

The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life

La reconfiguración de la vida erótica e íntima

Jeffrey WEEKS

London South Bank University
weeksj@lsbu.ac.uk

Recibido: 7.10.08

Aprobado: 16.12.08

ABSTRACT

We are living in the midst of an unprecedented transformation of erotic and intimate life. Although this has been the subject of much controversy, most people have taken for granted the results of the changes, with little awareness of how things have changed, and how significant the changes have been. The article explores three traps that commentators fall into. The first is a mindless progressivism that assumes that all is for the best in all possible worlds. The second is a declinist approach, which assumes that all change is for the worst and that the quality of our morality – for which we can read sexual behaviour and values – is in hopeless decline. The third approach assumes continuity: yes, superficial things have changed, but in essence power structures have remained resilient. Subforms of the continuist approach are described, derived from feminist, queer, and anti neo-liberal critiques. Against these broad analytical approaches, the article affirms the importance of a historical approach. This would recognise that change has been uneven, but transforming nevertheless, and for the better. What makes them so significant is that they have largely been grass roots led: a true remaking of everyday life under the pressure of globalisation, detraditionalisation and heightened individualisation. In drawing up a balance sheet of the great transition we must conclude that a new world is emerging, a world we have won.

KEYWORDS: Families, fundamentalism, gender, globalisation, homosexuality, intimacy, liberalisation, same sex marriage, sexuality, values.

RESUMEN

Vivimos en medio de una transformación sin precedentes de la vida erótica e íntima. A pesar de que este asunto ha sido objeto de una amplia controversia, han sido muchos los que han dado por supuestos los resultados de los cambios, con escaso conocimiento de cómo han cambiado las cosas y hasta qué punto los cambios han sido significativos. Este artículo examina tres trampas en las que caen quienes se han ocupado de este fenómeno. La primera es un progresismo estúpido que asume que todo cuanto ocurre contribuye a la realización de un futuro óptimo en el mejor de los mundos posibles. La segunda es una visión “decadentista” que asume que todo cambio es a peor y que la calidad de nuestra moralidad –léase, de nuestra conducta y valores sexuales– vive una decadencia irremediable. El tercer enfoque asume la continuidad: sí, ciertas cosas superficiales han cambiado, pero en esencia las estructuras de poder se han mantenido incólumes. El artículo describe algunas sub-formas del enfoque continuista, derivadas de las corrientes de pensamiento crítico feminista, homosexual y anti-neo liberal. Frente a estas amplias

aproximaciones analíticas, el artículo reivindica la importancia de un enfoque histórico. Ésta perspectiva constataría que el cambio ha sido desigual, aunque en cualquier caso transformador, y que ha significado una mejora. Lo que hace que ese cambio sea tan significativo es que en gran medida ha sido liderado por una movilización realmente popular, desde abajo: una verdadera reconfiguración de la vida diaria bajo la presión de la globalización, la des-tradicionalización y una individualización acentuada. Al hacer balance de la gran transición debemos concluir que está surgiendo un nuevo mundo, un mundo que hemos conquistado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Familias, fundamentalismo, género, globalización, homosexualidad, intimidad, liberalización, matrimonios entre personas del mismo sexo, sexualidad, valores.

SUMARIO

1. 'All that is solid melts into air'. 2. Traps. 3. The ways we lived then. 4. A new world arising. 4.1. The 'gender revolution'. 4.2. The coming out of homosexuality. 4.3. A 'transformation of intimacy'. 4.4. The irresistible rise of sexual diversity. 4.5. A proliferation of sexual stories. 4.6. Risk and the threat of sexual disease. 4.7. Culture Wars. 4.8. The making of sexual/ intimate citizenship. 5. A conclusion. References.

1. 'ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR'

Marx and Engels famously noted over a hundred and fifty years ago that 'all that is solid melts into air', a tribute to the simultaneously disruptive and creative force of capitalism, industrialisation and urbanisation in its first dynamic phase. In the latest phase of that dynamism, what we variously call globalisation, neo-liberalism, late capitalism, post-modernity, we are becoming ever more aware that what seemed most solid, resistant to the sweep of change, our bodies, our sexual drives, our identities, our very nature as sexed, gendered beings, are themselves being remade in often radical and transformative ways. We are living in the midst of a long, unfinished but profound revolution that has transformed sexual and intimate life. Over the past couple of generations, gathering pace since the 1990s, there have been dramatic changes in family and marital life, erotic behaviour, sexual identities, parenting, relationships between men and women, men and men, women and women, adults and young people, and in laws, norms and values. These changes have remade everyday life across most of Europe, North America and Australasia, and many other parts of the world as well. They occurred unevenly, shaped by specific configurations of forces and the peculiar history of each culture and nation. The persistence, for example, of the Franco dictatorship into the 1970s meant that for a long time Spain seemed out of time with the growing liberalisation of the Netherlands or Scandinavia, then the models of the new freedoms. Similarly today, values and norms in eastern Europe seem way out of line on issues like homosexuality with those of western Europe. But where radical changes have occurred they are rapidly taken for granted, and the complex history that produced them can all too easily be obliterated.

