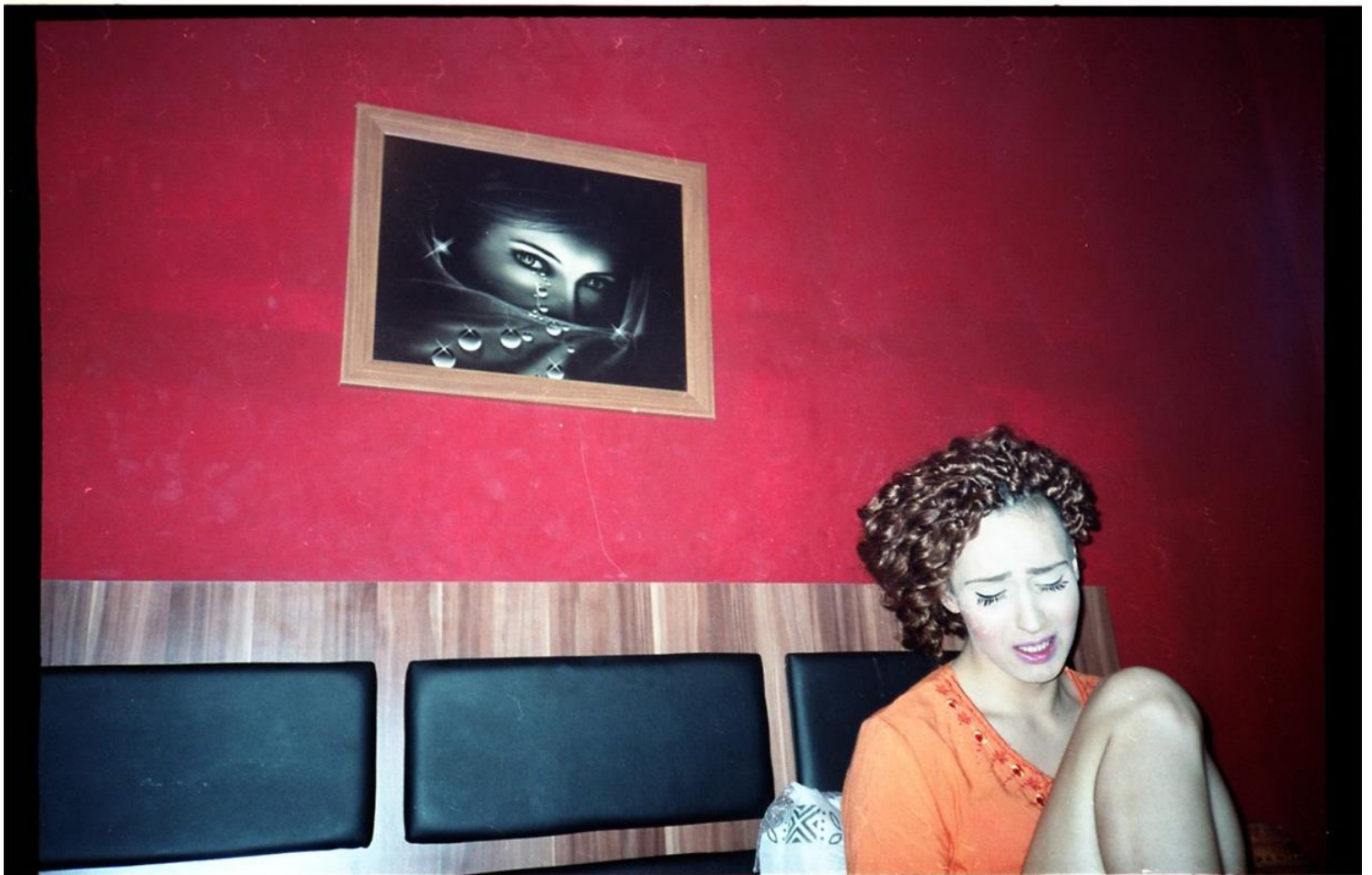


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LGBT Rights in Central and Eastern Europe:
Theoretical Disputes,
Community Building Strategies

***Analyze – Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies** is an on-line, open access, peer-reviewed international journal that aims to bring into the public arena new ideas and findings in the field of gender and feminist studies and to contribute to the gendering of the social, economic, cultural and political discourses and practices about today’s local, national, regional and international realities.*

*Edited by the **The Romanian Society for Feminist Analyses AnA**, the journal intends to open conversations among eastern and non-eastern feminist researchers on the situated nature of their feminism(s) and to encourage creative and critical feminist debates across multiple axes of signification such as gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, etc.*

The journal publishes studies, position papers, case studies, viewpoints, book reviews from practitioners of all grades and professions, academics and other specialists on the broad spectrum of gender and feminist studies.

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Editorial

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Foto: Daniel Vegel, Budapest

July 2007: the image of a brutally beaten gay couple during clashes between Budapest Pride participants and neo-Nazi groups makes waves throughout the world. The 12th edition of the gay pride parade in the Hungarian capital was the first to witness the violence of the extreme right wing, owing to a tensed political environment. Earlier that year Gábor Vona, the leader of the fascist party Jobbik had just registered the so-called “Hungarian Guard”, the paramilitary wing of the party, which “orchestrated a series of anti-Roma demonstrations, including marches through the village of Tatárszetygyorgy where violence later took Roma lives.”¹ It was one year after a secret audio tape of then-Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, in which he admits lying to citizens about progress made by the economy, got public and led to mass, violent protests in Hungary, paving the way for the second rise of illiberal Viktor Orbán. Since 2010, for the Hungarian Government the issue of ‘traditional values’ and ‘traditional family’ became one of the bedrocks of its illiberal regime. The 2011 Constitution defined marriage in heterosexual terms “while implying that a family based on marriage is the only type protected by the state,”² and in 2017 Budapest hosted the World Congress of Families.³ These recent

¹ William Downs, *Political Extremism in Democracies. Combatting Intolerance*, I (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 191.

² “Hungary: New Constitution Enshrines Discrimination,” Human Rights Watch, April 19, 2011, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/04/19/hungary-new-constitution-enshrines-discrimination>.

³ “World Congress of Families XI, The Budapest Family Summit, To Be Held in Hungary, May 24-28, 2017,” accessed August 13, 2018, <https://profam.org/907>.



developments come after a few decades in which Hungary has been a frontliner of LGBT rights in Central and Eastern Europe (‘CEE’). Just to give a few examples, the first officially-registered LGBT organization in CEE, Homeros Lambda, was founded in Hungary in 1988, and civil unions for same-sex couples were legalized as early as 2007.⁴

When it comes to LGBT rights, CEE countries have followed an uneven and often surprising road. Contrary to popular belief, the region has not experienced a linear path in terms of the advancement of LGBT rights, and intra-regional differences are considerable. If Czechia has long been considered a champion of equal rights for sexual minorities,⁵ countries such as Poland,⁶ Slovakia,⁷ Bulgaria⁸ or Romania⁹ have struggled with the issue of LGBT rights. Moreover, the accession to the European Union (‘EU’) did not provide a uniformization of state attitudes towards LGBT subjects. While in Romania the EU accession led to decriminalizing homosexuality in 2001,¹⁰ in Poland the EU accession had clear negative effects on LGBT rights. As a backlash to EU’s liberal agenda, conservative forces joined hands with the powerful Catholic Church and blocked the advancement of gay and lesbian rights, such as legalization of civil unions.¹¹ Moreover, both in 2004 and 2005, the mayor of Warsaw, Law and Justice Party’s Lech Kaczyński, banned Parada Równości, the city gay pride parade.¹² A similar move was attempted

⁴ See Hadley Renkin, *Ambiguous Identities, Ambiguous Transitions: Lesbians, Gays, and the Sexual Politics of Citizenship in Postsocialist Hungary* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

⁵ See Long, Scott, “Gay and Lesbian Movements in Eastern Europe. Romania, Hungary, and the Czech Republic,” in *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics. National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999)

⁶ See Chetaille, Agnes, “Poland: Sovereignty and Sexuality in Post-Socialist Times,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State. Comparative Insights into a Transformed Relationship*. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2011)

⁷ See Krošlák, Daniel. “The Referendum on the So-Called Traditional Family in the Slovak Republic.” *Central and Eastern European Legal Studies* 1 (2015).

⁸ See Roseneil, Sasha and Stoilova, Mariya “Heteronormativity, Intimate Citizenship and the Regulation of Same-Sex. Sexualities in Bulgaria” in *De-centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European perspectives* (Ashgate: 2011)

⁹ See Nachescu, Voichita, “Hierarchies of Difference: National Identity, Gay and Lesbian Rights, and the Church in Post-Communist Romania,” in *Sexuality and Gender in Postcommunist Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. Štulhofer, Aleksandar, and Sandfort, Theo (Philadelphia: Haworth Press, 2005)

¹⁰ See Carl Franklin Stychin, “Ch. 6 ‘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* (Hart Publishing, 2003), 115–38.

¹¹ See O’Dwyer, Conor, “Does the EU Help or Hinder Gay-Rights Movements in Postcommunist Europe? The Case of Poland.” *East European Politics*, Vol. 28, Issue 4, 332-352.

¹² “Gay Rights Activists Abandon Poland Pride Parade after Mayor’s Ban,” *The Advocate*, June 8, 2004, <https://www.advocate.com/news/2004/06/08/gay-rights-activists-abandon-poland-pride-parade-after-mayors-ban-12680>.

by Budapest authorities in 2008.¹³ In Romania, in 2005, the mayor of Bucharest, Adriean Videanu, banned the proposed gay pride parade, and reversed his decision only after public backlash from the Romanian President, Traian Băsescu.¹⁴

More recently, the CEE region has been a fertile ground for conservative movements to advance their cause, using LGBT rights as the catalyst for bringing together groups of different religious backgrounds.¹⁵ Indigenous movements received important support from American Christian groups decided to block any gender and sexual liberation.¹⁶ Croatia, Slovakia and Romania are the most relevant examples when it comes to showcasing the recent developments in CEE. All three cases underline the different attitudes and tools the EU has when dealing with Member States and their attempts to ban gay marriages. In 2013, right after joining the EU, Croatian conservative groups gathered signatures and pushed for a referendum to ban gay marriages in the Constitution. Despite strong opposition from major party leaders, the referendum passed with a large majority of over 65%.¹⁷ Given Croatia's EU accession model, in which LGBT groups were able to incorporate their activism, and their requests, as part of the larger accession framework,¹⁸ the political elites showed stronger commitment to LGBT rights. Right after the passing of the referendum for enshrining the 'traditional family' in the Constitution, the country witnessed a strong and successful push for legalization of civil unions, granting rights to gay couples.

In Slovakia, on the other hand, in 2015, a similar process was started, in which the so-called 'Alliance for the Family' gathered over 400.000 signatures in order to trigger a referendum

¹³ "Tóth Gábor Betiltotta a Melegfelvonulást," *Index.Hu*, June 12, 2008, <https://index.hu/belfold/melmelt0612/>.

¹⁴ Viski, Vlad Levente, "'An Army OF Generals Without Rank-and-File': Building a Gay and Lesbian Social Movement in Romania After 2001" (Unpublished MA Thesis, Central European University, 2015), 42.

¹⁵ Kuhar, Roman and Paternotte, David, eds., *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing against Equality* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017).

¹⁶ See Vlad Levente Viski, "American Dollars Sponsor Anti-Gay Movements in Europe (Dolarii Americani Sponsorizează Mișcările Anti-Gay Din Europa)," *Adevarul.ro*, March 20, 2017, accessed August 13, 2018, http://adevarul.ro/news/societate/dolarii-americanii-sponsorizeaza-miscarile-anti-gay-europa-1_58cfb73c5ab6550cb88247b3/index.html.

¹⁷ See Slootmaeckers, Koen and Sircar, Indraneel, "Croatia, the EU, and the Marriage Referendum: The Symbolic Case of LGBT Rights" (ECPR General Conference, Glasgow, 2014), <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/f3af562f-e97a-4143-8292-ac4d2150062f.pdf>.

¹⁸ Slootmaeckers, Koen and Touquet, Heleen, "The Co-Evolution of EU's Eastern Enlargement and LGBT Politics: An Ever Gayer Union?" in *The EU Enlargement and Gay Politics. The Impact of Eastern Enlargement on Rights, Activism and Prejudice*, ed. Slootmaeckers, Koen, Touquet, Heleen, and Vermeersch, Peter (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 25-26.

on gay marriage, adoption rights and sexual education in schools.¹⁹ A fourth question concerning recognition of any form of cohabitation for same-sex couples was rejected by the Constitutional Court of Slovakia in 2014. Despite strong opposition from the President of Slovakia, Andrej Kiska, both the Social-Democratic party, led by Prime Minister Robert Fico, and the Christian Democratic Party joined forces and reviewed the Slovak Constitution via the Parliament, effectively defining marriage in the constitutional text as the marriage between a man and a woman. The referendum issue was not settled following this move, and Slovaks were called to vote on the aforementioned questions. Due to a massive boycott by civil rights groups, the referendum only brought out 25% of registered voters, not enough to pass the mandatory threshold of minimum 50%.²⁰

When it comes to Romania, the story of the referendum to prevent the legalization of same-sex marriages is far from over. Back in 2015, a group of conservative organizations formed the Coalition for Family, whose purpose was to gather enough signatures to enshrine the heterosexual marriage in the Constitution. In less than six months, with support from the powerful Orthodox Church, they were able to gather 2.6 million signatures for their cause, way above the minimum 500.000 required.²¹ In July 2016, the Constitutional Court of Romania in a poorly motivated judgement²² green-lighted the initiative,²³ deeming it within constitutional boundaries. On May 9, 2017, the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Romanian Parliament approved the initiative to review the constitutional text with a large majority of over 70 points.²⁴ As of now the citizens' initiative lays in the Romanian Senate, where a vote is expected soon. Should it pass the Senate, the initiative ought to be once again approved by the Constitutional Court (to check the constitutionality of eventual amendments of the initiative), and will be followed by a national

¹⁹ Sekerák, Marián, "Same-Sex Marriages (or Civil Unions/ Registered Partnerships) in Slovak Constitutional Law: Challenges and Possibilities," *Utrecht Law Review* 13, no. 1 (2017): 34–59.

