

## The Traditional Family Versus Equal Rights Supporters Rhetoric In Romania

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**Abstract:** This paper clarifies some of the less known aspects of the origin, the development and the success of global Christian and Religious Right movements in Romania. Since 1995 global Religious Right started to offer comprehensive support for transnational moral campaigns over same-sex marriage, abortion, family life or gun control, sharing their (mostly) American expertise shaped in the battle with the secular state. One of the most important fronts in this battle was the discussion over traditional values in family life and the motivations and legal provisions that make it the only legitimate form of cohabitation. In Romania the Christian Right relies on conservatism, nationalism and religious tradition to foment popular support against same-sex marriage while at the same time touting the imminent homosexual attack on traditional family values, described as presently declining in importance in comparison to a prestigious past. Building on Romania's new social realities but also revitalizing and hybridizing some of the more extreme versions of nationalism and palingenetic ideology, one of Christian Right's offsprings, the Coalition for the Family's relative success signals the coagulation of a moral alliance affecting both lived and institutionalized religion. In short this paper argues that the emergence of a typical Christian Right coalition formed by various groups that are not necessarily of Orthodox faith, is part of an interreligious alliance against the separation of church and state, and reveals Romania's momentous role in the "clashing networks of global politics."

**Keywords:** Christian Right, Culture Wars, Religious Nationalism, Homonationalism

### Summary

In this paper I use the case of Romania to argue that there is an increased split in the understanding of family values which takes the shape of a culture wars related to same-sex marriage, feeding on Romania's polarized political scene and unstable international context. I use



a combination of discourse analysis and comparative analysis to discern some of the differences and the similarities between the various groups behind the culture wars. I start by introducing the actors and the theoretical and historical context which shapes their views. Then, I turn to familiarize the reader with the long-established relation between the state and the majority Orthodox Church, specifically at the nexus between state, church and nation. I show how based on this relationship which symbolically excludes all minorities, and promotes the idea of an Orthodox nation, the Orthodox Church sided with other Churches and with informal groups which belong to a Christian Right subculture focused on gender, family, abortion, and homosexuality. I show how focused on a referendum to change the Constitution, religious networks and human rights networks carefully criticise and deconstruct each other's arguments. I focus mostly on religious networks' views against LGBT rights, which are deployed in often contradictory ways, from labeling homosexuality as a Western problem, or abnormal behaviour, to nativist conspiracies about external enemies that want to weaken the nation. By comparison even more moderate points of view rely on inaccurate 'scarcity' arguments, seeing LGBT rights as a fad the country cannot afford.<sup>1</sup> I indicate that legitimate mobilization for LGBT rights was also used as a political tool to prop neoliberal ideas and to replicate discriminative tactics of stereotyping and exclusion not much different than the tactics used by their opponents. I conclude that the flourishing of a Romanian evangelical undercurrent is related to the influence of global networks in conjunction with the unique Romanian context, high religiosity, a majority Orthodox Church more willing to cooperate with other faiths against a common enemy, and a sensitive international context.

## **Introduction**

Few initiatives in Romania gained quick popularity as Coalition for the Family's (CpF) most recent call for a referendum to change the Romanian Constitution and to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman, instead of one between partners as the Constitution currently holds. CpF is the latest religious and conservative association with the mission to support Romania's 'traditional' family values in marriage, rearing-children and all forms of cohabitation. CpF is not an entirely new enterprise of this kind, but it is remarkable by being able to achieve

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<sup>1</sup> Sebastian E. Bartoș, Marius A. Baș and Israel Berger, "Since Trajan and Decebalus: online media reporting of the 2010 GayFest in Bucharest" *Psychology & Sexuality*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (2014) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2013.784211>, 276.

quick public visibility after tapping right into the country’s polarized political climate and vigorous religiosity. Following popular beliefs in Romania, CpF considers homosexuality not only a sin which cannot go unpunished, but also a foreign epidemic, and in its fringe manifestations, an unnatural, or even un-Romanian disorder.<sup>2</sup> Fearmongering about external and internal foes guarantees activism caused by the “dread of an enemy massing against us.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, CpF’s most pressing concern is to assemble a ‘moral’ alliance against civil partnerships for LGBT persons, and against the secular alliance supporting same-sex marriage and equal rights. Their first battle was won and the referendum was pushed to a later date but whichever the results, they will most likely continue on the same path.

Clifford Bob argues that there is a traditional families network, which he named the “Baptist-Burqa network,”<sup>4</sup> which consists of an “informal, multi-denominational grouping [that]-cooperate[s] transnationally on policy goals”<sup>5</sup> in countries such as Germany, Sweden, Nicaragua, Romania, Uganda and others. After the successful prohibition of same sex marriage in Uganda, Romania is seen as fertile ground, with a potential to impact American jurisprudence and influence events in the United States (US).<sup>6</sup> The ‘traditional family’ alliance expects that obstructing a possible recognition of same-sex marriage in a country with strong religiosity and low levels of accepting homosexuals as Romania, will likely fuel such initiatives and will challenge same sex marriage in other states. Yet, while Christian Right<sup>7</sup> organizations, which are behind the ‘traditional families’ and the CpF increased their influence abroad, their inland influence started to diminish. Recent studies showed that American Evangelicals adopted a more ambivalent tone regarding same sex marriage which reflects deeper changes within American society.<sup>8</sup> Some of these groups have been able to be successful both at home and on foreign ground. One of these is the Liberty

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<sup>2</sup> Voichita Nachescu, “Hierarchies of Difference: National Identity, Gay and Lesbian Rights, and the Church in Postcommunist Romania”, in Edmond J. Coleman and Theo Sandfort, *Sexuality and Gender in Postcommunist Eastern Europe and Russia (Human Sexuality)*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Clifford Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 23, 37-38.