We are much better at foretelling the past, it has been wittily remarked, than forecasting the future. If the past remains a battleground (and the sexual past can be especially controversial), and the present is highly contested especially, as in Spain or the USA, where traditional religion still has cultural weight, why should we be any good at saying anything worthwhile about what is likely to happen the day after tomorrow, let alone in the next thirty or a hundred years? Who, in the 1950s would readily have foretold the re-emergence of feminism or the rise of gay liberation? Who in the

1960s could have seen the rise of the new fundamentalisms? Who in the 1970s could have accurately seen the horrors of the HIV/ AIDS pandemic? Who in the 1980s could have seen the impact of campaigns for same sex marriage or the power of transgender challenges? Our realization of the impact of globalization and of transnational campaigns for human rights came not from the speculative minds of academics but from the heat of the battles over the spread of HIV, reproductive rights, and gross abuses of children, women and lesbian and gay people. The truth is that social scientists are better at analysing what hits us in the face than at casting a searchlight into the mists embracing the future.

But we need to start somewhere and the obvious place is with the present, this deeply historical present. How do we characterise it? Despite our knowledge of the horrors that persist across the globe, and also close to home, I believe we need to say clearly that from a broad historical perspective the sexual world has changed largely and dramatically for the better over the past fifty years. Unless we start out with that recognition it becomes impossible to escape the past, make sense of the present or have any possibility of colonising the future. But to do that we need to avoid the pitfalls and traps that we writers on sexualities tend all too easily to fall into (see Weeks, 2007: Chapter 1, and Weeks, 2008, from which the following discussion is taken).

2. TRAPS

Trap number 1 is to believe in the transformation as automatic or inevitable, a journey from the darkness of sexual repression into sexual freedom. And surely there is something to be said for that, at least if you live in large parts of the West. If the argument is that there has been progress in the ways we deal with questions of pleasure, desire, diversity and choice then who in their right senses would not prefer living today than fifty years ago? Despite the horrors that afflict so many parts of the world, from endemic war and ethnic cleansing (and the frequent association with them of sexual degradation and rape) to poverty, disease and transnational trade in human beings, there have been enormous strides in the toleration of difference, the different ways of being human, and in the

recognition of human rights in general and sexual rights in particular. But to say that does not mean I believe change to be either automatic or inevitable. There are too many people who have given their all to the cause of human - including sexual and intimate - freedom to believe that the paths were easy to follow or the struggles cost free

Nor do I believe in the possibility of an unproblematic sexual liberation. As Michel Foucault (1979) pointed out more than a generation ago now, you cannot 'liberate' sexuality as if you were taking the lid off a cauldron. Sexuality is not a property that can be repressed or released, but a historically shaped series of possibilities, actions, behaviours, desires, risks, identities, norms and values that can be reconfigured and recombined but cannot be simply unleashed (see my arguments in Weeks 2003). The changes that have taken place have embraced all the elements that go to make up the sexual, from erotic practices to the reorganisation of sexualised space, from the interactions of everyday life to religion, ethics and laws. But this is a qualitative shift in human relation, not a quantitative outpouring of more sex .

Finally, I am not assuming that the very idea of 'progress' is without its problems. How should we measure, say, the withdrawal of the state from the regulation of homosexuality, or the acceptance and promotion of birth control, or the outlawing of rape in marriage, or the recognition of widespread abuse of children, or indeed the growing acceptance of same sex civil partnerships or marriage (all of which has happened within most Western countries at least in very recent memory), against the commercial exploitation of children and women's bodies, the murder of homosexuals, the sleaziness of many parts of great metropolitan cities across the globe, the torrents of pornography on the internet, and what Bauman (2003) sees as the commodification of the erotic and the increasing fragility of human bonds? We have to weigh in the balance the gains and losses. Equally we need to understand what we mean by gains and losses. That involves in the end value judgments that we cannot avoid making ourselves in accord with our own sense of human needs, because we should be clear that there is no great Truth laid down for us in History, Religion or Science, despite the best efforts of their advocates to tell us differently.

But whatever traps would-be progressives may fall into they are as nothing compared with the next type of trap. Trap number 2 is to see everything as a decline from a state of grace , a world we have lost. Its characteristic tone is to lament the awful state of the present - the broken families, the high rate of divorce, the violence of young people, the incidence of mindless sexual promiscuity, the commercialisation of love, the public displays of homosexuality, the explicitness of sex education and the media, the decline of values, the collapse of social capital, the rise of sexual diseases - and to compare that with some golden age of faith, stability and family values (see, amongst others, Phillips, 1999, Davies, 2006). Alas, it is highly unlikely that the past - which ever past it was - was ever quite that golden, and it is certain that the present can never be quite that awful. This is perhaps the mirror image of a mindless progressivism. If the progressive mindset assume that sex in itself is a positive force for good, the socially conservative or declinist view assumes that it, or one of its variants, usually homosexuality - is not so much bad as dangerous, unless framed in specific contexts - usually heterosexual marriage.

The morally conservative critique has had a powerful purchase, despite its highly partial use of evidence. It underpins, for example the report of a recent British Conservative policy group on social justice led by Iain Duncan Smith, published in June 2007, and widely supported in the conservative press (for a critical assessment see Toynbee 2007). This talks of a 'disintegrating' or 'broken' society in a way which has had a powerful influence way beyond traditional conservatives. Echoes of the position can be traced even amongst leading radical scholars, such as Zygmunt Bauman (2003), who polemicises against the dangers and threats of 'liquid life' , 'liquid love' and 'dark times'. Left thinkers influenced by him have elaborated a critique of the 'social recession' which apparently belies our affluence and new freedoms. While ostensibly different from the jeremiads of conservative such leftist critiques come up with a similar cultural pessimism.