²⁰ "Slovakia Referendum to Strengthen Same-Sex Marriage Ban Fails," *BBC News*, February 8, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31170464>.

²¹ Decizia nr. 580 asupra initiativei legislative a cetatenilor intitulata "Lege de revizuire a Constitutiei Romaniei" (Curtea Constitutionala a Romaniei July 20, 2016).

²² Vlad Perju, "The Lack of Professionalism of the Constitutional Court: On the Positive Opinion Regarding the Initiative to Modify the Definition of Marriage in the Romanian Constitution (Neprofesionalismul Curtii Constitutionale: Despre Avizul Pozitiv Dat Initiativei de Modificare a Definitiei Casatoriei in Constitutia Romaniei)," Contributors.ro, October 16, 2016, <http://www.contributors.ro/cultura/neprofesionalismul-curtii-constitutionale-despre-avizul-pozitiv-dat-initiativei-de-modificare-a-definitiei-casatoriei-in-constitutia-romaniei/>.

²³ Citre, Cristi, "Curtea Constituțională a Dat Undă Verde Propunerii de Revizuire a Constituției Privind Căsătoria," *Mediafax*, July 20, 2016, <http://www.mediafax.ro/politic/curtea-constitutionala-a-dat-unda-verde-propunerii-de-revizuire-a-constitutiei-privind-casatoria-15534142>.

²⁴ Ion, Raluca, "Camera Deputatilor a Votat Pentru Schimbarea Definiției Familiei În Constituție. Doar 22 de Deputați Au Votat Împotriva," *Republica.Ro*, May 9, 2017, <https://republica.ro/camera-deputatilor-a-votat-pentru-schimbarea-definitiei-familiei-in-constitutie-doar-22-de-deputati-au>.

referendum, where over 30% of registered voters must cast a valid vote in order for it to become law.

Romania's relationship with sexual minorities is a rather sinuous one; the country is one of the last states in Europe to decriminalize homosexuality as late as 2001, after over three decades of harsh penalties for engaging in homosexual acts.²⁵ When it comes to anti-discrimination legislation, Romania adopted in 2000 a rather progressive anti-discrimination law prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in the fields of labor force, healthcare, education, judicial system²⁶ and was the first state in CEE to establish an equality body with competencies in finding and sanctioning acts of discrimination. Almost two decades later, Romania finds itself in the position of being one of the last countries in the EU that, except protecting them from discrimination in the public sphere, does not grant any other legal rights to same-sex couple (not even civil unions) next to Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia.²⁷

The issue of the referendum for 'traditional family' in Romania was somewhat complicated by a recent case brought forward to the Constitutional Court concerning the legal recognition of a gay marriage officiated outside Romania, in a EU-member state that recognizes such unions. The *Coman* case was brought forward to the Constitutional Court of Romania in 2015, and concerned the freedom of movement of EU citizens.²⁸ Adrian Coman, a Romanian citizen married Claibourn Hamilton, an American citizen in 2010, in Belgium. Romanian authorities refused to grant Claibourne Hamilton residency rights, based on a ban on recognition of foreign-officiated gay marriages from Article 277 of the 2009 Romanian Civil Code. Given the fact that the issue concerned the EU directive on freedom of movement of EU citizens, the Constitutional Court of Romania sent a series of questions to the Court of Justice of the European Union ('CJEU'),²⁹ the highest court regulating EU legislation, in order to clarify the meaning of the word 'spouse' from

²⁵ Viski, Vlad Levente, "An Army of Generals Without Rank-and-File': Building a Gay and Lesbian Social Movement in Romania After 2001."

²⁶ Ordonanța nr. 137/2000 privind prevenirea și sancționarea tuturor formelor de discriminare (2000), <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gezdiobqgu/ordonanta-nr-137-2000-privind-prevenirea-si-sanctionarea-tuturor-formelor-de-discriminare>

²⁷ Boffey, Daniel, "All EU countries must recognise rights of gay spouses, ECJ rules," Politico Europe, June 5, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/05/eu-countries-recognise-rights-gay-spouses-european-court-of-justice-ecj>

²⁸ Asociația ACCEPT, "Cazul Coman va Ajunge La Curtea de Justiție a Uniunii Europene," <http://coman.acceptromania.ro/cazul-coman-va-ajunge-la-curtea-de-justitie-a-uniunii-europene/?lang=ro>.

²⁹ Curtea Constitutională a României. 2017. *Comunicat de presa*. <https://www.ccr.ro/noutati/COMUNICAT-DE-PRES-257>.

the aforementioned EU directive. In June 2018, the CJEU released its decision,³⁰ stating that when it comes to freedom of movement of EU citizens, the term ‘spouse’ refers also to partners who find themselves in a legally recognized same-sex union. In July 2018, the Constitutional Court of Romania released its own decision on the *Coman* case, declaring Article 277 of the Romanian Civil Code as constitutional, as long as it respects the CJEU earlier decision.³¹

In all of the presented cases, of Croatia, Slovakia, and Romania, American-based conservative groups’ involvement can be traced. Two of these groups are Alliance Defending Freedom (‘ADF’), and Liberty Council (‘LC’), organizations involved in drafting constitutional bans on gay marriages³² and transgender bathroom ban bills³³ in a series of American states or submitting positions to the Supreme Court of the United States in cases such as *Lawrence v. Texas*,³⁴ which completely decriminalized homosexuality in the US, or *Obergefell v. Hodges*,³⁵ which legalized gay marriages throughout the US. In Europe, ADF got involved in defending in front of the European Court of Human Rights Ireland’s ban on abortions,³⁶ worked with Croatian conservative groups to ban sexual education in schools, openly supported Croatia’s ban on gay marriage referendum, submitted an *amicus curiae* to the Constitutional Courts of Slovakia³⁷ and Romania³⁸ in the cases concerning the proposed referenda to define marriage as between a man and a woman. As for Liberty Council, they also submitted an *amicus curiae* to the Constitutional Court of Romania in the case concerning the referendum.³⁹ In this brief, LC stated that “engaging

³⁰ Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 5 June 2018, *Coman*, C-673/16, EU:C:2018:385.

³¹ Curtea Constituțională a României. 2018. Comunicat de presa. <https://www.ccr.ro/noutati/COMUNICAT-DE-PRES-319>.

³² Peters, Stephen, “10 Shocking Facts About the Alliance Defending Freedom,” *Human Rights Campaign (blog)*, October 15, 2014, <https://www.hrc.org/blog/10-shocking-facts-about-the-alliance-defending-freedom>.

³³ O’Hara, Mary Emily, “This Law Firm Is Linked to Anti-Transgender Bathroom Bills Across the Country,” *NBC News*, April 8, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/law-firm-linked-anti-transgender-bathroom-bills-across-country-n741106>.

³⁴ Maza, Carlos, “This Right-Wing Legal Powerhouse Wants to Make Gay Sex Illegal,” *Huffington Post (blog)*, November 19, 2014, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/carlos-maza/this-right-wing-legal-pow_b_6185878.html.

³⁵ Eckholm, Erik, “Legal Alliance Gains Host of Court Victories for Conservative Christian Movement,” *New York Times*, May 11, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/12/us/legal-alliance-gains-host-of-court-victories-for-conservative-christian-movement.html>.

³⁶ The ban has been meanwhile overturned following a national referendum in 2018.

³⁷ Kiska, Roger, “Stanovisko k návrhu na začatie konania o predmete referenda vo veci PL. ÚS 24/2014,” 2014, <http://www.adfmedia.org/files/SlovakBrief.pdf>

³⁸ Portaru, Adina, “Intervenție privind propunerea legislativă de revizuire a Constituției României, publicată în Monitorul Oficial, Partea I, nr. 883/25.11.2015, înregistrată la Senat cu nr. b293/2016,” 2016, <http://adflegal.blob.core.windows.net/international-content/docs/default-source/default-document-library/resources/media-resources/europe/interventie-constituționala-adf-international.pdf>

³⁹ Staver, Matthew, Staver, Anita, and Mihet, Harry, “In re: The Legislative Proposal To Revise The Constitution Of Romania, Published In The

in homosexual conduct is dangerous, and endorsing and subsidizing same-sex unions and treating them as marriages is an endorsement of conduct that does not benefit society, but rather harms it by creating irresponsible and unhealthy people.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, in October 2017 LC brought infamous Kim Davis, the US county clerk who refused to perform same-sex marriages after *Obergefell v. Hodges* became the law of the land in the US, to tour Romania and convince Romanians about the dangers of same-sex marriage.⁴¹

The literature on LGBT rights in Central and Eastern Europe stands proof to the regional differences and nuances presented above. Some of the studies focus on the referenda taking place in recent years,⁴² the ways in which EU integration affected LGBT rights,⁴³ the different efforts to mobilize the LGBT community on issues such as HIV,⁴⁴ Pride events and the way they influence public opinion,⁴⁵ the use of transnational networks in order to advance LGBT rights,⁴⁶ the rise of right-wing movements using LGBT rights as a catalyst,⁴⁷ LGBT rights in CEE in the context of internationalization of gay rights,⁴⁸ visibility as a tool to advance the LGBT cause⁴⁹ or using courts as a means to advance equality.⁵⁰

Official Gazette, Part I, no. 883 / 25.11.2015, Registered At The Senate No. b293 / 2016,” 2016, <http://lc.org/072016RomanianMarriageAmicusBrief.pdf>

⁴⁰ See <http://lc.org/072016RomanianMarriageAmicusBrief.pdf>, p. 32.

⁴¹ Stack, Liam, and Gillet, Kit, “Kim Davis, Once Jailed in America, Campaigns Against Gay Marriage in Romania,” *New York Times*, October 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/12/world/europe/kim-davis-romania.html>

⁴² Krošlák, Daniel, “The Referendum on the So-Called Traditional Family in the Slovak Republic”; Slootmaeckers, Koen and Sircar, Indraneel, “Croatia, the EU, and the Marriage Referendum: The Symbolic Case of LGBT Rights”; Sekerák, Marián, “Same-Sex Marriages (or Civil Unions/ Registered Partnerships) in Slovak Constitutional: Challenges and Possibilities”

⁴³ Slootmaeckers, Koen, Touquet, Heleen, and Peter, Vermeersch, *The EU Enlargement and Gay Politics. The Impact of Eastern Enlargement on Rights, Activism and Prejudice*.

⁴⁴ Viski, Vlad Levente, “‘An Army OF Generals Without Rank-and-File’: Building a Gay and Lesbian Social Movement in Romania After 2001.”

⁴⁵ Woodcock, Shannon. “Gay Pride as Violent Containment in Romania: A Brave New Europe.” *Sextures* 1 (2009). <http://sextures.net/woodcock-gay-pride-romania>

⁴⁶ Binnie, Jon and Klesse, Christian, “Researching Transnational Activism around LGBTQ Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Activist Solidarities and Spatial Imaginings,” in *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, by Kulpa, Robert and Mizielinska, Joanna (Routledge, 2016), 107–30.

⁴⁷ Bob, Clifford, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴⁸ Kollman, Kelly and Waites, Matthew, “The Global Politics of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Human Rights: An Introduction,” *Contemporary Politics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 1–17; Stychin, Carl F., “Same-Sex Sexualities and the Globalization of Human Rights Discourse,” *McGill Law Journal* 49 (2004): 951–68.

⁴⁹ Ayoub, Phillip M., *When States Come Out. Europe’s Sexual Minorities and the Politics of Visibility* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵⁰ Helfer, Laurence R. and Voeten, Erik, “International Courts as Agents of Legal Change: Evidence from LGBT Rights in Europe,” *International Organization* 68, no. 1 (2014): 77–110.

The current issue of this journal aims to complete the current literature on LGBT rights in CEE with new information, methodologies, and points of analysis, proving once again the complexity and the differences among the CEE countries. Andrada Nimu's book review of Lukasz Szulc's *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland*, underlines the aforementioned differences and goes even further, shedding light on Szulc's thesis about the myths concerning the CEE region, both in relationship with the socialist past and its more recent developments.

I have chosen to open this issue with a reediting of Shannon Woodcock's excellent 2009 chapter in Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielinska's *De-Centering Western Sexualities, A short history of the queer time of "post-socialist" Romania, or, Are we there yet? Let's ask Madonna!*, a provocative and innovative analysis of the ways in which queer identity was built in Romania, mirroring the rampant anti-Roma racism in both the Romanian society at large and the local queer community. A strong critique of identity politics and the relationship between Europeanization and modernization temporality, the article fits perfectly, almost like a puzzle with Nimu's review of Szulc's *Transnational Homosexuals*, underlining the effects of homonationalism in CEE, and particularly in Romania.

On the other hand, Viviana Andreescu's article *Sexual Minorities, Civil Rights, and Romanians' Resistance to Social Change*, can be read mirroring her 2011 article on the same topic of Romanians' attitudes towards homosexuality, *From Legal Tolerance to Social Acceptance: Predictors of Heterosexism in Romania*. Her in-depth analysis of the statistical data from 2015 Special Eurobarometer brings forward surprising results and will, most certainly, provide important tools for activists and policy-makers alike.

Mihai Tarța's *The Traditional Family Versus Equal Rights Supporters Rhetoric In Romania* provides us with a much awaited look into the Coalition for Family's relations with transnational entities and uncovers in a systematic manner the ways in which the Christian Right has originated and developed in Romania, using culture wars rhetoric and American-inspired tactics. In the context of the proposed referendum for 'traditional marriage' in Romania the article's contextualization of the main processes taking place in the new Romanian social realities represents a fresh and engaging take.

Having participated in Alice Venir's journey towards researching the LGBT community in Bucharest, Romania, its strategies and mobilization choices, awaiting the constitutional referendum, I can only say that her article *2016, a Visible Year: discursive uses of visibility in*

LGBT activism in Bucharest, Romania unveils, in an original and methodologically sound manner, a rather under-researched area, providing valuable information on the ways in which discourse is developed, planned and performed.

Roxana Marin's essay, *Exploring Experiences of Transgender Identity Development in Romania* is one first attempt to present a missing piece from the literature, which often concentrates on gay and lesbian's battle for equal rights, ignoring the T from the LGBT. For sure, her essay stands to open a conversation about transgender issues in Romania, on which future researchers can build. Paul Golban reviews *Love Through The Looking Glass: An Open Dialogue in Romania*, a book edited by Tatiana Niculescu Bran, which contains different perspectives on homosexuality in the Romanian context. Given the novelty of the topic in the Romanian essayistic landscape, Golban's review is welcomed.