<sup>6</sup> Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 83.

<sup>7</sup> Radu Cinpoș, *The Extreme Right In Contemporary Romania*, (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2012), 8-9, I use Christian Right as a general name for conservative Christian groups and Religious Right for conservative religious groups.

<sup>8</sup> See Lydia Bean and Brandon Martinez, *Evangelical Ambivalence toward Gays and Lesbians*. *Sociology of Religion* (76) (2014), 395-417.

Counsel, based in US but offering aid to Romania's CpF, famous for proposing anti-Gay legislation in Uganda and defending Kim Davis, the American official who refused marriage certificates to gay couples. Besides offering legal aid and advocating a Constitution change, Liberty Counsel organized public talks and recently sent a senior member, Harry Mihet (an American of Romanian origin), and Kim Davis to hold various conferences in Romania.

Bringing more than 2.5 million valid signatures in support of the referendum placed Romania in the global spotlight where contending networks battle each other in global culture wars. The project was backed by extreme right-wing groups such as the New Right (Noua Dreaptă),<sup>9</sup> the Pro Vita Association,<sup>10</sup> by the former Facebook hate group originated from Cluj Napoca, "No to Islamization of Romania," (meanwhile disabled by Facebook) and up to a point by all active political parties which signed collaboration protocols with the CpF. The result raised the bid of the culture wars rhetoric related to gay marriage, since similar attempts to restrict same sex marriage were already tried in Croatia, Slovakia and even in Romania. An attempt to change the same article of the Constitution occurred in 2007, when another Christian association, the Romanian Alliance for Families (ARF), was not able to move forward with a referendum over a formality, the geographic distribution of signatures.

The CpF's reassembly of the global and the local Christian Right and the resuscitation of the traditional marriage theme also coincides with the success of right-wing politics in the European Union (EU), which dumbfounds EU's immigration and inclusion policies. Fearmongering tactics employed by right-wing parties, about the danger posed by gays or Muslim immigrants fuel the already existing tensions and channel them into successful political results. Talks about reforms and about enabling a multi-speed European Union fall in the same scenario, encouraging various negative reactions, from anti-egalitarian to nativist and anti-LGBT emotions. Most evidence shows that the trend was set in the 1980s with the rise of both the New Religious Right<sup>11</sup> in the United States and of neoliberalism worldwide, recently culminating in 'trumpism', the result of years of economic dislocation which caused stagnation or fall of wages, debt, and

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<sup>9</sup> Shannon Woodcock, "Gay Pride as Violent Containment in Romania: a Brave New Europe", *Sextures*, 1(1), (2009), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Cristina Foarfă, "Cum vrea cea mai puternică organizație din spatele Coaliției pentru Familie să schimbe România," [How does the most powerful organization behind the CpF want to change Romania], *Vice*, June 15 2017, <https://www.vice.com/ro/article/9k5gjp/documentul-sters-de-pro-vita-impotriva-femeilor>

<sup>11</sup> See Richard Pierard, "Religion and the New Right in Contemporary American Politics", in James E. Wood, *Religion and Politics* (Waco, TX: J.M. Dawson Institute of Church and State: 1983).

downward social mobility, and the election of anti-establishment, usually reactionary leaders, encouraging an unveiled ethno-nationalist and conservative policy.

The expected separation between church and state and increased tolerance for sexual minorities have yet to materialize since external developments and transnational forces contribute to a decreased acceptance of LGBT rights. While the situation of sexual minorities improved, a revival of religious nationalism and the adoption of a culture wars rhetoric seem to preclude further progress in the debates surrounding equal rights. In addition, the focus on identity politics risks neglecting rights and becoming homonationalism, a situation when racial and class privilege tend to become exclusory, inhibiting the development of a comprehensive equal rights agenda.

### **Modernity Versus Tradition**

After the fall of Soviet Union, an impressive body of literature about Eastern Europe used modernization theory to explain macro-sociological change and posited that “social change towards modernity in different societies will take place in a rather uniform and linear way.”<sup>12</sup> Modernization theory assumed, contrary to dependency and world-systems theories, that Western-styled liberal democracy is the finalization of the transition from traditional to modern societies. In short, the more complex societies become, achieving a ‘structured differentiation,’ the more chances they have to modernize. Countries may rise like the Asian Tigers or fall like the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> This meant that for countries like Romania, the failures of, and the solutions for modernization rested in the ability to follow the path of market economy reforms, economic growth, rule of law, a vibrant civil society and not least, secularization in the shape of the separation of church and state. Romania’s bid for EU membership in the 2000s was answered in the same way, with the EU imposing market reforms first and foremost and expecting that the rest will soon follow. Once the country got rid of its alleged ‘collectivist’, ethno-nationalist and Orthodox faith ‘backward’ mentalities, modernity was around the corner.

It is not surprising that the Orthodox faith and the absence of a strong civil society were often blamed for the country’s reluctance in adopting economic reforms or implementing human rights provisions, such as refusing to cancel an infamous law which incriminated same-sex

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<sup>12</sup>Wolfgang Knöbl. The Never-ending Story of Modernization Theory, in Gerard Delanty & Engin F. Isin (eds.), *Handbook of Historical Sociology*, (London: Sage Publication. 2003), 97.