The late modern individual, we are told, is forced to live the illusion of freedom whilst actually being wrapped in the gilded cords of late capitalism, seduced by the wiles of a globalizing

consumer capitalism, making impossible the most precious human bonds (Hennessy, 2000, Binnie, 2004, Elliott and Lemert, 2006).

Characteristically, though not invariably, the declinist view is framed by a religious world outlook, whether Christian, Jewish or Islamic. It is a perspective that has had powerful political impact in key parts of the world – from the United States to Iran – with major influence in many other cultures. In most of the West, America apart, it is a minority perspective; on a global scale it is possibly on the rise. If we live in an age of great moral and cultural uncertainty (Weeks, 1995), then a fundamentalist affirmation of the truth of the gendered body, heterosexual sex, the horrors of perversity, and the sanctity of faith can seem an appealing antidote. That does not make it right or valid.

Trap number 3 is to believe that despite all the controversy nothing much has really changed at all. There is a surprising head of steam behind this position, though from different starting points. There is, for example, a feminist subset of this position, which acknowledges superficial changes – a greater emphasis, for example, on the importance of female sexual autonomy, greater access to effective birth control, perhaps, or even, as currently in Spain, a large number of women in the government – but stresses the continuities, especially in terms of the relations of power. There may be equal pay legislation, but women still on average earn only about two-thirds of men. Women may be able to flaunt their sexual desires, but it is still for the sake of the male gaze. Men may now be willing to change baby's diapers, but mothers still have prime responsibility for child care. Rape may now be better recognized as a crime against women, but sexual violence is widespread. The arguments are familiar. Some might see them as part of the unfinished achievements of the long revolution that have transformed sexual values and conduct over the past fifty years or so. Others see them as reflecting the fundamental inequalities that persist between men and women.

A 'queer' subset of the trap again recognizes that there have been great changes in attitudes towards homosexuality and sexual diversity. Certainly western societies have seen a cultural revolution, with affirmative LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer/ Querying)

identities everywhere, carrying massive cultural weight, with gays in the vanguard of the new creative classes. But how much has really changed? Isn't a gay identity little more than a pseudo ethnic identity that is easily accommodated by late capitalist societies, easily succumbing to the pink dollar or pound or euro? Isn't same sex marriage simply an assimilation into heteronormative structures (for example, Warner, 1993, 1999)?

Then there is anti-globalisation subset of this trap. It takes elements of the previous two. It acknowledges the continuing exploitation of women on a global scale, economic as well as sexual. The structural readjustment policies of the World Bank trap millions in poverty that inhibits the development of sexual freedoms and intimate life. It recognizes the power of individualizing tendencies, but sees them as accommodating to the necessities of the latest phase of capitalist expansion. Indeed, the legal reforms and institutional achievements of LGBTQ people that many of us have welcomed as the signs of greater toleration (and the result of hard work) are seen as little more than the latest ruse of power, fully complicit with the strategic need of neo-liberalism (for example, see argument in Richardson, 2004, and discussion in Weeks, 2007: Chapters 5 and 8).

Critics of neo-liberalism argue that ideas of individual autonomy and self responsabilization are not so much illusory or deceptive as the very forms of regulation which can be most effectively articulated with the current form of capitalist organization. Neo-liberalism is the ideological face of globalizing forces, undermining welfare policies that protect the individual against the deprivations of international capital (see Weeks, 2007: Chapter 6 which I have drawn on for this discussion). As applied to sexuality and intimacy, the critiques of neo-liberalism often deploy a particular reading of the work of Michel Foucault (for example, Rose, 1999; compare Weeks, 2005), which stresses the discursive construction of subjectivities within specific regimes of power. From this perspective, neo-liberalism can be seen as a new form of governance through which the individual is, in Rose's phrase, 'forced to be free' (Rose, 1999), to manage his or her self. Under neo-liberal imperatives, individuals become 'entrepreneurs of themselves, shaping their own

lives through the choices they make among the forms of life available to them' (Rose, 1999: 230). This elaborate and sophisticated form of subjectivity/ subjectification, does not, however, lead to the abandonment of governance; rather it substitutes self governance as the principle form of social regulation.

Recent liberalizing sex reforms can be read in this light. Critics of same sex marriage have seen it as a move toward creating the 'respectable' gay as opposed to the transgressive, disruptive, and challenging 'queer' (see Weeks, 2007: Chapter 7). Respectability would involve a voluntary regulation of the sexual self in the interests of full acceptance and citizenship (Richardson, 2004: 393). Some have seen this process working its way through the management of HIV in the 'post-crisis' world (in the west at least). A surveillance medicine, based on a risk rationality, replaces hospital medicine, with the aim of creating self-reflexive, self-managing subjects. People with HIV learn to calculate and manage risk, using their knowledge of their HIV status, their T cell count and blood viral load count, and the likelihood of infection to negotiate sexual partnerships (Adkins, 2002:108ff; Davis, 2005: 251).