Finally, I would like to offer my warm greetings and thanks to the contributors, reviewers, editors and everyone who made this much-needed number possible. Special thanks go to Diana Neaga, for her constant guidance, Ana Maria Despoiu for her hard work and patience, and to Laura Grünberg for her valuable input.

A short history of the queer time of “post-socialist” Romania, or, Are we there yet? Let’s ask Madonna!¹

Shannon Woodcock

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In August 2009, Madonna performed in Bucharest as part of her European tour. Between songs, she said to the audience:

Now, I’ve been paying attention to the news reports and its been brought to my attention that there’s a lot of discrimination against Romanies and Gypsies in general in Eastern Europe and that makes me feel very sad because we don’t believe in discrimination against anyone, we believe in freedom and equal rights for everyone, right? Gypsies, homosexuals, people who are different, everyone is equal and should be treated with respect, ok, let’s not forget that.²

The audience boo-ed, and international headlines reported that Romanians boo-ed Madonna for making an anti-racism comment. Indeed, Romanians swamped internet forums and discussion lists on media sites with overwhelmingly negative reactions to Madonna’s comment. These comments repeated racist anti-Romani stereotypes *ad nauseum*, and only occasionally mentioned ‘homosexuals,’ always in similarly pejorative terms. Discussion lists and blogs of Romanians who identify as gay and/or homosexual were similar to the mainstream racist opinions and dismissed Madonna as ignorant. Rather than supporting a stance against discrimination in general, many of these self-identifying gay bloggers rejected Madonna’s equation of ‘Gypsies’ and ‘homosexuals,’ arguing that gay Romanians are valid recipients of ‘respect,’ while Roma are not.

In the wake of recent theoretical scholarship highlighting the role of race as catalyst in LGBT rights movements, this paper asks how nascent Romanian LGBT movements rely on racist discourses against Roma in order to claim a place for homosexuality in the heteronormative nation. As both the Romani and LGBT movements for human rights were introduced and developed only since the beginning of the 1990s, it is striking that in the debate over Madonna’s words, LGBT

¹ First published as a chapter in *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*. Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska (ed.). Ashgate, 2011, pp.63-84.

² Transcribed by the author from the recording entitled “Madonna Booed in Bucharest for Defending Gypsies!” posted on www.youtube.com on August 27, 2009 by LostForces <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMrk2PIFAKA> last viewed 10/1/2010.



claims to rights are explicitly staked over those of racial equality. The fact that this is occurring in the specific time of “post-socialism” in Romania demands close engagement, just as Jasbir K. Puar’s work (2007) is specifically situated in the Western time of post-9/11, and Henriette Gunkel’s work in the time of post-apartheid South Africa (2010). The post 9/11 moment in time is significant to Romanian (and broader Central Eastern European) national identity also as the cusp of EUropean accession, signifying the conditional acceptance of the poor cousin ‘East’ “back” into (albeit behind) European time.

This chapter is thus a primary exploration of how the LGBT movement in Romania relies on racial exclusion in the unique and dynamic space and time of post-socialist neo-liberalism. Drawing on a range of sources, we will trace the introduction of identity categories and politics in the temporal and political context of European Union accession, charting the creation of an LGBT movement in the model of the Western LGBT movements, and the contestation of these categories on the ground at Pride parades. We will explore who is included in and excluded from the LGBT movement, and how this violent process of containment masquerading as liberation has been contested and scaffolded by individuals and institutions in the recent debates provoked by Madonna’s observations.³ But let us begin by questioning the temporality in which Romania is pinned through its status as a “post-socialist” society and state.

What’s in a name? “Post-socialism” as capitalist belatedness

The East we name “post-socialist” becomes fixed in time at the moment when socialism failed. After 1990, and looking back in time to the East that built socialism, the EUropean West dictated the terms by which they would drag their geographical and racial prodigal brothers “back” to a EUrope that was in fact new itself. As Chari and Verdery (2009) argue, humanities scholars have used “post-socialist” and “transition” for CEE societies because the terms reflected the sense of chaotic liberalization policies after specifically socialist regimes, but the terms still function as

³ In this paper I use the labels LGB or T only to refer to those who identify themselves thus. Many individuals in Romania who would not march under an LGBT banner or name themselves thus nevertheless recognize that their desires can be interpellated within these categories but choose to reject and critique the LGBT label, as outlined in this paper. These non-heteronormative sexual identities are often referred to as “same-sex,” and I use this terminology in this paper because it is a widely supported concept in the community I am writing about, although I reject the binary construction of gender that enables it. The word “queer” is very rarely used in Romania, and isn’t used as a publicly or even intellectually unifying identity category, and thus I use the forementioned terms of same-sex and non-heteronormative to reference those who courageously question and problematise LGBT labels.

the primary identification for CEE studies twenty years after the establishment of capitalist liberal democracies. The term “post-socialist” plays a normative gate-keeping role for Western observers who, it is assumed, will be the ones to tell us when the East has actually arrived somewhere other than “post-socialism.” Just as the homosexual is born into his/her closet and needs to develop in order to “come out” into the world of heterosexuals, the “post-socialist” East exists in Western capitalist discourse in order for Europe to benevolently bestow recognition on its other. Just as the closet metaphor naturalises heteronormativity and places homosexuality as originating in enclosure (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1990), the “post-socialist” title repeatedly situates CEE societies in a stagnant moment of time before capitalism and after socialism, lagging on the singular trajectory of European development. In both cases, the agency of the others is contained through articulation as closeted or lagging behind the (hetero)normative states.

As well as submitting to pervasive EU reform requirements, the system of governance in “post-socialist” states was reformed to exclude groups and sideline institutions that represented “rights” under the new name of “civil society.” In my personal interactions with Western civil society “experts” in Bucharest and Tirana, they mostly ignored the fact that socialist governments had formal mechanisms to ensure parliamentary participation (albeit, for what that was worth) of women, ethnic and demographic groups. This new “civil society” was a non-governmental sector that lobbied politicians for legislative change on behalf of socially disenfranchised communities, laws lacking in implementation support decried as too costly for the “transition” period. Civil society was supposed to bring the stated categories of victims into the time of the nation, a task that formerly befell the state. As if the represented and marginalised groups had excluded themselves from the sudden new liberal state, the struggle for inclusion in policy and society fell on their shoulders rather than to the government. In the new system, the same people sank (those without cultural or financial capital) and swam (those with capital) as in the West, but this new marginalisation of formerly included groups was not called “neo-liberalism,” it was, and often still is, called “post-socialism.”

For civil society to function, people have to identify and group themselves in specific ways to claim their “human rights.” The first subjects of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in civil society were women, children in orphanages, ethnic minorities, and, by 1998, lesbian, gay,

bisexual and transsexual/transgendered (LGBT) communities.⁴ NGOs were primarily funded by international (Western) donor organizations such as Open Society Institute, United Nations Development Project (UNDP) and PHARE (Borza et al 2006). Laura Grünberg (2008), the founder of the Society of Feminist Analysis (*AnA*), expressed frustration with the civil society model that in effect redirected women outside the sphere of government decision making. NGOs are economically dependent on grants from donors who set the agendas to which they ostensibly function, usually with short term high rotation ‘projects’ leaving no time for staff development (Ghodsee 2006, 3). Activists are stretched too thin by structural requirements that do not support time for personal development, let alone the development of inter-group or extensive ‘grassroots’ networks. Grünberg (2008, 1) notes that the lack of clear long-term objectives marginalised the women’s movement inside the Romanian civil society movement, and exacerbated ‘tensions between the activist and academic sides or between generations.’

The naming of CEE countries as “post-socialist” and “transitional” meant not only that the failure of the system to provide “rights” and protect vulnerable citizens was considered inevitable, but also dismissed practices from before 1989 along with the socialist system. Western donors and “experts” drew a line between 1990 and the socialist period, the latter being erased as a world of its own although it was a political system that had also claimed to be democratic representation of “the people.” The formal (albeit controlled) incorporation of women in parliamentary structures under socialism in Romania was entirely dismantled, and the formal emphasis on rights of Romanian citizens as more important than ethnicity under socialism changed to the widespread scapegoating of Romani people through the pejorative and stereotypical name “Țigani” in “post-socialism.” Țigani became the villains who could be blamed for everything from rising prices in the market (capitalism) to the fall of socialism itself (Cesereanu 1993, 11, PER 1997, Verdery 1996, 98, Zub 2002, 136). Finally, Western “civil society” fought to have the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual/ Transgender (LGBT) people represented, but only a tiny group of people came forward to stand under these names in the mid 1990s. Western LGBT donors and press took this as another sign of repression in the primitive East. Perhaps all the lesbians were hiding at home? Perhaps they did not know themselves as ‘lesbians’? I don’t know about other women, but I knew the words, and I was watching and wondering what good could come of these

⁴ The “T.” was never clearly articulated in meaning – at the beginning it was written as transsexual, then later transgender, although the meaning seems to be understood overwhelmingly and disparagingly as ‘transvestite.’

new neon signs of sexual difference in such a hostile social environment far from the context in which the identity terms were developed.

The introduction of LGBT identity politics in Romania

Donor agendas, and thus NGO projects, are pinned to quantifiable identity groups and social changes, hence the formation of the first gay NGO, *ACCEPT* (formed from the Bucharest Acceptance Group) in 1996 and was staffed by a small, hardworking group of LGBT identifying activists. In 2001, *ACCEPT* was primarily funded by the United Nations Development Program to run anti-HIV health projects – presenting homosexual health as disease containment in line with Western discourses before 2001. The Open Society Foundation and Western European Government Ministries funded *ACCEPT* to lobby for legislative change in line with pan-European LGBT movements for decriminalization of homosexuality. Article 200 (under which individuals were most often arrested in relation to alleged or actual sexual practice) was removed in 2001, after which *ACCEPT* has continued to demand legislative changes concerning child adoption, civil union and marriage for LGBT identifying people (Human Rights Watch 1998). The work of *ACCEPT* to form and “express” a local Romanian LGBT community has had to take place around these agendas, as the NGO itself exists on donor funding, as with the vast majority of “civil (sponsored) society.”⁵

As recorded in the brief outline of their group history at their website, *ACCEPT* was formed in a society where there same-sex practices and underground “communities,” but no pre-existing LGBT identities in these Western categories. *ACCEPT* had to ‘find, translate, store and distribute correct information about what homosexuality is and is not.’⁶ The assumption implicit in “post-socialist” funding is of course that once Romania standardizes it’s identity categories and legislation with the European Union, this will assure “rights” on the ground. This approach ignores and obfuscates the particular reality of decades of homophobic, racist and sexist legislation in Romanian social and legislative context. If there was ever to be real change on the ground, activists and scholars need to understand and untangle the specific matrix of sexuality discourse that already exists. New laws have been implemented in Romania despite strong local ‘values’ that are developed and socially policed today, whether the European Union flag flies or not and often primarily in reaction to the blatant neo-colonialism of EUrope. Romanians recognize ideological containment, they’ve seen it before.

⁵ See the *ACCEPT* website for details of projects completed and financial support details <http://accept-romania.ro/proiecte/proiecte-incheiate/>

⁶ <http://accept.org.ro/foramoregayromania.html#chapter%201>, accessed 9/12/2009

Politicians across the spectrum saw Romania’s “return” to Europe as either or both an inevitable and a fraught utopian promise (Verdery 2006, 124). While EU accession requirements included human rights, scholars such as Borocz and Kovacs (2001) outline how the process was unfavourably geared against accession countries, and Romanians knew from everyday experiences that some Europeans had more rights than others (Trandafoiu 2009, 7). The campaign to remove Article 200 was primarily perceived by conservative Romanian politicians as an external invasive pressure, and, ironically, the terms “Gay” and “Lesbian” were brought to Romanian media discussion only after the conservative pro-Article 200 “Homosexuality No No No” campaign in 2000-2001. Orthodox student groups protested in the street, and the Patriarch himself and other religious figures held regular public speeches against homosexuality. Unsigned posters pasted along the major boulevards of Bucharest listed supposedly damaging effects lesbians and gay men would have on Romanian society. These posters articulated a vast range of signifiers of homosexuality, most showing continuity with discourses of degeneration from the socialist period. It was only after this poster campaign (and the largely uncritical media attention it received) that LGBT identities provided by the West were recognized by a larger portion of Romanian society as names for subjects who violate heterosexual norms, thus simultaneously constructing heteronormative signifiers. In Romania, the extended stereotypes attached to these new names were quickly and violently incorporated into the groundswell of anti-European new Right parties, such as ‘Romania Mare’ (Greater Romania), so that there was a strong and well funded political interest that ensured the Romanian public understood new terminology in unique and violently exclusionary ways.

As an LGBT community didn’t yet exist as such, either as individuals self-identifying as one of the categories, or as an LGBT community, many who did desire individuals of the “same-sex” also learnt these new names through the conservative anti-homosexual advertising. The vision statement of *ACCEPT* was to build ‘a society in which sexual orientation is simply a human characteristic,’ not to build a politically active community primarily identified through sexual practice.⁷ As I argue elsewhere, there is a gap between the way the Romanian LGBT activists saw their own identities as not just a sexual practice, and the way that their identity was vitally positioned in the discourses of the legislative lobbying against Article 200 (Woodcock 2004).

⁷ See <http://www.accept-Romania.ro/despre.html>, accessed 5/9/2004.

Romanian society had experienced horrific state intervention in private lives through sex – with Ceaușescu’s use of the entire bureaucratic structure to police an increase in childbirth through Decree 770 between 1966 and 1990 (Kligman 1998). This had damaging effects on how everyday people could talk about sex, as sex was claimed as a reproductive act in the name of the nation. In 1990, the legalisation of abortion and availability of contraception were early and almost unanimously supported changes that vigorously re-privatised sex and the domestic space from under state control. For LGBT identity to be publicly asserted as a “human right” when it had been previously punished as a public ‘scandal’ thus struck a discordant note in the Romanian context where sex was considered to be something properly privatised and out of state control after 1989. When the LGBT activists, with financial and professional support from the Western LGBT movement and in the name of Europeanisation, were identified through lobbying against Article 200 (which claimed to be also against public sex scandals), this silenced what could have been an important local social discussion about the relationship between sex, personal identity, community and the state. Rather, Romanians learnt that accepting LGBT identity as a human right was one of the ‘yardsticks of progress toward the Western model of modernity’ vital for EU accession (Munro 2009, 404). Romanians also thus learnt that homosexuals had to fight for their rights from a heteronormative state able to bestow them in the name of “the people.”