<sup>13</sup>Knöbl, “Modernization Theory,” 104.

relations. However, both secularism's and civil society's exclusive positive role have become more questionable. Dylan Riley brought plausible arguments that a strong civil society does not always lead to the development of liberal democracy. Rather than being an obstacle, a strong civil society was the ground for the rise of various forms of fascisms, like in Italy, Spain and Romania.<sup>14</sup> In addition, William Cavanaugh challenged the idea of religious 'resurgence' or violence, and argued that secularism does not guarantee the disappearance of religious or ethno-national conflicts, but hides them under the guise of hybrid religious forms of national identity, or nationalism in the form of civil religion, banal<sup>15</sup> nationalism, secular and political religions.<sup>16</sup> He also argued that theories which claim that religion faded away and those that claim that religion is "resurging," should be completed by a third option in seeing that religious devotion in the Western world did not go away but migrated to the realm of the nation-state.<sup>17</sup>

The proponents of modernization theory insisted on the ethnic roots of Romanian nationalism as a way to link culture and economic progress, and glossed over the lasting effects of severe poverty, inequality or global economic geography. A disturbing chauvinist Orthodoxist ideology does not differ from the principles of supremacism and nationalism which the Western countries considered long gone, or relegated to fringe groups such as the Christian Right. Orthodoxist ideology became more salient when transnational religious fundamentalism found its way to Romania after 1990, when religion opposition started to strengthen globally after gaining experience fighting family planning.<sup>18</sup> The Orthodox faith did not impact civil society by precluding it as initially thought, but had a far more complex relationship with it. Furthermore, the adoption of the logic of culture wars and of transnational religious fundamentalism should not be simply read as religious resurgence which derails Romania from the path already traveled by Western countries. Modernization theory also assumed that traditional society is nonparticipant

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<sup>14</sup> See Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain, and Romania, 1870–1945*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1995), 6.

<sup>16</sup> William Cavanaugh claimed that that the separation of church and state does not mean the separation of religion and state since "traditional religion is privatized, while the religion of politics occupies the public realm," making "nationalism the most powerful religion in United States.". See William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 116-118. See also Emilio Gentile. *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church*, (Grand Rapids, 2011), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Bob, "Clash of World Politics," 41.

and that there is a sharp transition and even antithesis between tradition and modernity. The success of CpF and its increased public visibility show that faith-based civil society and faith-based NGO-ization function in tandem with the means of modernization, paradoxically against equal rights. Earlier interpretations of the alleged ‘traditionalist’, ‘collectivist’ and ‘communitarian’ notions of identity<sup>19</sup> similarly have to be carefully revised. It would be an exaggeration to say that the Orthodox Church is a reformist institution; however, it is hard to claim that it remained unchanged over the years, that it was a setback for social participation (as a necessary condition for modernization) portrayed by theory, or a typical backward actor in the clash of civilizations and end-of-history scenarios.<sup>20</sup>

### **Religious nationalism**

Religious minorities like the Greek-Catholics (and 19th century’s Orthodox Church in Transylvania) have historically used religion as a way of empowerment, in the emancipation fight against the Austro-Hungarian empire, or later against the communist government, which was also perceived as foreign and illegitimate. First Romanian nationalists movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Transylvania relied on the Romanian Greek-Catholic and Romanian Orthodox Church which fought for Romanians’ rights.<sup>21</sup> Faith was a counter-hegemonical tool against political repression and an identity mechanism. After the union of Transylvania with the Romanian Principalities, the Orthodox Church became a majority Church until present. The state and the Church had common goals, and even if it became ‘tolerated’ and subordinated to the state during the communist period, the Church’s influence endured and even grew when it seized believers from the banned Greek-Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup> Between 1960 and 1970, despite its assumed internationalism, the communist government adopted an anti-Soviet discourse and encouraged the view that Romania is a Latin

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Denise Roman quoted in Carl F. Stychin, “‘We Want to Join Europe, Not Sodom’: Sexuality and European Union Accession in Romania.” *Governing Sexuality: The Changing Politics of Citizenship and Law Reform*, (London: Hart Publishing, 2003). 115–138. Bloomsbury Collections. Web. 8 Apr. 2017. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472562777.ch-006>>., 137.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Marsh (eds), *Burden or Blessing? Russian Orthodoxy and the Construction of Civil Society and Democracy*, (Brookline, MA: Institute On Culture, Religion and World Affairs, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> See Keith Hitchins, *Orthodoxy and Nationality: Andreiu Șaguna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1846-1873*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), and Cristian Romocea, *Church and State: Religious Nationalism and State Identification in Postcommunist Romania* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 129.

<sup>22</sup> Olivier Gillet, *Religie Și Naționalism: Ideologia Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Sub Regimul Comunist* [Religion and Nationalism: The Ideology of the Romanian Orthodox Church under the Communist Regime], (București: Campania, 2001), 37-39.

island in a sea of Slavs, while rebranding the older Orthodoxist doctrine that true Romanians are Orthodox and that the Orthodox faith is 2000 years old in the Romanian lands.<sup>23</sup>

The nation-state is the contemporary container of the biblical “chosen people,” and as an agent of nationalism the Orthodox Church sought exclusive relations with the state and attempted to exclude other Churches. This particularity influenced the Church’s view on its worldly mission and increased the role of the Church as a national institution, while private religiosity and morality appeared as less important. While Orthodoxy was never the official “national” religion, in practice the Orthodox Church enjoyed an informal “national church”<sup>24</sup> status, obtaining the largest help and logistical support from the state. In parallel with functioning as an institution, Orthodoxy functions as a civil religion<sup>25</sup>, which is a shared system of ideas, beliefs, rituals, practices and symbols relating to a common political system, a shared language or a shared history. After 1989, the Church resumed its presence where it was previously excluded: in public schools, the military, the penitentiary and the sanitary systems, in social work, and especially in mass media. It also resumed most of its functions in the background of the nation-state, filling the public space with Orthodox religious symbols, and bringing back religious service and ceremonies in Parliament.<sup>26</sup> Once the communist past was interpreted as the period of trial and decay, the Orthodox Church projected to revive the “national” faith, and to return to a ‘normal’ society, meaning an Orthodox way of life. Besides possible changes in the ethnic and racial order, for some fringe segments of the Orthodox Church the newest enemy became the European gender order. A feared change in this patriarchal gender order was added to the list of threats to the Romanian nation,<sup>27</sup> enabling a new version of racist discourse designed to maintain ethno-national identity.<sup>28</sup> For these segments of the Church, the Orthodox way of life meant more than the simple presence of the Church in