From this position the self-reflexive person is the ideal subject of neo-liberal discourse, and 'reflexivity is constitutive of new forms of classification, hierarchies, divisions, struggle and forms of contestation' (Adkins, 2002:123). An emphasis on individual freedom and rights, and the importance of self surveillance and regulation for the individual who has internalised the norms and goals of liberal forms of governance, is central to the new society (Richardson, 2004: 393). In the contemporary world they are all the more potent for seeming to be so dispersed, underplayed, and voluntarily chosen.

These are seductive arguments, especially for someone like myself who has been schooled in the work of Michel Foucault. But for someone, also like myself, who has lived the changes of the past few generations as well as researched and written about them, it sometimes appears that theory has become completely detached from a lived reality. Are we not genuinely freer than we were in the 1950s in all issues regarding intimate life? Do we not have more control over our lives than we did when Church and State sought to regulate every desire, and tradition ruled?

Are the laws not fairer and more protective of women, sexual minorities and the young than they were in that world we have lost? Trapped within our ideological enclosures we are in danger of failing to understand both the past and this historic present in which we live.

We seem destined to be locked into alternative determinisms. A naïve progressivism, which can only see progress towards some Eden in the future, has long lost any resonance. But it is in danger of being replaced by a declinist vision which sees a Paradise lost in the past; or by a strange swamp of arguments – from neo-marxists, feminists, queer theorists – which seems to believe that nothing has really changed at all. None of these positions seem to me to be very convincing. The progressive myth all too readily forgets the contingencies of history, the tangled roads that have brought us to the present. The declinist myth celebrates a history that never was, a world that was not so much lost as nostalgically re-imagined to act as a counterpoint to the present. The continuists want to stress the recalcitrance of hidden structures, but in doing so forget the power of agency and the significance of subtle cumulative changes in individual lives that make up the unfinished revolutions of our time (Weeks, 2007: 4-7).

Above all, in various ways they obscure what seems to me the inevitable reality: that the world we have won has made possible ways of life that represent an advance not a decline in human relationships, and that have broken through the coils of power to enhance individual autonomy, freedom of choice and more egalitarian patterns of relationships. I believe the long revolution to have been overwhelmingly beneficial to the vast majority of people in the West, and increasingly to people living in the global South whose lives are also being transformed dramatically – and I say that whilst acknowledging the major problems, inequalities, prejudices and discriminations that remain. But the momentum, I argue, is positive, and largely because of one essential feature of this new world: the power of grass roots agency. Collective struggles – of feminism and lesbian and gay movements especially – have contributed to, complemented but also often obscured the reality of millions of individual struggles by women and men over many years to gain control over the conditions

of their lives – in controlling fertility, entering into freely chosen or escaping from oppressive relationships, challenging sexual ignorance, battling against sexual violence, affirming sexual identities, having sexual pleasure, avoiding sexual pain. These are the ‘everyday experiments’ (Giddens, 1992) in which people have muddled through, making things up as they go along, living and let live, to create the conditions for post-traditional ways of life. Increasingly, I would argue, the contemporary world is a world we are making for ourselves, part of the long process of the democratisation of everyday life. Of course that process is uneven, affecting different people at different times and places, and I will outline the balance of losses and gains later. But that does not alter the fundamental fact that the social, cultural and moral revolution of our times is fundamentally a revolution from below, and its future lies in our own hands. Unless we grasp this we cannot understand not only the problems and anxieties but the challenges and opportunities in this world we are remaking.

3. THE WAYS WE LIVED THEN

To understand the changes which have transformed the world of sexuality and intimacy we need to a real sense of the historicity of these changes. We live history and we are in the midst of a living history. Without a sense of history, and an understanding of the ways we lived in the past, we have no benchmarks by which to measure what has changed, no means of grasping the magnitude of the dramatic shifts that have taken place over the past sixty years.

If I may, I would like to make a brief digression to look at the trajectory of the country I am most familiar with, and where I lived my own particular history, Britain. It is a different historical journey from that of Spain, though we can also see similar patterns within a different time frame and political ecology. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Britain, was dominated by a moral code based on restraint and denial. When I tell my students that up to the 1960s in Britain single mothers were still bundled into Mothers and Babies homes to escape the shame of illegitimacy, that all forms of male homosexuality were illegal and you could end up in prison for ‘the other love’, and

that if you were rash enough to try to commit suicide and survived you could be tried and imprisoned for a criminal offence, they laugh with disbelief. Britain until the 1960s had some of the most draconian legal penalties against sexual nonconformity in the world. Today it has one of the most liberal legal regimes, and a high degree of tolerance of sexual diversity.

This is because between the 1960s and the 1990s Britain, like most other parts of the Western world, underwent a historic transition in sexual beliefs and intimate behaviour. There was no single cause, no regular pattern across regions and countries, no common agenda for its main actors, chiefly members of the baby-boom generation. The process was messy, contradictory, and haphazard. But in the end it drew in and involved millions of people, re-imagining and remaking their lives in a myriad different ways. But the beginnings were ambiguous and uncertain. In her memoir of the 1960s, Sheila Rowbotham (2001), one of the founding mothers of second wave feminism, has written powerfully and evocatively of the sense of being poised between two worlds as the decade opens. For the young women giving birth to a child out of wedlock, and surrendering it straight away to adoption, there was still a heartbreaking contradiction between the hope of greater freedom and the economic and cultural pull of respectability and of sheer necessity. The young woman tentatively embracing a sexual career soon found that social taboos and practical means lagged well behind desire. For a long time the fear of the consequences of incautious sexual practices continued to haunt individual activity (Rowbotham 2001: 48).

