

## INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS BEYOND THE PINK CURTAIN?

The idea of this book was born in the Intimate/Sexual Citizenship conference in October 2005 in Ljubljana where scholars focusing on the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in post-socialist Eastern Europe were gathered to discuss the everyday life experiences of LGBT people regarding the functioning of social, political and cultural boundaries that separate the “good heterosexual citizen” from the rest.<sup>1</sup>

While a lot of research findings of our colleagues in the Western world on everyday life experiences of LGBT people are well documented, easily accessible, and often interpreted as having “universal” relevance, results of research projects about LGBT people in Eastern Europe are mostly unknown, and as they are coded in the local non-global languages, mostly inaccessible to broader audiences, and thus easily regarded as non-relevant or even non-existent. Therefore our main aim with this book was to bring together a variety of empirical—most often social scientific—research material from Eastern Europe for the first time and present it in “the global language.” As important as the obvious academic aim of the book is the political goal of the project: to voice those whose experiences are analysed and whose everyday lives’ joys and pains are mirrored in the texts presented here.

Some of the authors were participants in the Ljubljana conference, others we found through various research and activist networks—but all of them had something relevant and well-documented to say about the possibilities to live as LGBT persons in a region that is still haunted sometimes by the past experience of being locked behind “the Iron Curtain”.

While for about four decades after its descend probably the most powerful characteristic of “the Iron Curtain” derived from the puzzling fact that no one could really know what was going on behind it—now, when we can look beyond this metaphor and have a chance to discover what was hidden before, we can see more clearly the distorting conse-

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<sup>1</sup> The conference was part of a broader project “Intimate Citizenship: The Right to Have Rights,” including the Slovenian research on everyday life of gays and lesbians and the educational programme “Diversity makes us richer, not poorer” <[www.mirovni-institut.si/razlicnost](http://www.mirovni-institut.si/razlicnost)>.

quences of the forcefully imposed separation and the lack of information resulting from it. Thus we also have to realise that one type of separation can conceal several others, and the initial urge of looking behind will ultimately lead us to look beyond—and challenge the existing frameworks.

Among the various veiled segments of post-socialist Eastern European reality we wanted to examine those covered by “the pink curtain”—being in fact a global rag—, and we have found similar patterns of LGBT everyday life in different countries that do not discontinue at state borders. Considering that facing the diverse manifestations of social and cultural homophobia still seems to be a unifying experience for the majority of LGBT people, “the West” is not necessarily as far from “the East” as it is sometimes suggested.

We have collected documents of desire and pain, pride and humiliation, openness and fear, love and hate, care and neglect experienced by LGBT people struggling for recognition, respect and full community membership rights in this part of the world, too. At the same time the 21 articles of this volume illustrate the increasingly conspicuous *ways of LGBT existence* being specifically characteristic to Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, East-Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

And of course, we wish to share these experiences with everyone who cares to look (not just behind but also) beyond what has been separating us from each other.

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