

Cosmopolitan Sexualities

Hope and the Humanist Imagination

Ken Plummer

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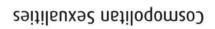
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In fond memory of

Stan Cohen (1942–2013) Mary McIntosh (1936–2013) Michael Schofield (1919–2014) Jock Young (1942–2013)

Four inspirations

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Hate begets hate, violence engenders violence, hypocrisy is answered by hypocrisy, war generates war, and love creates love.

Pitrim A Sorokin, The Ways and Power of Love (1954, p. xi)

Few things have done more harm than the belief on the part of individuals or groups (or tribes or states or nations or churches) that he or she or they are in *sole* possession of the truth: especially about how to live, what to be & do – & that those who differ from them are not merely mistaken, but wicked or mad: & need restraining or suppressing. It is a terrible and dangerous arrogance to believe that you alone are right, have a magical eye which sees *the* truth, & that others cannot be right if they disagree.

Isaiah Berlin, 'Notes on prejudice' 1981; in New York Review of Books, 18 October 2001 (Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of The Beneficiaries of the Estate of Isaiah Berlin Copyright © Isaiah Berlin 1981)

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Website

http://kenplummer.com/cosmosexualities/

You may also be interested to visit this website connected to the book which provides links to a broad range of further resources relevant to Cosmopolitan Sexualities.

Abbreviations

ACHPR African Charter on Human and People's Rights
AI Amnesty International
AIDS acquired immune deficiency syndrome

APF Asia Pacific Forum

ARSRC Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre

ART antiretroviral therapy

ART assisted reproductive technology

ARV antiretroviral

ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations

AU African Union

AVEN Asexual Visibility and Education Network
BDSM bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism
CATW Coalition Against Trafficking in Women

CBRC cross-border reproductive care

CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of all forms of

Discrimination Against Women

CHS Culture, Health and Sexuality (journal)

CLAM Latin America Centre on Sexuality and Human

Rights

CMA critical medical anthropology

CRC Commission on the Rights of the Child

CRPD Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities CSA child sexual abuse civil society organization CSO CSS critical sexualities studies **ECHR** European Convention of Human Rights EU European Union **FGM** female genital mutilation GAATW Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women **GCVP** Global Campaign for Violence Prevention Gender-Related Development Index GDI GJM Global Justice Movement Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN) GIFT GH Gender Inequality Index Human Development Index HDI human immunodeficiency virus HIV Human Rights Watch HRW HSI Human Security Index International Association for the Study of Sexuality, **IASSCS** Culture and Society **ICCPR** International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights International Convention on the Elimination of All ICER D Forms of Racial Discrimination. International Covenant on Economic, Social and **ICESCR** Cultural Rights **ICTY** International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia ICJ International Court of Justice Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index IHDI International Humanist and Ethical Union **IHEU** International Lesbian and Gay Association ILGA **IMF** International Monetary Fund **INGO** international nongovernmental organization **IRRAG** International Reproductive Rights Research Group **IWHC** International Women's Health Coalition

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (other letters can

LGBT

be added as appropriate, e.g., Q for queer; I for

intersex)

MDG Millennium Development Goals

MDMA ecstasy: empathogenic, phenethylamine and

amphetamine drug

MSM men who have sex with men MENA Middle East and North African NATO North Atlantic Treaty Alliance

NAMBLA North American Man Boy Love Association

NGO nongovernmental organization OAS Organization of American States

OHCHR Office of the High Commissioner of Human

Rights

OIC Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PAL Paedophile Action for Liberation
PIE Paedophile Information Exchange

SPW Sexual Policy Watch

SRHR sexual and reproductive health and rights

SRI Sexual Rights Initiative

UN United Nations

UPR Universal Periodic Review (United Nations)
UDHR Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNAIDS United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

UNCHR United Nations Commission on Human Rights

UNIFPA United Nations Population Fund UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund UNIFEM United Nations Fund for Women

WCF World Congress of Families WHO World Health Organization

WSF World Social Forum

WSW women who have sex with women

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Introduction

O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, That has such people in it!