For the closeted homosexual, too, the promises opened up by the more sex positive mood of the early 1960s remained dreams largely deferred. Law reform beckoned distantly, but the fear of exposure, or the developing threat of aversion therapy, or what the soon to be born gay liberation movement would label as ‘internalised self oppression’, continued to haunt everyday life. ‘Living in the shadows’ was to remain the dominant metaphor for the homosexual, male or female, until the 1970s.

For many, then, the 1960s remained a decade of unfulfilled hopes. Yet within barely a generation, the old shadows had been dispersed, replaced by

quite new shapes and configurations . In little more than thirty years, before the baby-boomers had reached middle age, the sexual world had been irretrievably transformed, and attitudes to marriage or non-marriage, to childbearing or non-parenting, to female sexuality, to family, to sexual unorthodoxy, all had changed fundamentally.

Between the 1960s and the 1990s there were profound shifts in the social relations of sexuality and intimacy. Amongst the most important are: a shift of power between the generations; a shift in power between men and women; the questioning of the fixity of gender; the separation of sex and reproduction; the separation of sex and marriage; the separation of marriage and parenting; a redefinition of the relationship between 'normality' and 'abnormality'.

Together they led, over this period of the Great Transition from the 1960s to the 1990s, to the effective demise of the traditional model of sexual restraint and opened the way to a new moral economy – one that was less hierarchical and more democratic, more hedonistic, more individualistic, more selfish, perhaps, but also one that was vastly more tolerant, experimental and open to diversity and choice in a way that had been inconceivable just a generation earlier.

4. A NEW WORLD ARISING

In a very useful exercise Plummer (2003: 10) has attempted to balance the different ways of seeing these changes. Widening disparities between rich and poor can be set against higher standards of living for most, if not all; social fragmentation can be read as a 'pluralization' of life chances; impersonality and loss of community may be set against a new sense of belonging in new sexual worlds; narcissism and selfishness must be measured against a proliferation of new individual freedoms; McDonaldisation and standardization have to be seen against a proliferation of choices in the democracy of the market place; dumbing down is matched by a sophisticated self awareness, an ironic reflexivity; moral decline can be countered by a definite moral effervescence and global citizenship; entrenched hierarchies of exclusion are met with the language of inclusion and belonging, and a deepening democratization of everyday life;

uncertainty and risk are set against the possibilities of a new global order and global human rights.

Both sides of the dichotomies may be true. The reality is that this is a world that has lost the unifying myths, the grand story which linked gender, sexuality, family into a more or less coherent unity sanctified by Church, State and community values. That world was never quite what it claimed to be, and in many ways was as fractured and divided as our contemporary world is. Yet its unifying myths did provide a sort of glue that held the structures together. Today that glue has dissolved. The power of traditional authorities, of religion, family, conventional morality, even of ideology, have been battered by decades of challenge and change and eroded by the dissolving powers of global flows, economic modernisation and cultural transformations, as well as by the will for change represented by the everyday choices of countless millions. Today, we live in a plural world, a world of irreducible diversity and multiple sources of authority.

How then do we draw up a balance sheet? In what follows I want to weigh the plusses and minuses against one another to show the ambivalence but also the reality of positive change.

4.1. THE 'GENDER REVOLUTION'

The position of women remains the most sensitive marker of deep-structured change. On all the markers – of education, employment opportunities, family roles, reproductive and sexual choice – there have been major shifts. The category of gender itself has been fundamentally challenged by the emergence of movements of transgendered people (Ekins and King, 2006). The gender order (Connell 1995, 2002) has been shaken, even destabilised. But the impact of the changes have been uneven, especially on a global scale. Even the most self confident women still hear the 'male in the head' (Holland et al, 1998) calling them back to sexual subordination. Even the most enlightened men find it difficult to cast off their privileges. We remain locked in relationships of superiority and subordination at various levels. Violence and abuse still police the boundaries.

There have been many factors underlying the transformations of relations between men and

women, but a key one has been the dramatic changes in the social relations of reproduction. There was birth control before the Pill, and dramatic falls in the birth rate before the 1970s. But the Pill, as a female controlled and relatively reliable contraceptive, both helped to realise and symbolized a massive shift, a world-historic shift indeed: the separation of sex and reproduction (McLaren, 1999: Chapter 4; Cook, 2005). As time has moved on it has become clear that the issue of reproductive rights has wider resonances: the right to have children as well as not, the right to terminate pregnancies in defined situations as well as to go ahead with them, the right to control fertility and to enhance it. There are also complex issues about non-traditional means of conception and the rights of non-heterosexual parents. Above all, there are fundamental questions of access to resources, of power and opportunity, on a global scale (Petchesky, 2003).

What has genuinely shifted, however, are the fundamental terms of the debate. The story is not so much that men and women are now equal, or treated equally. The real achievement is that inequality has lost all its moral justification. Inequality now has to be justified in ways it never had to be before. The fact that traditional differences now have to be rewritten in terms of equality is a measure of how far things have come (if also, at times, an index of how far there is still to go).