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<sup>23</sup> See Lucian Leuștean. *Orthodoxy and the Cold War. Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-65*, (Basingstoke:Palgrave, 2009) and Lucian Leuștean, “Between Moscow and London: Romanian Orthodoxy and National Communism, 1960-1965,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 85. Issue 3, (2007), 493-494.

<sup>24</sup> See Kjell Blücker, *The Church as Nation: A Study in Ecclesiology and Nationhood*, (Frankfurt Am Main: P. Lang, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Robert N. Bellah. Civil Religion in America, *Daedalus*, Vol. 96, 1 (1967), 1–21.

<sup>26</sup> The state continues to accommodate the Church despite problematic religious display and teaching religion in public schools, which create a captive audience, and may infringe on the liberty of conscience and even promote intolerance, see Gabriel Andreescu & Liviu Andreescu. “Church and State in Post-Communist Romania: Priorities on the Research Agenda”, *Journal For the Study of Religions and Ideologies*. Vol. 8. Issue 24, Winter 2009), 26-27.

<sup>27</sup> Nachescu, “Hierarchies of Difference,” 70-71.

<sup>28</sup> Shannon Woodcock, “A short history of the queer time of “post-socialist” Romania, or, Are we there yet? Let’s ask Madonna!,” in Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska (ed.), *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, (Farnham: Ashgate 2011), 68-69.

public. It also meant the revival of the myth of Romania as an Orthodox nation with a civilizing mission in Europe, and the myth of national unity and continuity from the ancient Dacians to the modern day Romanians. After 1989, attracted by the Romania's fascist past, when the Church enjoyed more authority, neo-Legionary (Nazi) ideology among the clergy resurfaced and started to intensify. For example, under the influence of an older generation of Orthodox confessor fathers like Arsenie Papacioc, Adrian Făgețeanu and Iustin Pârnu, and other fathers schooled at the Mt. Athos ultraconservative school in Greece,<sup>29</sup> Fr Ioanichie Bălan said that he prayed against Romania's European integration. More alarming was that the Romanian Secret Service also claimed that 15 Orthodox priests met in secret to revive the Legionary movement under the influence of Fr Gregorie who has spent some time at Mt Athos.<sup>30</sup>

In their fight for the Orthodox identity and against homosexuals, hierarchs of the Orthodox Church relied on various other groups, while they verbally disavowed the extremists' activity. They trusted on local and central politicians to change policy, on various segments like ASCOR (The Association of Orthodox Christian Students in Romania) to use threats and violence against the participants in Gay Parades, or on public figures like Transylvanian Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania, a harsh opponent of homosexuality, who managed to rally a lot of people to his cause. Anania became famous for his homophobic views, especially for declaring that Romania wants to "join Europe, not Sodom."<sup>31</sup> The Orthodoxist ideology in action caused not only rhetorical culture wars but also physical violence, and studies show that only about a quarter of male homosexuals are willing to be out and proud.<sup>32</sup> The Pride parades and various campaigns to raise awareness about discrimination were usually countered with 'normality' marches and 'normality' campaigns. When an anti-gay stigmatization campaign displayed banners throughout major cities with the picture of a baby with a hand-tag which read "homosexual," and "sexual orientation is not a choice, it's not a disease"<sup>33</sup>, local and central authorities took immediate action to remove them and threatened the companies which installed the banners. When the Orthodoxist identity was under

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<sup>29</sup> Bogdan A. Duca. "Neolegionarismul. O încercare de Teologie Politică Ortodoxă? [Neo-legionarism, An Orthodox Political Theology attempt?]", *Romanian Political Science Review*. Vol. VII, No. 3 (2007), 740.

<sup>30</sup> Duca, "Neolegionarismul," *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Stychin, "Sexuality and European Union Accession in Romania," 122.

<sup>32</sup> Sebastian E. Bartoș, Voon Chin Phua, and Erin Avery. "Romanian Masculinities in Online Personal Advertisements." *Culture, Society and Masculinities*, Vol. 2, Issue 2 (2010), 130.

<sup>33</sup> Vlad Levente Viski, "*An Army Of Generals Without Rank and File*": *Building a Gay and Lesbian Social Movement in Romania After 2001*, (Budapest: Central European University, 2015), 51.

attack, the state was not only reluctant to follow the rule of law but showed excess and violence, and ignored the laws by removing legally displayed banners.<sup>34</sup>

During the first gay parade in 2005 the police displayed hostility towards participants and were hesitant to follow the law and to protect them when over 1000 militants from ASCOR and The New Right threw eggs, rocks and shit-bombs in them.<sup>35</sup> However, by 2007 the ‘Normality March’ participants who were trying to interfere with the GayFest parade were confronted by a small informal group of Antifa sympathizers, an utterly unexpected turn of events. Their action showed their opposition to the state being incapable of insuring equal rights for all, and ‘playing’ tolerance instead of advocating it. The police forces surrounded the participants and used excessive confines, “containing the LGBT marchers from seeing and being seen.”<sup>36</sup> Threats and violence did not decrease, as in 2013, members of ARF blocked an LGBT event in Bucharest by performing Nazi salutes and pointing icons at the participants while calling the latter beasts and scum and shouting “death to homosexuals” and “you are not Romanians”.<sup>37</sup>