Of all the changes required by the European Union for Romania to join, politicians and clergy touted the changes to racial and gender order as primary threats to the Romanian people and channelled the realistic anxieties of everyday Romanians into familiar prejudices. “Post-socialist” governance simply re-organised the shared patriarchal and racial hierarchy, which both the West and the East relied on. But the new names and terminology, and the claims of groups for recognition under new names, enabled the public to shift old stereotypes into new European versions of racist discourse to maintain ethno-national identity. Even many conservative nationalist Romanian politicians realised in the early 1990s that they had little choice but to acquiesce to negotiations with the European Union that they saw as a neo-colonial process (Verdery 1996, 124). As Neville Hoad (2007, 9) has detailed in relation to post-colonial African legislative process, in this situation many governments take a stand against LGBT rights as “a disavowable excess of the process of economic modernization that the state wishes to achieve.” This is true in Romania as the majority of elected representatives argue against the LGBT campaigns for homonormative rights such as civil unions and adoption. Yet the very terms of this

disavowal of gay rights as excessive modernisation rely on the state being made aware of its own claimed heteronormative position as reliant on the family, which ironically was made possible in 1990 through the pressure to recognise a homosexual movement.

LGBT activists argue that these homonormative rights will enable Romania to catch up with European time, that the West had its Pride parades and gay liberation movements in the 1970s and Romania thirty years later, but that legislative change in line with Europe now will make Romania equal with the West (Cernea 2009). The responses from the other side are that rather than accepting enforced European teleology, Romanian politicians should take a stand in the name of the nation on this point and say that Europe has gone too far and Romania can choose to stay where it is.⁸ This debate is between “civil society” and powerholders and— as many bloggers and discussants in internet forums elaborate – it is happening despite a significant chorus from Romanian individuals who identify as ‘gay’ in various ways and do not perceive marriage and adoption rights as important in their lives.⁹ There is no self-identified queer movement in intellectual or social Romanian circles, and the refusal of same-sex identifying Romanians to embrace the LGBT terminology and movement in public is evidenced by the lack of community publications, forums, and even nightclubs. There have been no surveys of same-sex desiring individuals and their opinions in Romania because most of these individuals are not “out” as LGBT or T, and they do not attend Gay Pride (which we will discuss later) or regularly go to the few gay clubs. There is, however, a blossoming internet based gay dating scene, and blogs and internet forums are the best places to read the opinions of those who interpellate themselves under the LGBT identity, even if it is only to the point of using these forums to argue for their right to remain outside of the LGBT scene and movement. Gillian Whitlock (2007, 3) highlights that blogs are a form of life-writing that exemplify ‘the synchronic connections between the virtual and material worlds.’ Indeed, in a few active Romanian blogs, one can read the reflections of those people in whose name LGBT rights are being sought, where they speak back their life experiences to these categories of identity and practice. Of course these blogs are not a representation of generalised or statistically reliable positions, but they are the only sources aside from personal communications

⁸ Realitatea TV - Da sau Nu <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glrg2R6UbcA&feature=related> Adrian Paunescu Remus Cernea is executive director of Solidarity for Freedom of Conscience (www.humanism.ro)

⁹ See the debate following Robert G.’s blog where he questions just how many gay men want children and why a ‘piece of paper’ (marriage) is the legislative goal of the LGBT movement GayFest 2008 - Un mars al jandarmilor, 16/5/2008, <http://www.darkq.net/advertising/gayfest-2008-un-mars-al-jandarmilor/>

in which the voices of individuals rather than a handful of activists speaking in the name of LGBT organisations can be heard.

Categorical containment and racial scapegoats

While the term “LGBT” has gained legislative and discursive ground since its introduction just a decade ago, media and politicians have channelled the strongest tide of anti-European anxiety into racial discourses against Romanian Roma through the established stereotypical projection of the Țigan Other. I have explored elsewhere the central role that the Țigan other has played in Romania as a projected set of anxieties that changes depending on the social crises of the moment, and how these projected stereotypes are tethered as truth to Romani bodies (Woodcock 2007, 2008). Between the years 1385 and 1856, when all Roma in the Romanian territories were enslaved by law, and in the fledgling independent united Romanian state after this time, Roma were the internal others against which ethnic Romanians articulated their ethno-national independence. In the Holocaust, 26 000 Romani Romanians were deported to Transnistria alongside Romanian Jews, under the name Țigan, stereotyped incorrectly as nomads, criminals, and of a different blood to ethnic Romanians (Woodcock 2007). Under socialism, Țigani were not included in the socialist state’s list of “Co-inhabiting National Minorities,” yet they continued to function as a phantom presence in Romanian society, often rumoured to be working in league with the mysterious and cruel actions of the dictatorship.

In the confusing and emotional days of the 1989 revolution, soldiers or mysterious assassins who killed protesters were rumoured to be Țigani. The influx of consumption items for trade over suddenly opened borders that filled the street of Bucharest was blamed on Țigani mafia who not only supposedly “stole” across borders but also stole the established social value of items in the sudden shocking mass of available goods. Anxiety about capitalist practice was displaced by media rhetoric onto supposed Țigani “mafia” who were blamed for the changes (Cesereanu 1993, 11, Gheorghe 1991, 837, Zub 2002, 136). Across political parties, politicians incited ethnic stereotypes instead of naming capitalism as what it was, and physical and institutional violence against Romani Romanians dramatically increased. As a hurdle to European Union accession, EU required Romania to replace the term Țigan, clearly pejorative, with the name Roma. This was widely articulated in popular and elite Romanian discourse as an attempt by Țigani to hide their continual attacks on Romania, and was clearly the point at which Romania had to relinquish

its racial scapegoat. Yet Romania argued for the right to use the word Rroma, rather than Roma, in order to avoid supposedly possible confusion between Romanians and Roma – thereby inscribing both the meaning of the word Țigan and the neo-colonialism of European demands and Romanian resistance to this in the new word Rroma. As one Romanian political analyst entitled his editorial in 2000 “Just between us- we say Rrom but we mean Țigan” (Ghinea 2001, 3). In this way, Romanian resistance to Europeanisation is inscribed in superficial capitulation, the survival of the Romanian state in the face of Europe remains dependent on the Țigan, even as Rroma.

Thus, the existence of the racialised Țigan stereotype enables Romanian ethno-national existence, which must remain in order to Romanian national uniqueness to survive European accession. The new LGBT identity contains sexual identity as a binary with heteronormativity in prime position and is used by nationalists as the sign warning of excessive European modernisation that threatens Romanian existence as such. Romani and same-sex attracted Romanians thus share a struggle against discrimination based primarily on the identity categories imported from Europe for their supposed liberation. Do these groups support each other? Or is the LGBT movement racialised in order to claim its place in the nation on the basis of race over sexuality? Considering the primacy of public performance of LGBT identity – in “coming out” discourses and in Gay Pride parades- in the next section we will examine who is called to identify as an “LGBT community,” which individuals are interpellated and self-interpellate thus, and how race functions in this process.

How are queer practices contained by LGBT identities and who is excluded?

Those who seek out and participate in anonymous internet forums for LGBT people actively debate the usefulness of the term, even while acknowledging there is no rhetorical escape, that “LGBT” is the dominant international paradigm of identity recognition. But of course, in that world and time before “post-socialism” there certainly was a significant percentage of the community who identified themselves as “homosexual” or as having same-sex desires and identities. While one could say that most “homosexuals” were closeted or in prison before 1990, one Romanian gay blogger also wittily pointed out that in fact the Romanian gay scene could be called 100% bio-eco-powered – as queer men were the ones who most intimately knew the local

parks.¹⁰ There were always clubs, cafes, parks and beaches where same-sex desiring men and women could meet each other, although published reflections on this are thus far limited to the poetry of Dominic Brezianu (1996, 2000) and the novel of Constantin Popescu (2004). Brezianu, for example, knew of gay communities in other places, but in everyday life the most common term for homosexuality was to refer to someone as “like that” (*așa*).¹¹ More specifically, men identified other men as “real men” (*barbați*) or “girls” (*fetița*), which clearly plots a spectrum of sexual identity and practice between the two gendered binaries of identification. There were shifting visual signifiers of “homosexuality,” so that Romanian women who described meeting their lovers before they knew there were other women who also desired women (let alone a word for this) of course recognised each other through the simple actuality of human attraction.

Common sense logic of both activists and everyday people of non-normative sexualities was that to “come out” could be dangerous. The LGBT identity was a new western identity that seemed useless/dangerous to many but did offer a future community vision utopia to Romanians who were white, tertiary educated and middle class, those with enough cultural capital to be employed in the sphere of “civil society.” In the late 1990s, there were many actors moving between civil society, academia, and new state institutions, where the category of “women” meant ethnic Romanian middle-class women with university education. Ethnic groups such as Romani Romanians were considered the subjects of specifically racial NGOs rather than taken as “Romanian.” The hegemonic white middle class activists did not mention the urban working classes either, which is not a specifically “post-socialist” phenomenon, but is undeniably a capitalist phenomenon and occurring here in a specific neo-liberal and post-socialist context. It is not just because socialism “fell” that the new liberal democratic capitalist discourse does not include workers as humans who need specific rights as a group in “civil society.” Rather, non-unionization and the exploitation of workers increases profit margins for those who own the means of production, as Kideckel (2008) and Wiener (2005) have elaborated from the perspective of workers who themselves hopefully explain their own suffering as “transition” in neo-liberalist reform economies.

¹⁰ Gay in Romania, “Gays in Romania: 100% bio-eco powered” <http://www.darkq.net/advertising/gay-ii-din-romania-100-bio-eco-powered/>

¹¹ This information on naming from Personal Interview with Dominic Brezianu, 30/12/2009.

The gap between “civil society” and lived experience for same-sex desiring Romanians was highlighted when the first Pride parade in May 2004 was cancelled because Stefan Iancu, the organizer, didn’t think he could ‘convince gay people to come out into the streets...they are too afraid of the repercussions (losing their jobs, shocking their parents etc) (Stefan Iancu in *Ziarul* 2004).’ The Pride parade was not organised in Romania as an expression of an existing gay community, even though donors assumed that self-identifying members of a united LGBT community would be the participants in a Gay Pride parade. Considering that Romanian anti-gay groups such as *Noua Dreaptă* stated they would physically attack marchers, the larger question is clearly the injustice of “civil society” expectations that social change is to be implemented by the victims of violence rather than through educating or punishing aggressors. Indeed, the funding and impetus for the event came under the civil society banner of ‘diversity,’ and it was primarily NGO employed Romanian civil society employees and supporters who attended subsequent Gay Pride marches, regardless of their sexual orientation. This gap between the stated aim of the parade as a visibility of LGBT communities and the reality of Pride marchers, who were in fact straight folk, or non-straight folk disguised as journalists to avoid being beaten, highlighted the danger that still accompanies being out in Romania.

Gay Pride Romania – “The March of Police”¹²

When the first Pride march took place in Bucharest on 29 May 2005, as part of the ‘diversity’ festival and under the slogan ‘I love who I want to love,’ there was no reference to ethnic minorities, no formal representation of Romani or feminist NGOs, and no banners linking anti-racism or anti-sexism to the fight for LGBT rights as ‘diversity.’ Romanian Orthodox students of the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest and the right wing fascist group *Noua Dreaptă* physically intervened to stop the march as they had announced they would, and there were over 1000 violent protesters along the route throwing eggs, rocks and home made bombs at the 300 Pride marchers from the sidelines.¹³ *Noua Dreaptă* are a right wing Romanian nationalist group that are primarily

¹² Taken from the title of the blog <http://www.darkq.net/advertising/gayfest-2008-un-mars-al-jandarmilor/>

¹³ For information and images of GayPride 2005 see <http://www.accept-romania.ro/fest/fest05EN2txt1.htm>; <http://romania.indymedia.org/en/2005/06/851.shtml>; and the video posts at <http://www.youtube.com/user/daraptii>, accessed 14/5/2008.

active in racist publicity against Roma (as Țigani) and also against “homosexuality.”¹⁴ The march lasted about an hour without loud music or an abundance of rainbow flags and paraphernalia, which were not yet easily available in Romania (Miruna and Elena 2005).

In 2006, the Court of Bucharest, however, awarded *Noua Dreaptă* marchers a permit to hold their own parade, which the named ‘The March for Normality’ through central historic Bucharest on the same route that the Romanian fascist Iron Guard used for parades in the 1930s.¹⁵ The media and “civil society” sector widely considered the Government’s reaction to the Pride Parade a test of political readiness for integration in the European Union, or, more specifically, a test of how EUropean values of ‘tolerance’ would be enacted in the name of the Romanian state. 51 anti-GayFest protesters were arrested and fined for provoking violence at the Pride march (Human Rights First 2007) and ‘after the closing of the march six youths, amongst whom were two citizens of the European Union, were verbally and physically assaulted in the subway. The attackers shouted ‘Faggots, go to Holland’ as they bestially beat the youths’ (Accept 2006).¹⁶ The severity of this violence influenced how members of the LGBT community and individuals who had chosen not to attend the march blogged about the parade in the following days, and stimulated discussion about how fears and experiences of violence affected individuals and the gay community. The violence that participants experienced was reconfigured as a baptism of fire (the Romanian Stonewall) by some and used to articulate divisions within the community between those who watched the parade from the sidelines or from home as lacking courage, and those who had paraded (Woodcock 2009).

The GayFest parades of 2005 and 2006 functioned as spaces of contestation. On one hand, the LGBT community ‘came out’ as a small group of overwhelmingly white middle class “civil society” LGBT supporters rather than a grassroots ‘gay community,’ many of whom actively refused to support the idea of parading under a sexual identity. Protesters against LGBT identity were granted institutional support in terms of public space and the freedom to attack Pride participants. Regardless of human rights issues, Romania was accepted as an EU Member in 2007 and the 2007 Pride Parade demonstrated how the Romanian state saw EUropean human rights in

¹⁴ See www.nouadreapta.org, accessed 18/1/ 2010.