4.2. THE COMING OUT OF HOMOSEXUALITY

As the heterosexual nexus linking the gender order, family and sexual reproduction has changed, so homosexuality has come out of the shadows. The sharp binary schism between heterosexuality and homosexuality that has structured, defined and distorted the western sexual regime for the past couple of centuries, and perhaps reached a peak in the final determined reassertion of the domestic ideology of the 1950s (that lost golden age), has been fundamentally undermined as millions of gays and lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people have not so much subverted the established order as lived as if their sexual difference did not matter (Adam et al, 1999; Altman, 2001). Perhaps the most significant

evidence of this is the growing toleration of homosexuality in most western countries: no longer a sin, nor a sickness, barely a transgression, with same sex marriage apparently the key issue in many jurisdictions, LGBT lives are in danger of becoming 'ordinary' (Weeks, 2007: 198).

It is simultaneously possible to acknowledge the transformed possibilities of living a non-heterosexual life in most parts of the urban highly developed world, whilst recognizing the profound continuing weight of heteronormative values and structures. Homosexuality may have come out into the open, it may have made institutionalised heterosexuality porous, but even in the advanced cultures of the West it is still subjected to the minoritizing forces that excluded it in the first place. In other parts of the world social obloquy, long imprisonment, even death (by stoning or beheading) remain the fate of many homosexual people (Bamforth, 2005). For far too many that face of Otherness remains shrouded in mystery and fear, and the result is a terror that makes homosexuality as a way of life impossible.

4.3. A 'TRANSFORMATION OF INTIMACY'

The gender revolution and the challenge to heteronormativity are underpinned, and accelerated, by a profound change in the ways in which men and women, men and men, and women and women relate to each other, by a transformation of intimacy. The transformation, its main proponent argues (Giddens, 1992), is towards egalitarian, open and disclosive relationships, marked by the 'pure relationship'. Same sex relationships have been seen as especially important to this transformation, as leading the way to more egalitarian forms of relationships and creative life experiments, as much by force of circumstances as design (see discussion in Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001). There are many critics of this position (see Jamieson, 1998), and the most we can perhaps say is that the evidence remains uncertain and uneven. But behind the controversies there does seem to be a longer term trend at work, towards an informalization and democratization of intimate life, a revolution in everyday life, which has yet unrealised and unsettling implications for

the relationship between private passions and public life (Wouters, 2004, Weeks, 2007: 63-72).

A critical aspect of this process is the changing nature of family life. The apparent decline of the traditional family is frequently seen as the marker, cause and consequence, of changes in sexual relationships, childbearing, the decline of marriage, and so on. Its decay is blamed for the weakening of social capital, those norms, values, networks that are held to sustain social trust and stability (Fukuyama, 1999, Edwards, 2004). Yet there is another story: of diversification of family forms caused by a weakening of patriarchal authority over women and children, the emergence of a more complex and diverse culture as a result of mass immigration, and the sheer pluralization of household patterns and domestic arrangements: cohabitation and the decline of (heterosexual) marriage, single parenthood, the growth of people living on their own, the emergence of serial monogamy as the dominant form of sexual partnering, and the rise of non-heterosexual (and of heterosexual) 'families of choice' underpinned by the 'friendship ethic' (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001). All these justify the claim that we should talk about *families* rather than 'the family', that we should recognize and appreciate the varied ways of doing family like things, and that we need to celebrate the emergence of new and diverse forms of reciprocity and relationality – and of social capital - rather than lament the decline of the family.

4.4. THE IRRESISTIBLE RISE OF SEXUAL DIVERSITY

Gayle Rubin (1984) famously spoke of the advance of the perverse sexualities out of the pages of Krafft-Ebing onto the stage of history. Today the very category of the perverse has all but disappeared. People proudly proclaim not only their gayness, bisexuality, sado-masochisms, trans identities, fetishisms and fantasies in all their infinite variety, they can satisfy them through the infinite possibilities of the internet. We dwell in a world of polymorphous non-perversities, of plastic sexuality (Giddens, 1992). But this is only a part of the radical diversity that characterises contemporary life. There are different ways of life, shaped by class and geography, age, (dis)ability,

and of course by 'race' and ethnicity. Western nations, for so long apparently homogeneous (though actually always political unities rather than cultural wholes) have become visibly diverse and multi-cultural with the influx of new populations, with often different experiences of family, gender, sexuality and faith. Even in those parts of Europe which have been ostentatiously liberal, such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, there have seen acute tensions as liberal values have been threatened. But there are also, as Gilroy (2004) has argued, new forms of 'conviviality' as cultures encounter one another and intermingle – especially sexually and intimately - which defy simple categorizations, and can be said to represent the fraying of difference if not yet the disappearance of divisions.

4.5. A PROLIFERATION OF SEXUAL STORIES

As this suggests we can now tell our sexual stories in a huge variety of different ways. Michel Foucault (1979) wrote of the discursive explosion since the 18th century which produced sexual modernity. But that was defined by rules on who could speak, in what circumstances and on whose authority. Now we can hear everyone who want to speak, and can access means of speaking, speak their truths- from talk shows to home movies, from parliaments to the media, from the streets to personal blogs and social networks on the web. Through stories – of desire and love, of hope and mundane reality, of excitement and disappointment – told to willing listeners in communities of meaning, people imagine and re-imagine who and what they are, what they want to become (Plummer, 1995, 2003). Now there are many would-be authorities competing noisily, especially in the anarchic democracy of cyberspace. By no means are all of these voices progressive by any definition of the word – there are evangelical Christian or radical Islamicist voices as loud as any liberal or libertarian voices. There are threats as well as opportunities in the hyper market of speech. But we can no longer doubt the power of narratives, and the ways in which we can make and remake ourselves through them in the new age of globalisation (Altman, 2001, Plummer, 2003).

