourist town. What I am arguing is that the choice that double misrecognition precipitates, the selection it demands, does in some respects resonate with the paradox the feminine lesbian was forced to face in the context of Sitges. And it does so precisely because Sitges' locational identity as cosmopolitan was predicated on a system of representation, which meant that successful participation in the community relied on positive recognition being attained. And yet despite the fact that at first glance it seemed that there may well have been a place of acceptance, a form of positive recognition in the world that surrounded the feminine lesbian in Sitges, it was, I am arguing, nonetheless based on a double misrecognition, one that left her with a choice to make; embody the identity read off her body at the price of forfeiting legitimacy – or accept the cultural norms which demanded she externalise and make her authentic self legible through stylised masculinity with all of the negative connotations that entailed.

As what was understood by participants to be authentic lesbianism – that is to be an exclusively homosexually-orientated woman who outwardly expressed this identity through stylised forms of normative masculinity – was denied the ability to represent, the kind of feminine lesbianism perpetuated and concretised through media representations has, I am suggesting, come to stand throughout mainstream Euro-American culture as the defining image of lesbian visibility, the image that shows equality has been achieved and how tolerant a society has become. Subsequently, it was an image that also contained the power to legitimate claims to cosmopolitanism in the town in which I worked, constituting the lens through which people understood lesbianism more generally. And nowhere was this clearer than in relation to Sitges' first ever gay Pride event.

Sitges gay Pride and lesbian non-participation

I remember feeling surprised when I heard that Sitges had never held a gay Pride event before, despite its reputation, But when I mentioned this to participants, they quickly argued that the reason was simple:

'I don't think you need Pride parades anymore. I mean really, what's the big deal?

I don't think people care, especially not here' (Alastair, retiree)

‘I don’t see why they even need to have one here, Pride is supposed to be to fight for equality, it’s [homosexuality] already accepted here, you don’t need Pride’ (Hans, businessman)

Participants overwhelmingly believed that Pride events were supposed to be political. In Sitges, it was argued, homosexuals supposedly had equality, so there was simply no need. Soon, however, the following pictures (see Figures 1 and 2) began to appear as marketing for the event, both online and on posters around the town:

This type of marketing – meant to represent an openness towards and/or encourage lesbian participation in Sitges Pride – was redolent of that found throughout the town’s place-marketing. Such images either contained pictures of overtly sexualised women who were read by participants as being feminine, or no depictions of women at all; particularly not those who could be read by participants as being ‘authentic’ lesbians. And as a result, participants – both lesbian and non – began to express ambivalence, beyond the idea that Pride was not politically necessary. One prominent gay businesswoman who lived in the town had contacted the event organisers to complain: ‘I told him, the two girls advertising the *Girl’s Night Out* are ridiculous! I bet they’re just models. They’re probably not even gay, they don’t even look like lesbians! I mean, come on, who is that going to appeal to?’, whilst another lesbian I knew described it as being a ‘total insult’. Perhaps somewhat inevitably, the end result was an obvious – and explicitly recognised – lack of lesbian participation in the Pride event itself. When I asked gay women I knew if they had attended, the replies were similar across the board:

‘Why would I? What was there for me? Oh, let’s be honest, the whole thing was for the guys!’ (Meredith, promotions)

‘It’s the same old story isn’t it? They pay lip service to us [lesbians], I suppose because they think they have to, but let’s be honest, there was hardly anything for women at all; a BBQ in someone’s garden, a meal in a restaurant . . . They basically gave us the crap left over after the boys had had their fun’ (Jo, lecturer)

As a result, the images meant to depict lesbianism concretised and further substantiated the hegemonic terms of the normative gender paradigm precisely because they did not really equate to non-normative female sexuality at all. Lesbian participants with whom I worked in Sitges subsequently felt excluded before the event had even begun. In essence, the result of the proliferation of such representations was two-fold; firstly it meant that lesbianism was rendered invisible at the level of public discourse at exactly the same moment that the opposite was being said to have been achieved. Secondly, the problem was intensified at the level of the relating-individual, because recognition is not just about identity in a theoretical guise, whether discussed in terms of embodiment or otherwise; identity is never solely about constructing and negotiating a categorical description of 'who you are' or to determine 'whom others might be'; because to do so also defines a template for interaction, a basis for the way that people treat one another. And re-signifying feminine lesbianism as an extension of female heterosexuality not only (inevitably) impacted on the way that women claiming an exclusively homosexual identity negotiated their social participation within the town, but may also potentially impact upon the way that all women are treated more generally.

Conclusion

And so to conclude: my point is simple. It may well be tempting to think that lesbians have equality, recognition achieved, on the basis of the supposed tolerance of the kinds of images made visible and perpetuated through the medium and marketing of films like *Black Swan*, which are then replicated to convey a similar sentiment in the promotion of places like Sitges as 'cosmopolitan'. What I am arguing, however, is that whenever and wherever this does occur, we have to be completely and utterly certain that inequalities are not simply being reiterated at the exact moment the opposite is being said to have been achieved; to be certain that is, that in perpetuating and celebrating such representations we are not all simply hiding behind the faces of white masks.

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Notes

1. For elaborations of the 'creative class'/'creative city', see Florida, 2002; Landry, 2000.
2. This idea was also prominent within Richard Florida's work in which he (not uncontroversially) posited a 'gay index', wherein a relatively high proportion of gay people living in an area was deemed to be vital to attract the creative classes, constituting a visible sign of openness and tolerance that he believed they sought (Florida, 2005).
3. See, for examples: Case, 1993; Davis and Kennedy, 1992; Nestle, 1987, 1992.
4. Shakira is a Columbian singer, renowned for her sexually provocative 'belly dance' dance style.
5. Within this context, the word 'filthy' operated colloquially to suggest an overt – and not necessarily negatively valued – sexual liberalism, most commonly associated with women.
6. Jennifer Aniston is an American actress who became famous worldwide in the 1990s playing a lead role in the globally successful American TV show Friends.
7. See Fraser, 1997: 23–24, 189; Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Young, 2000: 105.
8. Fraser's example of homosexual politics sparked debate with Judith Butler, who accused her of 'neo-conservatism' and suggested that Fraser's analysis dismissed the oppression of lesbians and gays as 'merely cultural', a charge that Fraser, however, vehemently denied. See Butler, 1997; Fraser, 1998.

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