### **Culture Wars**

In the last 50 years religion in America has become increasingly polarized around political lines and issues like gender, abortion and homosexuality, which James Hunter<sup>38</sup> describes as a culture war between progressive/secular and traditional/religious views. Others have voiced their skepticism about the boundaries and the dimension of this conflict, as well as the size of the population who neither agree nor disagree with any of these heated political and cultural debates.<sup>39</sup> Since the 1920s, when their influence in the American society started to diminish, various Christian Right groups emerged as key actors in influencing public policy, but after 2004, when George W. Bush was elected president these groups entered a major crisis.<sup>40</sup> Major organization like Focus on the Family, Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America laid off part of their

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<sup>34</sup> Viski, *An Army of Generals*, 53.

<sup>35</sup> Woodcock, “Violent Containment,” 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>37</sup> Florin Buhuceanu, *Traditional values, Religion LGBT rights & in Eastern Europe*, European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups (2014), 21.

<sup>38</sup> See James Hunter, *Culture wars*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> Clyde Wilcox, Carin Robinson, eds., *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right In American Politics*, (Philadelphia: Westwood Press, 2011), 26.

<sup>40</sup> Wilcox and Robinson, *Onward Christian Soldiers*, 54.

staff, experimented budget shortfalls and partially retreated from political activism until the election of Barack Obama.<sup>41</sup> Divergent views of the Christian Right emerged, one gradually taking a defensive position to protect Christians from a hostile society or a hostile state, the other continuing to demonize people and acting to deprive the rights of women or LGBT persons.<sup>42</sup>

The disputes in Romania followed similar moves from the US where the Christian Right rallied evangelicals for state-by-state referenda on same-sex marriage. While in parallel with referenda activism, American Evangelicalism also adopted an ambivalent and moderate view on same-sex marriage,<sup>43</sup> not the same thing happened in Romania where demonizing homosexuality prevailed among Christians and where local gay assimilationist groups are not yet present.<sup>44</sup> Despite accusations, the UK based *Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement* and the American based *Catholics for Choice*<sup>45</sup> prove that not only godless radicals, but also Christians voice their support for equal rights. For example Diane Fischer, a lesbian pastor of the Metropolitan Community Churches in US, active in Romania, lobbied various acquaintances in USA to convince the mayor of Bucharest to accept the first parade.<sup>46</sup>

The emergence of CpF in Romania is linked to these conflicting movements as part of the rise of a global civil society. CpF's rise is also intimately connected with the emergence of the Religious Right and transnational advocacy networks, united by common causes and ideas, formed by "NGOs, foundations and broader publics, as well as officials of governments and international organizations."<sup>47</sup> In particular, associations like the CpF in Romania link to interest groups rivaling equal rights NGOs, and function by:

*spreading ideas, lobbying officials, infiltrating parties, and influencing domestic and thereby international policy...[A]ctivists, even those who glorify parochial cultures or national traditions, leap levels of the political system – or use foreign developments to advance their local*

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>43</sup> Amy L. Stone, *Gay Rights and the Ballot Box*, (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press 2012), quoted in Lydia Bean & Brandon Martinez, *Evangelical Ambivalence toward Gays and Lesbians*. *Sociology of Religion* (76) (2014), 396.

<sup>44</sup> Mihai Tarta, "European Culture Wars: Sexual Nationalism between Euro-Christian and Euro-Secular Civil Religion in Poland and Romania," in Sremac Srdjan., Ruard.G.Ganzevoort, *Religious and Sexual Nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe: Gods, Gays and Government* (eds.), (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 38.

<sup>45</sup> Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 67.

<sup>46</sup> Viski, *An Army of Generals*, 44.

<sup>47</sup> Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 7-8.

*causes...Conservative religious groups have for years engaged in clashes over family policy. Much of their activism aims to preserve traditional families against what they decry as an onslaught of feminism, abortion, and gender politics. ... [continuing a] conflict between the gay rights network and American religious advocates that have major overseas activities. Both sides back local allies. Their lawyers litigate foreign cases. They defend or implant favorable statutes. They use the results, both successes and failures, in other conflicts, including California's 2008 battle over Proposition 8.*<sup>48</sup>

The US-based Alliance Defense Fund, a partner of the World Council of Families (WCF), influenced Romanian parliamentarians to make amendments to the Family Code by saying that the European Union pressures governments to adopt same-sex marriage.<sup>49</sup> Another major battle took place in 2008 when the WCF helped a kin organization from Romania, the ARF, to raise 650,000 signatures to modify the Constitution. By 2016, the earlier mentioned Liberty Counsel<sup>50</sup>, an NGO that is also connected to the Family Research Council, started to help the CpF to gather signatures for a new referendum to change the Romanian Constitution.<sup>51</sup>

Other groups are also active in the area, such as Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), whose former president Alan Sears declared that legalizing homosexuality will allow the legalization of pedophilia, polygamy or even bestiality,<sup>52</sup> and the European Center for Law and Justice (ECJL), a version of Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice, which sent a Memorandum on the Assisted Human Reproduction Draft Law to the Romanian Parliament. One of ECJL members, Gregor Puppink, declared that "numerous people have already been sanctioned due to their moral refusal of homosexuality," and, became famous for setting up public campaigns such as One of Us, gathering 1.8 million signatures, and La Manif Pour Tous (Protest for All) in France, where some 100,000 people protested against anti-discrimination law

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<sup>48</sup> Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 11, 13-14.