¹⁵ See http://www.nouadreapta.org/actiuni_prezentare.php?idx=110; accessed 14/5/2008.

¹⁶ Press statement 5 June 2006 ‘Marșul Diversității: Inca un pas spre toleranta’, accessed at http://Accept-romania.ro/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=52&pop=1, accessed 14/5/2008.

domestic space – the parade was violently corralled and policed by the state. The slogan of GayFest 2007 was ‘Celebrate diversity! Respect rights!’ and the media predictably pedaled the two parades as ‘diversity versus normality.’ Only 400 people attended the Parade, to which the Romanian government sent more than 800 regular, military and riot police attended, on horseback, with dogs, and backed up with water canon trucks and military equipment.¹⁷

GayFest was given an entire half of the boulevard, traffic was redirected, and the borders of the marching space were the police trucks on one side and the wide nature strip (for the media and those with cameras running alongside the march) and traffic on the other. Eggs and garbage were thrown at the marchers from open windows in apartment blocks along the route, and smoke bombs were lobbed into the parade from the margins. While Maxim Anmeghichean (2007) ILGA-Europe’s Programme Director, considered the police cordon a success, Romanian marchers reflected on the effects of enclosing the parade in a heavily policed space with more ambivalence.¹⁸ One participant (Namolosanu 2007) nicknamed the event ‘the march of the Police, with 30 police for every gay.’

Those who marched in the GayFest parades in 2007, 2008 and 2009 were physically forced out of visibility in the name of protection – the parade was visible *as* the containment of European ‘diversity.’ As Wendy Brown (2006, 96-99) points out, the state bestows tolerance on Gay subjects on the condition that they remain invisible in the public sphere. The Romanian state uses non-violent tolerance as the discursive rationalisation to physically prevent GayFest marchers from responding to anti-GayFest protesters who violently attack from the sphere of non-corralled public space in the name of “normality.” The Romanian state claims it is acting in the name of Romanian adherence to European values of freedom of expression, which throws into stark relief the ways that the rhetoric of liberalism and non-violence in democratic Europe can be used as a form of violent containment.

In 2009, the discussion on “gay” Romanian websites continues to ask what the point of the parade and legislation is when it isn’t in the interest of everyday people now identified as ‘homosexual’ regardless of their own identities. One blogger, Dan, suggested that instead of a

¹⁷ See photos at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rombaer/> tagged as ‘law enforcement’ and ‘gay pride 2007.’ See a wonderful series of photos and narratives about the day by a self-identified ‘straight male’ American participant – who is also the only virtual narrator to say he was ‘sadistically longing’ for a confrontation with the protesters- at www.romerican.com/2007/06/14/gayfest-2007/, accessed 5/14/2008.

¹⁸ See Woodcock 2009 for a full exploration of how participants recorded their experiences of violence in the march.

Pride parade, that there be a March of Silence, ‘with men in everyday clothes, to show that we are not transvestites as most people in this country see us.’¹⁹ This suggestion abandons the discursive constructions of gay identity thus far, actively removing the words that have been introduced on march banners and as identity categories, and draws hope for a future queer community based on the lived experiences of those who reject the agenda and practices of the homonormative European LGBT community.

But what can we say about how this broader queer community sees their identity in relation to the dominant Romanian national identity as they claim to look like “everyday” people, especially as Romanian ethno-national identity relies on the racialisation of Țigani as Others? In Western Europe, of course, Puar and Rai (2002) and Haritaworn (2008) have detailed how the racialisation of Muslim men as terrorists relies upon the presentation of sexual liberation as a sign of progress and depicting non-European ethnic groups as against progress because they are supposedly against homosexuality. Puar and Rai (2002, 124) also point out that this racialisation is only possible because of a long history of Europe constructing itself through monstrous others such as ‘the vagrant, the Gypsy, the savage, the Hottentot Venus, or the sexual depravity of the Oriental torrid zone’ without which the ‘terrorist-monster’ could not exist in this specific moment. Luckily for us scholars, Madonna chose this moment to publicly announce her views equating racism and homophobia in Romania and we can trace the various reactions to this announcement to understand better the links between the LGBT identity movement and racism.

Madonna as Western liberator and Romanian responses

Madonna performed to a crowd of 60-70 000 people in Bucharest on 28 August 2009. Accompanied on the tour by Russian Romani band the Kolpakov Trio and Romani dancers, Madonna paused to speak to the audience during the show and said

Now, I’ve been paying attention to the news reports and its been brought to my attention that there’s a lot of discrimination against Romanies and Gypsies in general in Eastern Europe and that makes me feel very sad because we don’t believe in discrimination against anyone, we believe in freedom

¹⁹ Dan 16 may 2008, <http://www.darkq.net/advertising/gayfest-2008-un-mars-al-jandarmilor/> last accessed 12 January 2010. Interestingly his comment wasn’t seriously discussed, an active blogger and pro-LGBT activist Robert G replied that ‘the idea of a march of men is great!’ taking it a different direction.

*and equal rights for everyone, right? Gypsies, homosexuals, people who are different, everyone is equal and should be treated with respect, ok, let's not forget that.*²⁰

The crowd response was a lot of boo-ing and a few cheers, which faded to silence as she then sang a watery rendition of a Romani song.

This moment hit the international and Romanian press under headlines such as the Guardian's "Romanian fans boo Madonna for supporting Gypsies" and Reuters "Madonna booed in Bucharest over Gypsy remarks", both of which cut any mention of the word 'homosexuals' from Madonna's cited statement.²¹ Only one of the 347 comments on the Guardian article, and none of the 42 comments on the Reuters article mention that Madonna mentioned the rights of 'homosexuals' alongside Roma. The 231 comments on the most popular Youtube clip of the event give the best outline of how Romanians reacted to the statement, and less than 5 of the comments refer to Madonna mentioning 'homosexuals' alongside Roma, all by linking their racist insults to anti-gay slurs.²² While the Guardian web moderator has removed racist comments, participants on the Youtube site chat have deleted anti-racist commentators, who were attacked as Western foreigners, distancing all pro-Romani and anti-racist comments as non-indigenous and therefore without the right to speak to Romanians.

The rage of Romanians against Madonna as gleaned from internet discussion cover many of the areas we've already discussed. Madonna's inclusion of Bucharest in her European tour, with tickets at Western European prices, was a powerful and rewarding symbol of Romanian access to European identity. Madonna's long statement to the audience in simplified English and chastising, patronizing grammatical structure ('let's not forget') ruptured the ability of Romanians to enjoy the concert as consumers of entertainment on an equal level to Western European audiences. In this moment, Madonna spoke as a global, progressive citizen embodying 'tolerance' for 'people who are different' (in itself scaffolding racialised heteronormativity) in a way that interpellated the audience as composed of Easterners yet to catch-up with this global progressive time. Many

²⁰ Transcribed by the author from the recording entitled "Madonna Booed in Bucharest for Defending Gypsies!," posted on www.youtube.com on August 27, 2009 by LostForces <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMrk2PIFAKA>, last viewed 10/1/2010.

²¹ <http://blogs.reuters.com/fanfare/2009/08/27/madonna-booed-in-bucharest-over-gypsy-remarks/> Madonna booed in Bucharest over Gypsy remarks, 27/8/2009 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2009/aug/28/madonna-booed-at-romania-concert> Romanian fans boo Madonna for supporting Gypsies [Haroon Siddique www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk), 28/8/2009

²² www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdDgcMsETDE

comments expressed this in various ways, although the vast majority of responses were ‘fuck Madonna, fuck the Gypsies’ in various forms. In responses such as this, the Romanian speaker interpellated by the global progressive West (Madonna) as racist Romanian, speaks back by embodying the Romanian ethno-nationalist identity (which relies on the Țigan Other) against the European discourses of tolerance.

One respondent commented, for example, ‘So I AM A PROUD INTOLERANT ROMANIAN’ (clementinebroken).²³ Another (BaiazidIX) wrote that ‘we’re discriminated all the time by Western Europe who calls us Romanians gypsies, and this bitch tells us not to discriminate? And why the fuck did she say “romanies and gypsies” like they are 2 different groups, what does that mean? That’s like saying we romanians are romanies.’ This is the post-accession discourse of deliberate confusion between Romanian and Romani ethnicities to maintain the Țigan other that we discussed earlier. DenisDMN presents another common argument dismissing the very concept of “human rights” as universal when he writes

gypsies ain't humans, they're animals...y'all get this straight, you can't be a racist when it comes to a animal...the gypsies she's talkin' about are not the kind of gypsies we hate...the gypsies she's talkin' about are people...the gypsies we hate are a virus, you wouldn't want them around...get this straight...respect humans but don't take everything, that stands on two legs and can think and talk, for a human being...that's just insulting towards humans.

Finally, “egoguitar’s” comment highlights the way that dismissal of the universality of human rights draws on a complex range of Western and Romanian discourses when he sarcastically contributes

Everyone is created equal: Homosexual faggots, Romanians, Gypsies, 3 legged dogs, Nazi's, Mexicans, etc... These are all equal. Please don't discriminate.

Sadly, Romanian discussants on explicitly “gay” and queer Romanian websites did not react very differently to these mainstream commentators. On the international Gay news website Pink News (UK), the article “Bucharest crowd boo Madonna's defence of gays and Roma” received 33 comments, beginning with Western European respondents who speak in the name of European

²³ All comments here taken from the previously cited youtube clip “Madonna Booed in Burcharest, Romania Concert” by Mikeyblogs2comments at www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdDgcMsETDE

progress stating ‘We need to start becoming tougher on these countries who are in, or wanting to be in, the EU, and making it a strong condition of membership that there is full equality for gay people’ (Bentley, Aug 28).²⁴ This tone is rebutted by a Romanian writing as SBV82 that ‘gays should not be lumped together with the gipsyes, because gay and bisexual people are decent civilised people while the gipsyes are, for the most part, criminals that are incapable to live in a civilised society,’ and this respondent forecloses the right of non-Romanians to speak by writing that ‘I bet you haven't met a gipsy in your life and if that is the case I politely ask you to SHUT UP.’ After small rebuttals from non-Romanian readers, the Romanian argument that racism can only be critiqued by the racists who have ‘experienced’ the (Țigani) villain wins, enabling all discussants to maintain the “gay community” on the condition of silence on racist exclusion and practice.

On August 31 2009, Robert G, a regular Romanian blogger and gay activist, posted a blog lambasting Madonna as ‘stupid to mix music and other things,’ as ‘probably imagining that Țigani are some hippy bohemian people who travel with caravans and horses,’ and inviting Madonna to ‘spend half an hour in a suburb with Țigani and see if she comes back, probably without her watch.’²⁵ One of the first responses to this post states

*This article has no place here, it is totally disqualified. One minority attacking another. It is totally unjust! We need to be an example of tolerance, acceptance, integration and Europeanism.*²⁶

Robert G replies that ‘gays are one thing and Țigani another’ and from there other discussants such as “Fireman” post messages saying that Țigani are the reason he is ashamed whenever he leaves Romania. These gay male bloggers thus rely on the racialisation of Roma as Țigani, the normative Romanian ethnonational identity, to displace the reality and anxieties resulting from the

²⁴ Worldwide Gay Travel and Culture - Life, Sites and Insights
 A Charitable Website Supporting Human Rights
<http://www.globalgayz.com/country/Romania/view/ROM/gay-romania-news-and-reports-2009#article6>, *Gay Romania News & Reports*, 2009

Bucharest crowd boo Madonna's defence of gays and Roma; <http://www.365gay.com/news/madonna-booed-in-bucharest-for-defending-gypsies/> Madonna booed in Bucharest for defending Gypsies, *The Associated Press*, 27/8/2009,

<http://gaynews.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-13846.html/>

VIDEO: Bucharest crowd boo Madonna's defence of gays and Roma, *PinkNews*, 28/8/2009

²⁵ “Betty blue” <http://www.darkq.net/romania/betty-blue/#comments>

²⁶ Elements.de.Vie in Sep 20, 2009 who on his own blog had written that he was ashamed to be Romanian at the concert that night. <http://elementsdevie.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2009-10-01T19%3A33%3A00%2B03%3A00&max-results=10>

fact that the West does discriminate against Romanians.

Numerous gay Romanians, however, did blog about their shame when their fellow Romanians booed- what they saw as Madonna's stand against both racism and homophobia. Elements.de.Vie wrote that he was ashamed to be Romanian at the concert that night, and Wannabegay, who lives in California, posted an open letter to Madonna thanking her for speaking out against discrimination against Roma. Wannabegay pointed out that the evidence of systemic discrimination is not only the plethora of blogs saying 'who cares if we discriminate against them,' but also the fact that Romanians still refuse to use the self-appellation for Romani people.²⁷ One of the first respondents, Chris, said he believed it is 'improper to speak in the same article of discrimination against both the Roma and against homosexuals, as they are not the same thing.' Following comments include one asking whether this means the blogger is actually Țigan (as if this is an insult), and a general discussion where the majority of participants argue against the blogger that Roma really are criminals and hence the racism is warranted. Another website 'Gay in Romania,'²⁸ blogged that it was disappointing to hear Madonna boo-ed at the concert, and again only one regular (and self-identified heterosexual woman) participant (Dak) on these websites wrote in support. The majority of the other 11 comments were against Țigani and against Madonna making 'propaganda' and 'political statements.' One discussant on this site also wrote that god is against gays and lesbians, highlighting the truly queer nature of communities online who are interested in discussing identity and "human rights" outside formal forums.

Of course, there are serious methodological issues with using even exhaustive blog and internet-based research to judge the opinions of any group of people, and far from all the same-sex identifying Romanians who are on internet dating sites write blogs. Nevertheless, in the same-sex and LGBT identifying blogs and discussions surrounding Madonna's comments we can read the same discourses against Roma that we find in the mainstream press and internet discussion. It is also a fact that the blogs posted by non-Romanian LGBT identified and internationally residing Romanian gay bloggers such as wannabegay, were more open to the ways that anti-discrimination has to fight both racism and homophobia, while the bloggers who argued that anti-Țiganism was not discrimination because Roma weren't civilized included LGBT "civil society" activists from

²⁷ Draga Madonna, <http://wannabegay.org/2009/09/03/draga-madonna/#comments> Wannabegay lives in LA

²⁸ *Gay in romania*, <http://gayinromania.blogspot.com/2009/08/madonna-huiduita-la-bucuresti.html> , Madonna huiduită la București, 27/8/2009

Romania, such as Robert G.. In conclusion, the LGBT movement in Romania draws support from only a minority of individuals who consider themselves interpellated by the LGBT category, due to the obvious gap between the utopia it offers and the reality on the street, and many individuals are excluded by the racialised and middle classed homonormativity of the movement itself. The queer communities that exist at and as the critical margins of the LGBT movement, however, also rely on racial discourses of the Țigan other in order to claim Romanian ethno-national identity in the face of specifically European pressures, including economic and legislative reforms which are obscured by naming liberalization “post-socialism.”