Shakespeare: The Tempest, 1610

Endless forms most beautiful and wonderful Charles Darwin, On the Origins of the Species, 1859

Planet Earth currently houses well over seven billion human beings in some two hundred nations with thousands of ethnic tribes often in conflict, and more than seven thousand languages, each with histories stretching back across the millennia. Imagine, if you dare, the sheer multiplicity of various gendered, sexual and intimate relationships and practices that these little animals, us, have experienced as they have walked the earth through time and space; and the different religions, states and economies that have been brought into existence that have helped shape them. Here is a truly vast labyrinth of desire, gender and reproduction. Think perhaps of the sheer complexities, or not, of your own life; and those of your parents, grandparents and their communities too. Think of all the

films you may have seen, the novels you might have read, the television you might have watched, the music you have heard about human relationships and sex. Spend a few minutes searching some of the millions of sex sites on the web. Then massively multiply all this into the global gendered world of human sexual complexity: the human sexual labyrinth.

Now this is indeed a challenge - and it is what this small study is about. I want you to stand with me in amazement at this oh so 'incorrigibly plural' world (to quote Louis MacNeice's poem 'Snow'), this 'pluriverse of differences', and these 'endless forms most beautiful'. I want you to wonder, along with Shakespeare, how many goodly creatures there are here and, maybe, how beauteous mankind is. Or, just maybe, to ask how many of these creatures are really not so beautiful at all. And with this, to ponder just how it is we can live together with all this difference. In this book, I puzzle about these varieties of embodied, emotional human sexual and gendered experiences, and ask how we humans live, or fail to live, with them. I will not be aiming here to chart a topography of these 'world varieties of sexual experience', to document 'the global history of sex', to review the multiple forms of the 'world gender order', to detail any kind of global scientific truth about diverse and gendered sexualities, or even to provide a manual of titillating sex acts: all this has now been tried in very many places. In this book, my focus lies with the challenge of grasping human vulnerabilities and asking how we can live with the diversities of our genders and sexualities and their tangled, emotional, biographical bodies; how we can build some common cosmopolitan values that will enable us to connect such diversity; how we can appreciate just where boundaries and borders do indeed have to be drawn; and how we can start to build up cosmopolitan institutions that make all these tasks possible.

To help me in this, I draw on the long history of cosmopolitanism, which suggests a form of everyday practical *consciousness* that recognizes human differences and then struggles to build social *structures and cultures* that help make diversity a workable feature of the humane, good social life. It is a goal to strive for, it harbours utopian visions and there are a few signs to indicate that we may be a little on our way towards its development. At the same time,

the path to its realization is cluttered with major problems and difficulties that need facing head on. My version of cosmopolitanism is a humanist theory; and my stance in this book will be broadly that of critical humanism. This takes seriously the centrality of a contingent human vulnerability, agency and meaning emerging alongside global human values: empathy and dialogue, care and kindness, dignity and rights, actualization and human flourishing, and fairness and justice. Despite a continual attack from many directions on humanism, it provides an imagination of great value.

A troubled world

And yet, everyday, as I have been writing this book, I have been torn with a dark hope. As the daily world news arrives, I am given a repeatedly clear vision of the devaluing of human lives across the world: the damaged and destroyed lives in the wars, violence and terrorist acts in Syria, the Ukraine, Iraq, Palestine, the Congo and elsewhere. We live in a very cruel, nasty world of dehumanization that is destroying lives for generations to come. Money, religion, nation and power (usually linked to gender and masculinity) seem to be the prime motivating forces for much of this misery and conflict. Yet, at the same time, I can also see the flourishing of human lives - in music and art, in education and care, in sport and science, in hundreds of little miracles of everyday human kindness. It is a joyous world of human creativity and caring. And this contrast will be a recurrent theme of this book. The bad news is humanity's inhumanity to humanity. Often with the help of the state and religion, unbelievable violence and cruelty are heaped on large numbers of people. Systems of ranking, honour and status are used to brutally destroy 'the other'. Powerful elites get away with murder, and tragic human suffering among the masses is ubiquitous. But the good news is humanity's evolving compassion, hope and creative activism. People in the world fight back: they do not like the horrors of the world, they create new movements to resist them and they bring dreams of a better world. Cosmopolitan sexualities, and this book, form part of that dream.