<sup>49</sup> Buhuceanu, *Traditional Values*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Jessica Valenti, "Liberty Counsel: the law firm whose mission is to defend 'God's authority.'" *The Guardian*, 3 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/03/liberty-counsel-law-firm-kim-davis-religious-freedom-abortion-same-sex-marriage-gay-conversion-therapy>, accessed 29 march 2018.

<sup>51</sup> wanderingeagle, "When Evangelical Christians Export their Culture Wars Abroad: Kim Davis and Liberty Counsel Fighting Gay Marriage in Romania," <https://wonderingeagle.wordpress.com/2017/11/06/when-evangelical-christians-export-their-culture-wars-abroad-kim-davis-and-liberty-counsel-fighting-gay-marriage-in-romania/>, accessed 29 march 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Buhuceanu, *Traditional Values*, 28-29.

proposals.<sup>53</sup> Roger Kiska of the ADF argued that democracy and the rule of law are currently at stake in Eastern Europe:

*Not at the hands of communism or dictatorship, but from a threat coming from a much more cunning and friendly figure within the European Institutions. These institutions believe that they can use Romania as a new member state still unsure of its place in Europe as means of quickly implementing radical legislation that they would like to in the future set up in the west. In a way, it has become a cold war of social policy.*<sup>54</sup>

In 2006 the Orthodox Church openly accused the government for letting the GayFest take place,<sup>55</sup> and letting the West interfere with the Romanian tradition, similar to what the godless “communists” did.<sup>56</sup> There was a visible tendency to use familiar concepts like ‘communism’ to spread the vision of a community vulnerable to foreign enemies, which was enriched with new concepts like ‘gender.’ Thus Family First Foundation considered that even the simple usage of ‘gender’ terms may lead to “demographic winter” and “the decline of human family”.<sup>57</sup> These transnational networks employed a more ethnic-neutral language, less connected to the nation and more connected to demography or humanity, while they also adopted the enemy tactics of speaking for the disfavored. Therefore, by the early 2000s conservatives countered with their own religious, women’s and various other organizations, which lobbied governments in the Caribbean, Asia and Africa, on common moral beliefs:<sup>58</sup>

*Nor does certifying one’s position with moral, scientific, or entertainment figures go uncontested. Even when one network bolsters its sages’ qualifications with awards and accolades, foes remain unimpressed. They decertify by attacking the experts’ conclusions, credentials, ethics, and sanity. They fight back with a competing stable of wise men—their own scientific wunderkinds, moral megastars, and celebrity hangers-on – recipients of separate prizes meant to intensify their own*

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<sup>53</sup> Splendor1618, “The Rise of Pro-life and Traditional Family Movement in Europe,” *The Splendor of the Church*,” February 5, 2014, available online <http://thesplendorofthechurch.com/2014/02/05/the-rise-of-pro-life-and-traditional-family-movement-in-europe/>, accessed 29 march 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Buhuceanu, *Traditional Values*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Conovici mentions that Patriarchy’s press release about the homosexual march in Romania, mentioned historical tradition first while the Church’s teaching came only second, see Iuliana Conovici, *Ortodoxia in Romania Postcomunista* [Orthodoxy in Post Communist Romania]. Vol. 2 (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2009), 788.

<sup>56</sup> Woodcock, “Violent Containment.” 7.

<sup>57</sup> Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 44.

<sup>58</sup> Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 45-46.

*gravity. More negatively, they yoke their foes to moral monstrosities, historical events or personages whose wickedness epitomizes the enemy's secret aims. As for victims, opposing networks deploy their own, with equally compelling but contrary messages.*<sup>59</sup>

Following this logic they also replicated scientific research and conferences. In 1995, ASCOR organized a meeting in Bucharest titled “Homosexuality: propaganda of human degenerates”, with contribution from several disciplines, law, sociology and medicine arguing against the removal of the article 200. The conference ended by issuing a brochure signed by the Patriarch and by the higher clergy, and was presented as a petition to the Romanian parliament.<sup>60</sup> In 2000, the ROC used its popularity to claim that the proposal to remove article 200 was in opposition to the majority of Romanians’ wishes and thus it is anti-democratic, and proposed a referendum instead of parliamentary debates.<sup>61</sup> Currently, CpF takes pride in showcasing a few public figures who support their initiative, actors, models, sportsman, doctors, politicians, which culminates with a list of academics from the major universities in Romania.

On the opposite side, under Netherland’s lead, European Gay activism got aid from the Ford Foundation in the early 1990s and from Soros and Arcus Foundations in the 2000s, which ended with securing equal rights in most European states. Among other objectives, Arcus Foundation of New York, which promotes equal rights for the world’s LGBT, “started a Program on Religion and Values” targeting various Churches to ““refute beliefs that portray gay...people as sinful and immoral”; to “achiev[e] long-term change in cultural attitudes and religious institutions”; and to “creat[e] a positive shift in cultural attitudes and values toward sexuality in general and GLBT...issues in particular.””<sup>62</sup> This expansion of networks and their strategies was at times uncoordinated in the field. Viski’s assessment about the Americanization of Gay Rights is a clue that organizations like ACCEPT and their opponents were part of a global move to fight each other in key countries, without sufficient knowledge and capabilities to interact with and act in the name of local LGBT persons.

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<sup>59</sup> Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 30.

<sup>60</sup> Andreea Sinziana Carstocea, “Homosexuality: a measure for democratization. Negotiation and mediation for defending a new born interest in Romania,” *ECPR Joint Sessions* (Nicosia, Cyprus; 25 - 30 April, 2006), 15.

<sup>61</sup> Nachescu, “Hierarchies of Difference,” 68.