Queering containment in post-socialist liberalism

I want a world where the queer reality of dynamic sexual identities is free to be muddled through and performed without fear of violence or the restrictions of categorical containment. I would like to share the utopian teleological homonormative vision of legislative reform – civil unions, marriage and gay adoption rights – as the means to creating a world where everyone can enjoy a peaceful life, but I have only seen evidence to the contrary.

The categories that were staked and won by Western activists for gay liberation are in the service of the capitalist state, and they contain us. In Romania, LGBT categories were introduced as an inevitable and singular sign of progress in the name of Europe, within the “post-socialist” liberalism that tethered identity politics to biology (gender, race, sexuality) and corralled the claims of individuals in these newly liberated categories to “civil society.” Those who recognize that the massive police deployments required to “tolerate” LGBT identity do not bode well for an everyday reality free of persecution in this generation, refute state and “civil” interpellation by this name. And yet the claims to both homonormative “rights” and the queer search for new futures both claim access to an ethno-national Romanian identity which relies on the violent racialisation of Roma as Țigani in European Romania, powered primarily by resistance to the temporal prison of “post-socialist” society.

We can pay attention to names; where they place us in relation to progress, how we are attached to them, when and where we refuse to answer, and who needs to be excluded in order for them to function. We can fight with the knowledge that names bind us, and if there are to be

rights, they are the rights to refuse categorization and to remain queer in time, space, desire and safety.

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Sexual Minorities, Civil Rights, and Romanians' Resistance to Social Change

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Abstract: Using as a data source the 2015 Special Eurobarometer, the present analysis tries to identify the individual-level factors more likely to predict the Romanians' opposition to equal rights for sexual minorities (including marriage equality rights). Although more than half of the Romanians tend to oppose equal rights for LGBT persons and seven out of ten respondents do not favor the legalization of same-sex marriage throughout Europe, as prior research has shown, the social context, as well as personal characteristics and life experiences, influence significantly variations in Romanians' attitudes regarding LGBT rights. Specifically, findings indicate that heterosexist attitudes are more likely to be expressed by individuals who belong to minority religious groups, such as Catholics and adherents to Christian denominations other than the Orthodox Church, persons over 55 years old, those who regard themselves as being part of the working/low-middle classes, residents of South Muntenia and the South East, and persons who do not have access to or do not use modern communication systems. Conversely, support for LGBT rights is higher among those who acknowledge interpersonal contacts with LGBT persons, have higher levels of social acceptance of sexual and gender minorities in various spheres of the public life and in the family, and identify with the European Union's norms and values.

Keywords: LGBT rights, sexual minorities, sexual prejudice, heterosexism, same-sex marriage, Romania.

Introduction

Almost two decades have passed since the Romanian legislators enacted in 2001 the decriminalization of same-sex relationships in Romania. Starting with 2000, several laws and policies focusing on sexual minorities' rights have been implemented in Romania. As indicated by



a recent report of the *International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association* (ILGA), Romania is part of a minority of UN states (37%) where discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation is forbidden by the law (see Articles 5-8 of the 2000 Anti-Discrimination Law). Additionally, Articles 10-16 of the Anti-Discrimination Law prohibit discriminatory practices in housing, education, access to health care and other services on the grounds of sexual orientation. Although there is no legislative provision prohibiting incitement to hatred based on sexual orientation, Romania is also part of the small group of countries (23% of UN states) that acknowledge in their legislation that a homophobic motive is an aggravating factor in the commission of a violent crime (see Article 77 of the 2006 Penal Code). Currently, there are no ‘propaganda’ and/or ‘morality’ laws that target freedom of expression related to sexual orientation and legal barriers to the formation, establishment, or registration of sexual orientation-related NGOs have not been detected in Romania (Carroll and Mendos 2017).

Nonetheless, Romania is one the six EU member states that do not offer any legal protection to same-sex couples because civil unions and/or same-sex marriages are not recognized by the Romanian law. Romanian legislation also lacks provisions regarding the recognition of joint adoption by same-sex couples or second parent adoption rights (Carroll and Mendos 2017). In fact, the Romanian Civil Code has been amended (Article 277) in 2009 and marriage has been redefined to clearly ban same-sex marriages. While at the time of this writing, the public debate regarding the organization of a referendum about the redefinition of the family in the Constitution (as a consensual union between a man and a woman) continues, in March 2018, the National Anti-Discrimination Council (CNCD) proposed a bill, which if approved by the Parliament, would grant legal recognition to civil partnerships. However, Article 14 of the proposed bill stipulates that same-sex partners that enter a civil union do not have any adoption rights (CNCD 2018).

In sum, for the most part, the legislative changes meant to protect and promote equal social and civil rights for sexual minorities in Romania occurred prior to the country’s accession to the European Union in 2007. It can be argued that Romania’s adoption of equal-rights legislation was mainly a result of strong international pressure and the European Union’s accession requirements (see Andreescu 2011; Nachescu 2005) and not because the country internalized the EU norms concerning LGBT persons. The limited number of 2013-2017 legislative attempts to recognize and protect same-sex couples, such as civil union or registered partnership legislation, failed and the Coalition for Family’s initiatives to undermine sexual minorities’ marriage rights seemed to be

more successful in attracting many supporters. Organized in 2015, the Coalition for Family is a “civic initiative” that currently includes 37 NGOs (Gheorghiu 2018). The highly conservative coalition portrayed same-sex partnerships as a threat to traditional family values and gathered almost three million signatures on a petition to introduce a constitutional amendment that would change the current gender-neutral definition of marriage. Consequently, in 2016, the Romanian Constitutional Court (CCR) validated the proposal. Additionally, the “Constitutional Court ruled that a popular vote on the issue could take place, despite concerns from international [and local] NGOs that the proposed amendment would violate human rights” (ILGA-Europe 2017, 190).

Regardless of anti-discrimination legislation, an increased visibility of the Romanian LGBT community, the LGBT activists’ campaigns and various actions meant to improve the lives and the social acceptance of sexual minorities across the country (see Viski 2015; Viski and Nachescu 2017), and despite the public statement of solidarity with the LGBT community made by Romania’s President in October 2016 (ILGA-Europe 2017), a large segment of the Romanian population continues to display hostility toward sexual minorities and a relatively high level of sexual prejudice. If in 2006, 46.4% of the Romanians age 15 and over, did not think, “gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish” (Andreescu 2011, 219), in 2012, 53% of the respondents to a survey conducted on a nationally representative sample noted that homosexuality should be outlawed. In addition, 79.4% of the study participants declared they would not wish to have as a neighbor a homosexual person (IRESCOP 2012). Yet, even if only 34% of the respondents participating to a more recent national survey conducted by ILGA noted they would be comfortable socializing with people who are openly attracted to persons of the same sex, more than half (52%) of the interviewees (N= 1,154) considered that “equal rights and protections should be applied to everyone, including people who are romantically and sexually attracted to people of the same sex” (ILGA 2017, 370-375).

Based on a systematic analysis of the six waves of the World Values Survey (WVS), political scientists Inglehart and Welzel (2010) identified two major dimensions of the cultural variation in human values across countries of the world. One of this dimension is a continuum from traditional values to secular-rational values, while the second dimension refers to materialist (survival) values vs. post-materialist (self-expression) values. In traditional societies, citizens are more likely to emphasize the importance of religion, respect for authority, and traditional family values. Secular-rational values represent the opposite. When survival values are dominant, citizens

tend to value economic and physical security, are more likely to share ethnocentric values, and have low levels of societal and interpersonal trust and tolerance of the outgroup members. On the other hand, in post-materialist societies, citizens prioritize environmental protection, are more accepting of immigrants, favor gender equality and equal rights for sexual minorities, and want to participate actively in the political and economic decision-making processes (see Inglehart and Baker 2000; Held et al. 2009).

The diachronic cultural maps created by Inglehart and Welzel based on data collected from representative samples of residents in 97 countries representing 90% of the world population show how Romanians' cultural values changed over time. If in the early 1980s, Romania was among the countries predominantly characterized by secular-rational values, gradually, over the following three decades, Romanians' human values became more traditional. Conversely, while in 1981, Romania was part of the group of countries characterized by extreme survival values, when the sixth wave of WVS was conducted (2010-2014), Romanians moved closer to countries where citizens were more likely to emphasize self-expression values. Nonetheless, even if Romanians' scores were not extreme on any of the two dimensions, the country is a cultural neighbor of states whose residents are more likely to share traditional values and emphasize economic and physical security (World Values Survey n. d.).

In light of this profile, Romanians' reluctance to support equal civil rights for sexual and gender minorities is not surprising. Nonetheless, like in any country, Romanians' opinions regarding equal rights for social minorities vary among social groups. The present study intends to identify the individual-level factors more likely to differentiate persons who oppose LGBT equal rights from those who do not express such opposition. Additionally, the study intends to identify any potential changes that occurred in the determinants of Romanians' attitudes toward LGBT rights during the past decade (see Andreescu 2011). While in recent years, several studies and reports focusing on public attitudes toward sexual minorities and their civil rights in Europe and elsewhere have been published, quantitative research focusing exclusively on the correlates of Romanians' opinions about sexual and gender minorities' rights is sparse. Although limited in scope, this research intends to reduce this gap in the literature and to provide a better understanding of the circumstances that shape the Romanians' attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities in the country. Moreover, the intention is to provide information LGBT activists, as well as policy

makers interested in advancing equality rights for sexual and gender minorities in Romania, could use in their future endeavors meant to increase the public support for LGBT civil rights.

Explaining variations in public attitudes toward sexual minorities

Although in a significant number of countries sexual minorities continue to be discriminated by the law, public opinion polls, as well as recent legislative changes that safeguard sexual minorities' civil and social rights suggest that worldwide the level of hostility toward individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or transsexual is decreasing. In fact, the authors of a recent report produced by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) noted that the "world is surprisingly more accepting than one might have imagined." Based on survey data collected from 116,000 respondents in 75 countries, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, the findings indicate that despite the anti-LGBT messages of religious and conservative political leaders, "a majority of people feel they can be respectful of their religion and culture and be accepting of sexual and gender diversity" (Carroll and Robotham 2017, 6). Nonetheless, attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities vary among countries and among individuals. Macro and micro-level studies conducted during the past decades identified several factors that explain variations in public attitudes toward sexual minorities and LGBT rights. This section of the paper will present some of them.

As Ayoub (2016, 137) noted, churches, the original global institutions, regard "international norms of homosexuality as threatening to important moral values." Unsurprisingly, research consistently documented a positive relationship between religiosity (e.g., the importance of religion in one's life; church attendance) and sexual prejudice (Ayoub 2016; Herek 1991; Norton and Herek 2013). Spina (2016) found that independent of one's involvement in religious activities, Romanians with a high level of confidence in the authority of the Orthodox Church were significantly less likely to consider homosexuality justified. Additionally, other research studies acknowledged that religious individuals were more likely to oppose LGBT rights, in general (Andreescu 2011; Swank and Raiz 2010; Takács and Szalma 2011) and same-sex marriage, in particular (Becker 2012; Brumbaugh et al. 2008; Dion and Diez 2017; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2008; Jakobsson, Kotsadam, and Jakobsson 2013; Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006; Pearl and Galupo 2007; Schwartz 2010; Woodford et al. 2012).

With few exceptions (see West 2018), research generally identified a link between the religious denomination individuals belong to and their attitudes toward sexual minorities and LGBT rights. Using the last three waves of the World Values Survey (WVS) Adamczyk (2017, 18-19) tried to determine how major religions and their followers view homosexuality. The author concluded that Protestants and Muslims, followed by Hindus are the most conservative religious groups in the world. Conversely, Jews and people with no religious affiliation express the lowest levels of disapproval of homosexuality.

Studies conducted in United States generally found that persons belonging to conservative Neo-Protestant denominations are more likely to oppose LGBT rights in general (Wood and Bartkowski 2004), and marriage rights, in particular (Becker 2012; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2008; Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006; Whitehead 2010). In post-socialist societies, however, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches have been particularly opposed to the import of EU norms regarding sexual minorities' equal rights (Ramet 2006, 126, cited in Ayoub 2016, 137). Yet, in both new and old EU countries, when compared to people belonging to other religious denominations, respondents who acknowledged adherence to Catholic and Christian Orthodox churches expressed a significantly lower level of tolerance toward homosexuality (Ayoub 2016, 147). Additionally, Takács and Szalma's (2011) multilevel analysis conducted on samples from 26 EU countries showed that persons who belonged to a religious denomination were significantly less likely to support equal rights for sexual minorities than were atheists.

Nevertheless, people's perceptions and attitudes toward outgroup members are not solely shaped by their religious beliefs and/or their recognition of the church authority. As scholars have demonstrated, "modernity is an important predictor of value change" (Ayoub 2016, 139). In the globalized modern world, individuals are constantly exposed to multiple external norms and values, which may change their sense of morality and social justice, especially if developed democracies of the world are recognized as models to be followed. Ayoub (2016), for example, found that in both old and new EU states, individuals with a high degree of confidence in the EU have a significantly higher level of tolerance toward homosexuality than their counterparts who do not identify with EU norms and values. Similarly, Sloopmaeckers and Sircar's (2018) macro-level analysis showed that municipalities in Croatia with a higher proportion of Eurosceptic individuals (i.e., persons who voted against the country's accession to the European Union) were

significantly more likely to support the introduction of a constitutional definition of marriage, that would deny marriage equality rights to same-sex couples.