4.6. RISK AND THE THREAT OF SEXUAL DISEASE

If we can see the globalisation of sexuality as a reordering of risk, then at the heart of the risks facing the world today is the inexorable presence and spread of the HIV/ AIDS pandemic (Altman, 2001). Twenty years ago it was possible to write about it largely as an appalling threat to the gay populations of North America, Europe and Australasia. Today the wealthy countries have found ways of controlling the spread of the epidemic and of managing the progression of the virus. But globally the statistics, and behind them the realities of everyday life, are terrifying. Here sexuality has become entwined in the nexus of poverty, ignorance, fear and prejudice on a massive scale. The pandemic reveals as nothing else the impossibility of separating the sexual and the intimate from other social forces, and the inevitable flows, in an increasingly globalised world, of sexual experiences and tragedies from nation to nation, continent to continent. AIDS has become the symbol, if not the only example, of the risks of rapid sexual change in a world uncertain of its values and responses.

4.7. CULTURE WARS

Uncertainty breeds conflict, the danger of culture wars and the rise of fundamentalisms, secular and religious. Fundamentalisms especially can be seen as a response to uncertainty, confronting the ambiguities and ambivalences of the world with an absolute certainty about Truth, History and Tradition (Ruthven, 2004). As many have pointed out the various forms of fundamentalism, whether Islamic, Christian, Hindu or Jewish, are not really cultural throwbacks. They are very much products of late modernity, utilising its technologies and global linkages brilliantly (Bhatt, 1997). But they are against what they see as the deformations of late modern cultures, and at the heart of these are sexuality, gender and the body. The fundamentalisms of our time seek to restore demarcations between men and women, reaffirm heterosexual relationships, and eliminate perversity. In the most extreme manifestations they enforce their will through the bullet, the bomb, the knife and the hangman's noose. But though the tone and the tenor might be different, the

religious and socially conservative movements of the USA, in their affirmation of traditional values and opposition to abortion, homosexuality, same sex marriage, sex education, evolutionism and the like, share some common assumptions with them: a belief that there is an essential truth to sexuality which the high priests alone know the key to. Culture wars are the inevitable result.

4.8. THE MAKING OF SEXUAL/ INTIMATE CITIZENSHIP

It is in this context that new discourses about sexual or intimate citizenship have emerged (Plummer, 1995, 2003). Citizenship is about belonging, about being recognised, about reciprocal entitlements and responsibilities. Historically, it has been restricted – racially, xenophobically, by gender and by sexuality (Brandzel, 2005). We forget how recent has been the achievement of full citizenship rights for women, to what extent our prized Welfare states have been built on assumptions about the right way to live, and the ways in which minorities and deviants have been excluded from the rights and obligations of full citizenship. Sexual or intimate citizenship is about the recognition of these exclusions and about moves to inclusion (Weeks, 1998, Plummer, 2003). The steps in the process have been erratic, and in many jurisdictions, including the most wealthy and most powerful, not yet fully realised. Yet without the idea of full citizenship we cannot measure how far we have come; and without the ideal of equal citizenship we have no measure of how far we still have to go.

This becomes especially challenging in the context of globalisation and 'global sex' (Altman, 2001). Sexuality has a 'central significance within global regimes of power' (Hemmings et al, 2006:1), and this is manifest in persistent inequities between cultures, and in continuing sexual injustices, especially against women, children and lesbian, gay or transgendered identified peoples. At the same time, we see the emergence of global standards of what constitutes justice. We can learn to accept difference and human variety, various ways of being sexual, and this has become a new imperative as we get to know more and more about other cultures. We can understand the power differentials that underpin difference. But

increasingly, in a world not just of different but of conflicting values, many people are also seeking common standards by which to measure behaviours. We have become aware of sufferings across the world where 'before they might have gone unnoticed' (Baird, 2004: 8). We can no longer easily fail to notice when the survivors of injustices can tell us of their sufferings across the globalized media, from the internet to television, and when waves of people begin to appear at our own doorsteps, seeking refuge from persecution. Globalization has made us aware of sexual wrongs across the world, and has awakened us to the significance of sexual rights. As Nussbaum (1999: 8) has persuasively argued, a universal account of human justice need not be insensitive to the variety of traditions that shape human lives, nor is it a mere projection of particularist Western values onto parts of the world with different concerns. The evolution of human sexual rights has been a process that engages the other, that has involved a dialogue across differences, and the concept of sexual rights that is emerging provides space and opportunity for difference to flourish within a developing discourse of our common humanity.

5. A CONCLUSION

In the melancholia of a post-everything world, in the midst of turmoil and change, it is all too easy to forget how much has been gained.

It has become a cliché that sexuality has a history, indeed many histories. But it is easy to forget as we live our own sexual history, that alongside us people are living theirs', and their experience might be quite different from ours. What a historical approach to sexuality can do is make us aware of our commonalities and differences. It should alert us to the ways in which the erotic is shaped in complex relations of power. It should also make us aware of our contingency.