<sup>62</sup> Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 68.

### **Homonationalism as a faulty adoption of western norms**

Nationalists were always interested in how people are born, how they live and how they die, and when homosexuality in U.S. started to be associated with “life and productivity (i.e. gay marriage and family),”<sup>63</sup> it found its way in the mainstream culture. Instead of the earlier morbid views linking homosexuals to incest, pedophilia, madness, and disease”<sup>64</sup>, homosexuals started to be pinned to the nation. This inclusion mechanism also carried an exclusionary component, excluding outsiders. For example a large majority of Romanians declare to be of Orthodox faith, and by using the terms of ‘national faith’ or ‘national church’ it is presumed that:

*...through birth (and infant baptism) there is an automatic reception into the national church, followed by an inculturation during upbringing. There is not really a choice whether to belong or not.....the ritualistic religiosity of the folk church stresses order and unity more than diversity: one people, one nation, one church.*<sup>65</sup>

Jasbir Puar argued that the increased acceptance of queers in the American nation was used to boost this exclusionary component, named homonationalism. Homonationalism is the heteronormativization of queerness as a way to justify the bias against the “backward” (usually) Muslims’ attitudes towards homosexuals. It was used to also justify aggressive foreign politics like military interventions disguised in missions to bring peace, tolerance and liberation. Puar argued that it represents the old type of nationalism based on exceptionalism and national superiority. Nation-states can parade their exceptionalism and ‘modernization’ in contrast to ‘homophobic others’ by showing their tolerance towards sexual minorities. Homonationalism blames the enemy for backwardness while promoting Islamophobia and racism: “the invocation of the terrorist as a queer, non-national, perversely racialized other, has become part of the normative script of the U.S. war on terror.”<sup>66</sup> Externally, homonationalism repudiates second-class nations with lesser queer cultures and internally it repudiates foreigners or immigrants and mocks their lifestyles, choice of clothing, etc.

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<sup>63</sup> Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, (Duke University Press 2007), chap. Preface, tactics, strategies, logistics, epub.

<sup>64</sup> Puar, *Homonationalism*, chap. Logistics: mapping the text

<sup>65</sup> Blücker, *The Church as Nation*, 139-140.

<sup>66</sup> Puar, *Homonationalism*, chap. The sexuality of terrorism

In Romania, demands for equal rights for LGBT persons point to a gay community that strives for homonormativization and speaks the language of ethnic nationalism in order to feel accepted. Shannon Woodcock and Vlad Viski wrote about the presence of this type of self-homonationalization, revealing that initial LGBT movements relied on racist discourse against Roma. They used anti-Roma prejudice, to discriminate against and settle them aside as outsiders and to claim a rightful “place in the nation on the basis of race over sexuality.”<sup>67</sup> Carl Stychin warned that by achieving human rights victories gay politics risks becoming politically conservative because of the failure to expand the agenda, for example to distinguish local power relations, or institutionalized structures of inequality like heteronormativity, and, intersectionality, the local intersections of class, ethnicity, religion and gender. The Roma minority and Roma poverty were blamed as part of the stumbling block that prevents Romanians from joining the EU or being a respected EU member.

Stychin mentions that homosexuality was a lens through which the country’s progress in EU integration was evaluated.<sup>68</sup> The lens was inseparable from the neoliberal discourse about reforms,<sup>69</sup> part of the political-economic preconditions that Romania was either very slow or unable to achieve.<sup>70</sup> While neoliberal ideas were advertised to Romanians in the same package with democracy and human rights, Clifford Bob argued that religious networks used fear and resentment and appealed to nationalism as a favoured tactic to appeal developing countries, usually by blaming the West for trying to impose foreign norms like homosexual and abortion rights.<sup>71</sup> However, almost the same tactics of blaming foreign influence, was deployed when implying that intolerance is inherent to Eastern Europe’s ‘transition’ and ‘post-socialism,<sup>72</sup>’ or even traditionalism encouraged by the illiberal East. Besides favoring equal rights, liberal mass media in Romania frequently depicts CpF’s sponsors as Russia’s and Vladimir Putin’s men,<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Woodcock, “A short history” 63-64, 71, and Viski, *An Army Of Generals*, 11-12.

<sup>68</sup> Stychin, Carl F. “‘We Want to Join Europe, Not Sodom’: Sexuality and European Union Accession in Romania.” in *Governing Sexuality: The Changing Politics of Citizenship and Law Reform*. (London: Hart Publishing, 2003), 115–138. Bloomsbury Collections. Web. 8 Apr. 2017. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472562777.ch-006>>, 115-116.

<sup>69</sup> Tom Gallagher in Stychin, “We want to join Europe,” 131.

<sup>70</sup> Stychin, “We want to join Europe,” 118.

<sup>71</sup> Bob, *Clash of world politics*, 46.

<sup>72</sup> Woodcock, “A short history,” 65.