Moreover, past research found that individuals with a post-materialist value orientation (e.g., those who emphasize freedom of speech and giving people more say; favor progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society) are generally more accepting of homosexuality (Ayoub 2016). Additionally, a recent study that examined public views on homosexuality in Romania and Bulgaria found that in both countries, independent of one's religiosity, persons with a materialist value orientation (i.e., preference for security and conformity) were significantly less likely to show tolerance toward homosexuality when compared to persons with post-materialist values (Spina 2016). Similarly, Andreescu (2011) acknowledged that Romanians more likely to oppose equal rights for sexual minorities were persons with materialist and conventional values, who were rule followers, underscored the importance of traditions and customs, and wanted the government to be strong and to ensure safety.

Almost two decades ago, Swim, Ferguson, and Hyers (1999, 61) noted that prejudice against gays and lesbians is openly demonstrated when there are, for instance, legislative efforts to prevent the legal recognition of same-sex marriages. However, more covert forms of prejudice against gays and lesbians exist, as well. One such behavioral manifestation of covert prejudice toward members of social minority groups is known in the literature as *social distance* (see Bogardus 1925) or “the degree that individuals desire to associate” with members of the target group (Maurer and Keim 2018, 4). Among other reasons, according to Goffman (1963, cited in Swim et al. 1999, 62), people may wish to distance themselves from stigmatized individuals in order to avoid a “courtesy stigma” or being stigmatized themselves because of their association with outgroup members.

In addition to experimental studies that examined the relationship social distance - sexual prejudice (e.g., Maurer and Keim 2018; Swim et al., 1999) or studies focusing on the correlates of social distance toward sexual minorities (Gentry 1987; Herek 1991), in recent years, several multi-country surveys (e.g., WVS, Eurobarometer) included various social distance scales to assess the public's level of acceptance of sexual minorities (see also Carroll and Robotham 2017). Moreover, a limited number of studies tested the effects of perceived social distance on public attitudes toward gay rights. Using WVS data for the years 2011 to 2015, Carlo-Gonzales, McKallagat, and Whitten-

Woodring (2017) found that countries that had a higher percentage of people unwilling to have a homosexual as a neighbor were significantly less likely to support gay rights laws.

Informed by Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory, which states that interpersonal contact with stigmatized outgroup members would diminish prejudice and biased perceptions of social minority groups, several research studies tested the applicability of Allport's hypothesis to sexual minorities. Research findings generally show that interpersonal contact with gay and lesbian individuals reduces sexual prejudice and/or is significantly and positively associated with support for LGBT rights (Barth, Overby, and Huffmon 2009; Barth and Parry 2009; Bartoş, Berger, and Hegarty 2014; Brewer 2008; Carroll and Robotham 2017; Garner 2013; Lewis 2011; Wood and Bartkovski 2004). Persons who acknowledged interpersonal relationships or prior contact with sexual minorities were also more likely to support same-sex marriage rights (Becker 2012; Dyck and Pearson-Merkowitz 2014; Santona and Tognasso 2018; Swank and Raiz 2010). Using a large sample of American college students, Woodford et al. (2012), however, did not find that having LGBT friends or acquaintances significantly differentiated supporters of same-sex marriage from those who had neutral attitudes regarding equal marriage rights for same-sex couples. While contact with transgender individuals does not always attract support for transgender rights (Flores 2015), recent research conducted in United States (Norton and Herek 2013; Tadlock et al. 2017) and Hong Kong (King, Winter, and Webster 2009) found that contact with transgender persons significantly influenced positive attitudes about transgender individuals and transgender rights.

In addition to cultural norms and values, religious beliefs, and the relational context of social interaction with sexual/gender minorities, prior research identified several demographic factors that appear to shape the public's feelings about sexual minorities and/or their civil rights. As Adamczyk (2017) recently noted, these factors generally refer to age, gender, socioeconomic status, and marital status.

Although not in all countries older individuals have more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities (e.g., West and Cowell 2015), in general, research acknowledged a positive association between age and sexual prejudice (Ayoub 2016; Adamczyk 2017; Herek 2002a). Additionally, several studies found that opposition to LGBT rights increases with age (Hayes 1997; Takács and Szalma 2011) and that younger generations are more supportive of marriage equality rights than older generations are (Becker 2012; Brumbaugh et al. 2008; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2005; Lewis and Gossett 2008; Olson et al. 2006; Schwartz 2010; West and Cowell 2015). A prior study

conducted in Romania on a representative sample also found that senior citizens are significantly more likely to oppose gay rights than are younger individuals (Andreescu 2011). Jakobsson et al. (2013), however, did not find that age significantly affects variations in public support for same-sex marriage in Sweden and Norway.

Empirical research generally found that women tend to have more liberal attitudes toward sexual minorities (see Adamczyk 2016, for a review), males having a higher level of sexual prejudice (Herek 2002a; Norton and Herek 2013; West and Cowell 2015). Similar to prior findings, several studies acknowledged that women tend to be more supportive of same-sex marriage rights than men are (Becker 2012; Brumbaugh et al. 2008; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2005; Lannutti and Lachlan 2007; Lewis and Gossett 2008; Moskowitz, Rieger and Roloff 2010; Olson et al. 2006; Pearl and Galupo 2007). Although Herek (2002b) also found that compared to men, women expressed a significantly higher level of support for gay rights, the author noted that heterosexual men's opposition to equal civil and adoption rights was less pronounced when it concerned lesbians and was stronger when it referred to gay men's rights. Comparably, Moskowitz et al.'s (2010) analysis based on a sample of predominantly white, unmarried, American undergraduate students showed that when compared to heterosexual women, heterosexual men showed more negative attitudes toward gay male marriage than they did when asked about lesbian marriage. Nonetheless, prior research conducted in Romania did not identify gender-based differences in tolerance of homosexuality (Spina 2016) or opposition to equal rights for homosexual individuals (Andreescu 2011).

Research findings frequently showed that more educated people and/or those with a higher socioeconomic status tend to have lower levels of sexual prejudice (Adamczyk 2017; Ayoub 2016; Bartoş et al. 2014; Herek 2002a; Herek and Gonzalez-Rivera 2006; Norton and Herek 2013; West and Cowell 2015). Similarly, support of equal rights for sexual minorities, including marital and adoption rights generally increases with one's level of education (Becker 2012; Hayes 1997; Schwartz 2010). Nonetheless, exceptions do exist. Using data collected in three US states, Brumbaugh et al. (2008) found that persons who had less than a high-school education expressed the lowest amount of opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage. Conversely, persons whose highest educational level was high school had the most negative attitudes toward gay marriage. Although prior research conducted in Romania (Andreescu 2011) did not find a significant relationship between one's education and opposition to gay rights, the study noted that

individuals whose parents were highly educated were significantly more likely to support equal rights for sexual minorities. While a recent study conducted in two Scandinavian countries acknowledged that an increase in education significantly predicted support for same-sex marriage, one's income did not appear to influence people's attitudes about sexual minorities' marital rights (Jakobsson et al. 2013). Brumbaugh et al. (2008) also contended that the family income was not a significant predictor of public attitudes toward same-sex marriage in United States.

As several studies demonstrated, one's marital status may influence attitudes toward sexual minorities, as well. In her analysis of data from 87 societies, Adamczyk (2017) observed that those who were single, divorced/separated, or living with a partner had more positive attitudes about homosexuality than married individuals did. Similarly, Brumbaugh and her colleagues found that persons who never married, those who were divorced/separated, and those who recently cohabitated were significantly less likely to oppose equal marital rights for sexual minorities than married people did. However, persons who had children were more likely to oppose the legalization of same-sex marriages (Brumbaugh et al. 2008).

A recent study on tolerance toward homosexuality in Romania and Bulgaria did not find that married individuals differed in their attitudes toward homosexuality from persons who had a different marital status (Spina 2016). Prior research conducted in Romania (Andreescu 2011) found, however, that individuals who acknowledged pre-marital cohabitation were significantly more likely to support equal rights for homosexuals than were persons who stated they never lived with a partner without being married.

In addition to age, gender, socioeconomic status, and marital status, several research studies also examined the impact of the respondent's place of residence on public attitudes toward homosexuality in general and toward gay rights, in particular. Although findings across studies appear to be inconsistent, some research studies found that residents of rural areas tend to manifest higher levels of sexual prejudice (Herek 2002a), while residents of urban areas tend to be more tolerant toward homosexuality (Ayoub 2016; Herek 2004; Takács and Szalma 2011). However, one study found that residing in rural/small towns had no significant effects on attitudes toward transgender people (Norton and Herek 2013). Nonetheless, Jakobsson et al. (2013) identified a stronger support for the legalization of same-sex marriage in the capital cities of Norway and Sweden, while Andreescu (2011) contended that in Romania, residents of large cities were

significantly less likely to oppose equal rights for sexual minorities when compared to people living in villages or small towns.

Data, Methods, and Hypotheses

The source of the data is the Special Eurobarometer 437 – wave 83.4. The Eurobarometer survey has been conducted in 28 EU member states at the request of the European Commission - Directorate General for Communication. In Romania, the survey was carried out by TNS CSOP from 05/30/2015 to 6/08/2015 on a multi-stage probability sample (N=1,012), which was representative for the Romanian population age 15 and older (European Commission, 2016). In terms of the respondents' social orientation, the sample is quite homogenous (i.e., 99.4% of the study participants self-identified as heterosexuals). In order to detect the individual-level characteristics that predict opposition to equal rights for sexual minorities (including marriage equality rights), the following variables will be included in the multivariate analyses:

Dependent variables

*Heterosexist attitudes*²⁹ – The first dependent variable is a dummy measure coded 1 for respondents who tended to disagree or totally disagreed with the statement “*Gay, lesbian and bisexual people should have the same rights as heterosexual people.*” Persons who showed support for sexual minorities' equal rights and those who did not express an opinion were coded zero.

Opposition to same-sex marriage – This is also a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondents (totally) disagreed with the statement “*Same sex marriages should be allowed throughout Europe.*” Persons who (totally) agreed with the statement and the undecided were coded zero.

Independent and control variables

Post-materialist values – This ordinal-level variable is used here as a proxy measure of post-materialism (see Inglehart, 1997)³⁰. Respondents have been given the statement “Sometimes

²⁹ Although the term heterosexism has been utilized inconsistently in the literature, Herek contended that heterosexism refers to a cultural ideology that perpetuates sexual stigma and includes beliefs about gender and morality, which define sexual minorities as “deviant, sinful, and threatening.” Heterosexism provides the rationale for the society's hostility and discriminatory attitudes toward non-heterosexual individuals (Herek 2004, 15-16).

³⁰ Inglehart's (1997, 355) post-materialist index contains a 12-item battery that refers to the respondent's preferences regarding national priorities and policy preferences. Some of these items are maintaining order in the nation vs. giving people more say in decisions of the government; fighting rising prices vs. protecting freedom of speech; making sure the country has strong defense forces vs. trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful. The Eurobarometer

economic development results in damage or destruction of nature in protected areas” and have been asked if, in their opinion, this is acceptable. Based on the respondent’s selection, the answer has been coded 1 (“This is acceptable because economic development takes precedence”), 2 (“This is only acceptable for projects of major public interest and if the damage is fully compensated for through restoration or mitigation measures”), or 3 (“This should be prohibited because these are our most important nature areas”). *EU identification* – Respondents who showed agreement with the statement “My voice counts in the EU” have been coded 1 and the others zero.

Interpersonal contacts with sexual minorities – Respondents have been coded 1 if they acknowledged having friends/acquaintances who belong to sexual and/or gender minority groups (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual individuals) and zero otherwise. *Social distance* – This is a composite measure constructed via principal component analysis (PCA). It includes responses at four questions that asked respondents if they would feel comfortable having in the highest elected political position or as a colleague a person who is gay, bisexual, transgender, or transsexual. Initial responses varied from 1 (Not at all comfortable) to 10 (Totally comfortable). The reliability coefficient Alpha for this measure is .871. Only one factor with a value higher than one has been obtained (Eigenvalue = 2.957) and the variance it explained equals 73.93%. The factor loadings vary from .84 to .88. Higher values indicate a high acceptance level or low social distance between respondent and the hypothetical member of a sexual or gender minority group. *Family distance* – This measure is also a composite variable based on two questionnaire items. The question was: “Regardless of whether you have children or not, please tell me, using a scale from 1 to 10, how comfortable you would feel if one of your children was in a love relationship with a person from each of the following groups: (1) a person of the same sex; (2) a transgender or a transsexual person.” The measure is reliable (Alpha = .851) and has construct validity (Eigenvalue = 1.743; variance explained = 87.15%; factor loadings = .934). Higher values indicate a higher level of social acceptance.

*Religious affiliation*³¹ – Catholics and respondents belonging to Neo-Protestant denominations have been coded 1 and the others zero. *Marital status (single)* – Single (unmarried)

survey used in this analysis did not include any measure that would be similar to the original components of Inglehart’s index. The selected questionnaire item captures, however, one of main ideas used in the construction of the original index.

³¹ The survey did not include any variables that would assess one’s degree of religiosity and the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward LGBT rights could not be assessed. Additionally, the initial intention to dichotomize the variable into believers and non-believers failed because only three respondents in the sample declared they were

persons with or without children, who do not live with a partner have been coded 1, while the others have been coded zero. *Social class*³² – Respondents who self-identified as members of the working or low-middle classes have been coded 1, while those belonging to middle, upper-middle, and upper classes have been coded zero. *Economic disadvantage* – Respondents who found always/sometimes difficult to pay their bills have been coded 1, while the others have been coded zero. *Internet usage* – This ordinal-level variable takes values from 1 (daily usage) to 7 (never used/no access). *Gender* – Male respondents have been coded 1 and female respondents have been coded zero. *Place of residence* – Respondents residing in villages/rural areas of Romania have been coded 1, while residents of urban areas have been coded zero. *Region* – Residents of the South-East and South-Muntenia regions have been coded 1; residents from the rest of the regions and from Bucharest have been coded zero.

Hypotheses

Informed by prior research, the present study hypothesizes that Romanians' attitudes toward sexual minorities' civil rights, including same-sex marriage rights will be shaped by various contextual and individual-level factors. Specifically, heterosexist attitudes and opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage across EU states is anticipated to be higher among males, middle-age and older individuals, persons with a lower socioeconomic status, residents of rural areas, and persons with limited access to information and communication technology, such as the internet. While limited or lack of internet usage could reflect economic disadvantage and social inequality, it may be also viewed as an indicator of social isolation³³ and as one's resistance to modernity.³⁴

atheists or non-believers. The large majority of the respondents (88.5%) belonged to the Christian Orthodox Church, 5.3% were Catholics, 3.2% Protestants and 1% belonged to other Christian denominations. There was only one Muslim person in the sample and 1.6% of the respondents refused to answer the question.