No-one in 1945 could have foreseen the world we now inhabit and have helped to re-make. We live in a different world. But if we forget our history we are in danger of having to re-live it. Perhaps one of the greatest achievement of the long revolution is that it has made us reflexive, sensitive to our own historicity, and to the profoundly challenging notion that if we have made our own history we can re-make it.

REFERENCES

- ADAM, B. D., DUUVENDAK, J. W., and KROUWEL (eds) (1999): *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*, Philadelphia, PA, Temple University Press.
- ADKINS, L. (2002): *Revisions: Gender and Sexuality in Late Modernity*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- ALTMAN, D. (2001): *Global Sex*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- BAIRD, V. (2004): *Sex, Love and Homophobia: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Lives*, London, Amnesty International.
- BAMFORTH, N. (2005): *Sex Rights*, Oxford Amnesty Lectures, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- BAUMAN, Z. (2003): *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- BHATT, C. (1997): *Liberation and Purity: Race, New Religious Movements and the Ethics of Postmodernity*, London, University College London Press.
- BINNIE, J. (2004): *The Globalization of Sexuality*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Sage Publications.
- BRANDZEL, A. L. (2005) 'Queering Citizenship? Same-sex Marriage and the State', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol.11, Num. 2: 171-204.
- CONNELL, R. W. (1995): *Masculinities*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- CONNELL, R. W. (2002): *Gender*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- COOK, H. (2005): *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800-1975*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- DAVIES, C. (2006): *The Strange Death of Moral Britain*, New York, Transaction Publishers.
- DAVIS, M.D.M. (2005): *Treating and Preventing HIV in the Post-crisis situation: Perspectives from the Personal Experience Accounts of Gay Men with HIV*, unpublished PhD thesis, Institute of Education, University of London.
- EDWARDS, R. (2004): 'Present and Absent in Troubling Ways: Families and Social Capital Debates', *The Sociological Review*, Vol 52, Num. 1, February: 1-21.

- EKINS, R. and KING, D. (2006): *The Transgender Phenomenon*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage.
- ELLIOTT, A. and LEMERT, C. (2006): *The New Individualism: The Emotional Costs of Globalization*, London and New York, Routledge.
- FOUCAULT, M. (1979): *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- FUKUYAMA, F. (1999): *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order*, London, Profile Books.
- GIDDENS, A. (1992): *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- GILROY, P. (2004): *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture*, Abingdon, Routledge.
- HEMMINGS, C., GEDALOF, I. and BLAND, L. (2006) 'Sexual Moralities', *Feminist Review*, Vol. 83: 1-3.
- HENNESSY, R. (2000) *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, New York and London: Routledge.
- HOLLAND, J., RAMAZANOGLU, C., SHARPE, S., and THOMSON, R. (1998): *The Male in the Head*, London, The Tufnell Press.
- JAMIESON, L. (1998): *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- MCLAREN, A. (1999): *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- NUSSBAUM, M. (1999): *Sex and Social Justice*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- PETCHESKY, R. (2003): 'Negotiating Reproductive Rights', in Weeks, Holland and Waites, 2003: 227-240.
- PHILLIPS, M. (1999): *The Sex-change Society: Feminised Britain and Neutered Male*, London, The Social Market Foundation.
- PLUMMER, K. (1995): *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*, London, Routledge.
- PLUMMER, K. (2003): *Intimate Citizenship: Private Decisions and Public Dialogues*, Seattle, University of Washington Press.
- RICHARDSON, D. (2004) 'Locating Sexualities: From Here to Normality', *Sexualities*, Vol. 7, Num. 4: 391-411.
- ROSE, N. (1999): *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, 2nd edition, London and New York, Free Associations Books.
- ROWBOTHAM, S. (2001): *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties*, London and New York, Verso.
- RUBIN, G. (1984) 'Thinking sex: notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality', in Carole S. Vance (ed.), *Pleasure and Danger. Exploring Female Sexuality*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, Boston : 267-319.
- RUTHVEN, M. (2004): *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- TOYNBEE, P. (2007) 'This broken society rhetoric leaves Cameron marooned', *The Guardian* (London), 10 July: 31.
- WARNER, M. (ed.) (1993): *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press.
- WARNER, M. (1999): *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life*, New York, The Free Press.
- WEEKS, J. (1995): *Invented Moralities: Sexual Values in an Age of Uncertainty*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- WEEKS, J. (1998) 'The Sexual Citizen', *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol.15, Num. 3-4: 35-52.
- WEEKS, J. (2003): *Sexuality*, 2nd edition, London and New York: Routledge.
- WEEKS, J. (2005) 'Remembering Foucault', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 14, Num. 1/2 : January/April: 186-201.
- WEEKS, J. (2007): *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life*, Abingdon, Routledge.
- WEEKS, J. (2008) 'Traps We set Ourselves', *Sexualities*, Vol. 11, Num. 1/ 2, February/ April: 27-33.
- WEEKS, J., HEAPHY, B. and DONOVAN, C. (2001): *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and other Life Experiments*, London, Routledge.
- WEEKS, J., HOLLAND, J., and WAITES, M. (eds) (2003): *Sexualities and Society: A Reader*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- WOUTERS, C. (2004): *Sex and Manners: Female Emancipation in the West, 1890-2000*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Sage Publications.