<sup>73</sup> See Danciu Traian, “Cum au ajuns prietenii lui Putin și fondatorul Noua Dreaptă să formeze Coaliția pentru Familie,” [How did Putin’s Friends and the New Right’s Founder Form the CpF] *Vice*, 9 nov 2016, available online at <https://www.vice.com/ro/article/53bkmz/cine-sunt-oamenii-din-spatele-coalitieii-pentru-familie>

perpetuating the same nationalist tendencies and fearmongering about external influences as religious networks. Shannon Woodcock argued that rightful concerns about human rights turned into nationalistic reactions, by accepting concepts such as ‘transition’ and ‘post-socialism’ which suggest a never ending struggle to convert to western-style democracy.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusions

A 2017 Pew Report showed that compared to other European countries Romania shows the lowest public acceptance of homosexuals.<sup>75</sup> However, in the cohort of Orthodox countries Romania and Greece have the highest approval rates (26%) for same-sex marriage, almost double the approval rates of other Orthodox countries.<sup>76</sup> Previous work showed that biblical literalism,<sup>77</sup> the tendency to explain the bible literally, and to interpret homosexuality as a sin, partially explain why most Romanians oppose equal rights for LGBT persons. In Europe, Romania is second after Georgia in the percentage of those who admit that the Bible is the word of God, with 76% of the respondents.<sup>78</sup>

Concerning family values, data from Eurobarometer 2017, shows that Romania is the 4th least satisfied EU member state regarding family life,<sup>79</sup> and the most likely member state to accept that women are not fit for politics (do not have the necessary qualities and skills to take position of responsibility in politics) or able to represent one’s interest.<sup>80</sup> From 2014 onwards more attention goes towards documenting domestic violence, but a legislation change to protect women is still to occur.<sup>81</sup> The Pew Research shows that for 42% of Romanians, ‘national culture’ and ‘family tradition’ are the reasons why they identify with the Orthodox faith, while only 32%

<sup>74</sup> Woodcock, “A shot History,” 66.

<sup>75</sup> Viviana Andreescu, “From Legal Tolerance to Social Acceptance: Predictors of Heterosexism in Romania,” *Revista Română de Sociologie*, serie nouă, anul XXII, nr. 3–4, pp. 209–231, (București, 2011), 210, 219.

<sup>76</sup> Pew Research Center, *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe*, (May 10, 2017), 107-108.

<sup>77</sup> Amy Burdette in Bean and Martinez, “Evangelical Ambivalence,” 398.

<sup>78</sup> Pew, *Religious Belief*, 87, see also Amy Burdette et al., in Lydia Bean and Brandon Martinez, *Evangelical Ambivalence toward Gays and Lesbians*. *Sociology of Religion* (76) (2014).

<sup>79</sup> Eurobarometer, “Future of Europe,” *Social Issues*, available online <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2179>, 60.

<sup>80</sup> Eurobarometer, “Future of Europe,” 28, 41, 45.

<sup>81</sup> Statistici privind violența în familie: aproape nouă mii de cazuri de lovire și alte violențe și 80 de violuri în familie, în primele 6 luni ale anului <https://violentaipotrivafemeilor.ro/statistici-privind-violenta-in-familie-aproape-noua-mii-de-cazuri-de-lovire-si-alte-violente-si-80-de-violuri-in-familie-in-primele-6-luni-ale-anului/>

indicated ‘personal faith’, and some 19% indicated both options, yet, only 6% referred strictly to national culture which makes ‘family tradition’ the most important factor.<sup>82</sup> It appears from this data that family values are not followed and enjoyed in the same measure as in the culture wars rhetoric. CpF is notoriously connected to right-wing political parties which shut down 65 small town clinics in 2011, which were the only institutions securing pregnancies and births in semi-urban, poorest areas in the country.<sup>83</sup> Sympathisers include the National Liberal Party’s chief campaigner, Gheorghe Falcă, or Mihai Gheorgiu, a CpF leader, member of the bygone Christian Democrat National Peasant Party(PNTCD), and current adjunct director of the National Romanian Peasant Museum, involved in boycotting LGBT events.

This paper analyses the connections between religion and nationalism, by looking at the mobilization of the global Christian Right and human rights organizations to fight over the definition of family. The issue was not new but political tensions which escalated after 2015, increasingly divided Romanians around family values and homosexuality, and more and more around abortion rights or mandatory vaccination. Based on Romania’s strong religiosity, and with legal and logistic aid from US, local Christian Right groups which were more or less connected with local churches, joined together and fused to form the CpF. CpF grew when it speculated these increased political tensions and decided to put all its efforts to petition for a new referendum to modify the Constitution. The project succeeded after the Orthodox Church got involved and used its extensive influence in the territory to convince as many believers as possible to sign the petition. Furthermore, this venture was integrated in the global Religious Right’s plans to focus on countries like Romania, a religious state which might become a test case able to influence policy in US.

Hopes about increased Europeanization, secularization, privatization of faith and diversification of the Orthodox Church’s discourse vis a vis the nation have collided with the powerful influence of transnational forces, the recent political turmoil around the immigrant crisis, the revival of palingenetic ultranationalism which focuses on national rebirth, and the adoption of culture wars. Assuming that religious mobilization does not focus on alternatives, other than nationalist ones, it will continue to have a negative impact on the democratization of public life.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Pew, *Religious Belief*, 57.

<sup>83</sup> Cristina Raț, “Părinți netrebnici și familii sănătoase, Fața Disciplinativă a Politicilor Familiale,” [Wretched Parents and Healthy Families, The Disciplining Force of Family Policy] *Critica Antologie I (2010-2011)*, (Chișinău: Cartier, 2011), 70.

<sup>84</sup> Voicu, Mălina, *România Religioasă: Pe Valul European Sau În Urma Lui?* [Religious Romania: In the European

Well adapted religious groups do not only survive but even thrive in today's society, and, as Christian Smith argued, faith is eroded by pluralism, but religious groups do renegotiate and "adapt their core beliefs and practices to perform more robustly in the modern world."<sup>85</sup> The Orthodox Church appears to focus on morality and cooperation with minority Churches and ceased to aggressively dominate and restrict the activities of other faiths. A Christian Right alliance will hold in the near future but it is difficult to predict which group, or, if a specific group will take the lead. An important change was that on the particular issue of LGBT rights, all the local religious groups collaborated with each other on equal footing.

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<sup>85</sup> Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 154.

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