³² The survey did not include a specific question regarding one's level of education. One questionnaire item asked respondents how old they were when they stopped attending school. Additional analyses showed a positive and significant correlation between self-assessed social class and the respondent's age when he/she stopped attending school. Specifically, the Pearson's coefficient for the correlation between working/low middle-class and age 19 or lower at the end of the studies is .25 (p. <.001), suggesting that respondents in this group generally have high-school education or less. In Romania, children typically enter the elementary school when they are seven years old and graduate from high school at age 19.

³³ For a detailed discussion of the "digital divide" and its implications at the macro and micro levels, see Sparks (2013).

³⁴ Carlo-Gonzales et al. (2017) observed a higher respect for gay rights in countries that had higher internet access rates.

Conversely, persons with high acceptance levels of sexual and gender minorities, those with post-materialist attitudes, persons who identify with European Union's norms and values, persons who had social contacts with members of sexual/gender minority groups, and those who are not married are expected to be proponents of sexual minorities' equal rights. Additionally, variation in attitudes about sexual minorities' civil rights are expected to be influenced by the religious denomination a person belongs to and by the region, one lives in.

Results

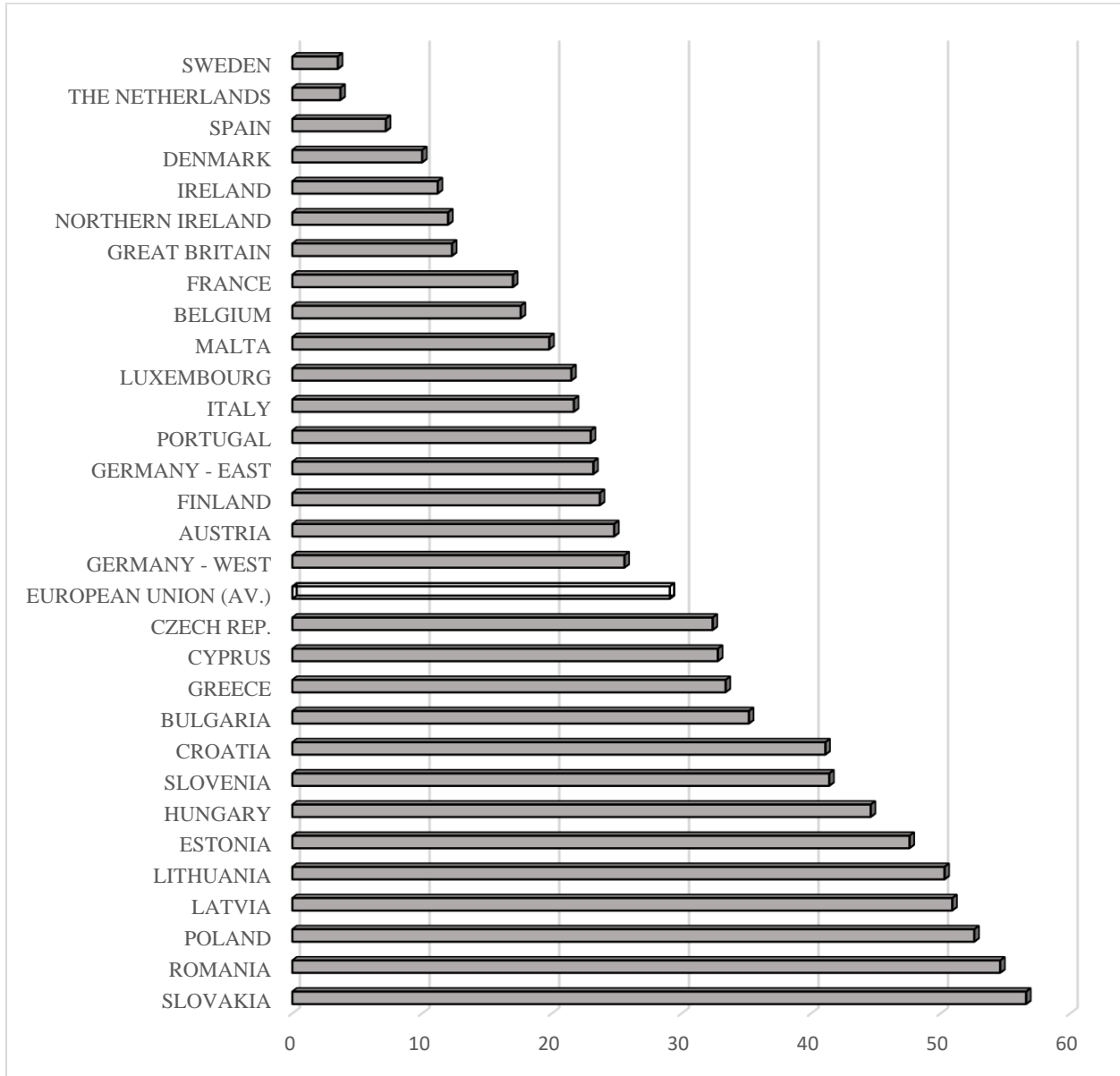
Based on data collected in 2015 (European Commission, 2016), the percentage of persons who do not think that sexual minorities should have the same rights as heterosexual individuals varies among EU residents from a low 3.5% in Sweden to a high 56.6% in Slovakia (Figure 1). Romania has the second largest proportion (54.6%) of persons who oppose equal rights for sexual minorities and is one of the few European countries (5), where the majority of the population age 15 and over expressed heterosexist attitudes toward sexual minorities.

Further analyses are conducted to identify the factors more likely to predict Romanians' attitudes toward sexual minorities' civil rights. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and range) for all the variables included in the multivariate models. Additionally, the correlation coefficients (Pearson's r) show the strength of the bivariate relationships between the main dependent variables, as well as between each dependent variable and the selected independent variables.

It can be noticed that respondents who oppose equal rights for sexual minorities are significantly more likely ($r = .62$; $p < .001$) to oppose legislation that would allow same-sex couples all over the European Union to enter into legal marital partnerships. Bivariate correlations also show that with the exception of gender, all the selected predictors are significantly related to the first dependent variable, when controls are not introduced in the equation. Specifically, these preliminary analyses show that Romanian males and females do not differ in their attitudes regarding LGBT rights. Additionally, results indicate that those who oppose equal rights for sexual minorities are more likely to live in rural areas, they belong to the working class or to lower middle class, they acknowledged financial difficulties, they are less likely to access the internet, and they are 55 years old or older. Catholics and adherents to neo-protestant churches are more likely to

oppose equal rights for sexual minorities than do residents who adhered to the Christian Orthodox church, are Muslims, atheists, or agnostics.

Figure 1: Heterosexist Attitudes in European Union in 2015



Source: Eurobarometer 437 (European Commission, 2016). The chart shows the percentage of persons age 15 and over, who disagreed/totally disagreed with the statement: “Gay, lesbian and bisexual people should have the same rights as heterosexual people.”

Results also indicate that those who oppose equal rights for sexual minorities are more likely to be residents of South East and South Muntenia. Additional analyses (not shown) indicate

that while on average, about 55% of Romanians are more likely to oppose equal rights for sexual minorities, in South Muntenia and in the Southeast region, about 71% of the respondents shared these conservative attitudes. The highest level of acceptance of the sexual minorities' civil liberties is registered in Bucharest, where only 32% of the population expressed opposition to sexual minorities' equal rights.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics & Bivariate Correlations (N=1,012)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	r	
					DV1	DV2
Heterosexism (DV1)	.55	.49	0	1	-	
Opposition to same-sex marriage (DV2)	.69	.46	0	1	.62***	-
Post-materialist attitude	2.14	.77	1	3	-.09**	-.10***
EU identification	.42	.49	0	1	-.10***	-.13***
Interpersonal contacts	.00	1.00	-.24	5.68	-.16***	-.18***
Social distance (acceptance)	.00	1.00	-1.16	2.21	-.38***	-.33***
Family distance (acceptance)	.00	1.00	-.79	2.57	-.29***	-.34***
Religious affiliation (Catholics + NP)	.06	.24	0	1	.07*	.07*
Marital status (single)	.16	.37	0	1	-.09**	-.07*
Social class (W + LMC)	.45	.50	0	1	.15***	.20***
Economic disadvantage	.41	.49	0	1	.13***	.04
Internet usage (low)	3.51	2.44	1	7	.20***	.13***
Gender (male)	.48	.50	0	1	-.05	-.01
Age (55 years old and over)	.36	.48	0	1	.16***	.12***
Region (South-East + South Muntenia)	.29	.45	0	1	.21***	.20***
Residence (rural)	.48	.49	0	1	.10***	.05

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (2-tail test)

Nonetheless, Romanian respondents who have friends/acquaintances belonging to LGBT groups are significantly less likely to oppose equal rights for sexual minorities. Persons who would feel comfortable having as the highest-rank elected politician or as a colleague a LGBT person, share similar opinions, as are individuals who would not mind their children being in a same-sex

love relationship. Approximately 43% of Romanians believe they have a “voice in the EU” and 38% consider that economic development should be prohibited in nature-protected areas, even when the proposed projects would be of major public interest and the potential damage to nature in the area would be fully compensated. Respondents who appear to identify with the European Union’s values and those sharing post-materialist values are also more likely to support equal rights for sexual minorities.

Heterosexist attitudes

Table 2 presents the results of two multivariate analyses that try to identify the individual-level characteristics more likely to predict opposition to equal rights for sexual minorities in Romania. Model 1 includes only the main predictors, while model 2 shows the results of the bivariate logistic regression analysis, when the control variables are introduced in the equation.

As anticipated by prior bivariate analyses, findings show (Model 1) that the odds of opposing equal rights for sexual minorities decrease significantly by 49% (OR = .510; $p < .001$) and by 23.7% (OR = .763; $p = .001$) with a decrease in one’s social and family distance to members of LGBT groups. Additionally, social interaction with members of LGBT groups predicts a 21.7% decrease (OR = .783; $p < .01$) in the odds of opposing equal rights for sexual minorities. These significant effects are preserved in the full model as well. The effects of post-materialist attitudes and of one’s identification with the EU values are weak and no longer significant. Yet, the direction of these effects remained negative in both models, as hypothesized.

Additionally, opponents of equal rights for sexual minorities are more likely to be members of minority religious groups, such as Catholics and persons belonging to Christian denominations, other than the Christian Orthodox church. While initial analyses indicated that unmarried persons (with or without children) were more likely to oppose unequal rights for sexual minorities, one’s marital status does not differentiate any longer equal-rights opponents from those who express more liberal attitudes or are undecided. Opposition to equal rights for sexual minorities is increasing significantly with a decrease in one’s usage of the internet. Compared to residents from Bucharest and other regions in the country, residents of the Southeast region and South-Muntenia manifest the strongest heterosexist attitudes.

Table 2: Logit estimates of heterosexist attitudes in Romania (N=1,012)

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	B	SE	OR	p	B	SE	OR	p
Post-materialism	-.142	.09	.868	.114	-.096	.09	.908	.302
EU identification	-.235	.14	.790	.095	-.095	.15	.910	.532
Interpersonal contacts	-.245**	.09	.783	.006	-.242**	.09	.785	.010
Social distance (low)	-.672***	.08	.510	.000	-.649***	.09	.522	.000
Family distance (low)	-.270***	.08	.763	.001	-.194*	.08	.785	.021
Religion (Catholic + NP)					.914**	.31	2.495	.004
Marital status (single)					.005	.21	1.005	.979
Social class (W + LMC)					-.027	.16	.973	.867
Economic disadvantage					.227	.15	1.255	.141
Internet usage (low)					.102**	.04	1.107	.008
Gender (male)					-.153	.15	.858	.297
Age (55+)					.361*	.18	1.434	.048
Region (SE + S Muntenia)					.768***	.17	2.154	.000
Residence (rural)					.217	.15	1.242	.154
Constant	.588**	.213	1.800	.006	-.417	.28	.659	.140
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	.220				.288			

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (2-tail test); B = logistic regression coefficient; SE = standard error; OR = odds ratio.

Opposition to same-sex marriage

As shown in table 1, public attitudes toward LGBT overall civil liberties is the strongest determinant of public attitudes regarding same-sex couples’ marital rights. Specifically, preliminary analyses (not included) indicate that 95.3% of the respondents who do not think that LGBT persons should have the same civil rights as heterosexual individuals also oppose marriage equality for same-sex couples. Additionally, 38.4% of the respondents who did not express a clear opposition to equal rights for minorities in general (i.e., 39% of the initial supporters and 34% of the undecided), do not think that same-sex marriage should be allowed throughout Europe.

Further analyses have been conducted to identify the characteristics of the Romanian residents who tend to oppose or are totally against legislation that would allow same-sex marriages in the European Union. The results of the logistic regression analyses are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Logit estimates of Romanians' opposition to same-sex marriage (N=1,012)

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	B	SE	OR	p	B	SE	OR	p
Post-materialism	-.170	.09	.844	.079	-.156	.10	.856	.116
EU identification	-.364*	.15	.695	.015	-.244	.16	.783	.125
Interpersonal contacts	-.212**	.07	.809	.005	-.185*	.08	.832	.019
Social distance (low)	-.466***	.08	.627	.000	-.467***	.09	.627	.000
Family distance (low)	-.450***	.08	.637	.000	-.382***	.08	.683	.000
Religion					.929*	.36	2.532	.011
Marital status (single)					.000	.22	1.000	.999
Social class (W + LMC)					.516**	.18	1.676	.003
Economic disadvantage					-.301	.16	.740	.071
Internet usage (low)					.040	.04	1.040	.337
Gender (male)					.051	.16	1.052	.746
Age (55+)					.216	.20	1.242	.274
Region (SE + S Muntenia)					.828***	.20	2.290	.000
Residence (rural)					-.009	.16	.991	.958
Constant	1.461***	.23	4.312	.000	.814**	.30	2.257	.006
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)		.213				.266		

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (2-tail test); B = logistic regression coefficient; SE = standard error; OR = odds ratio.

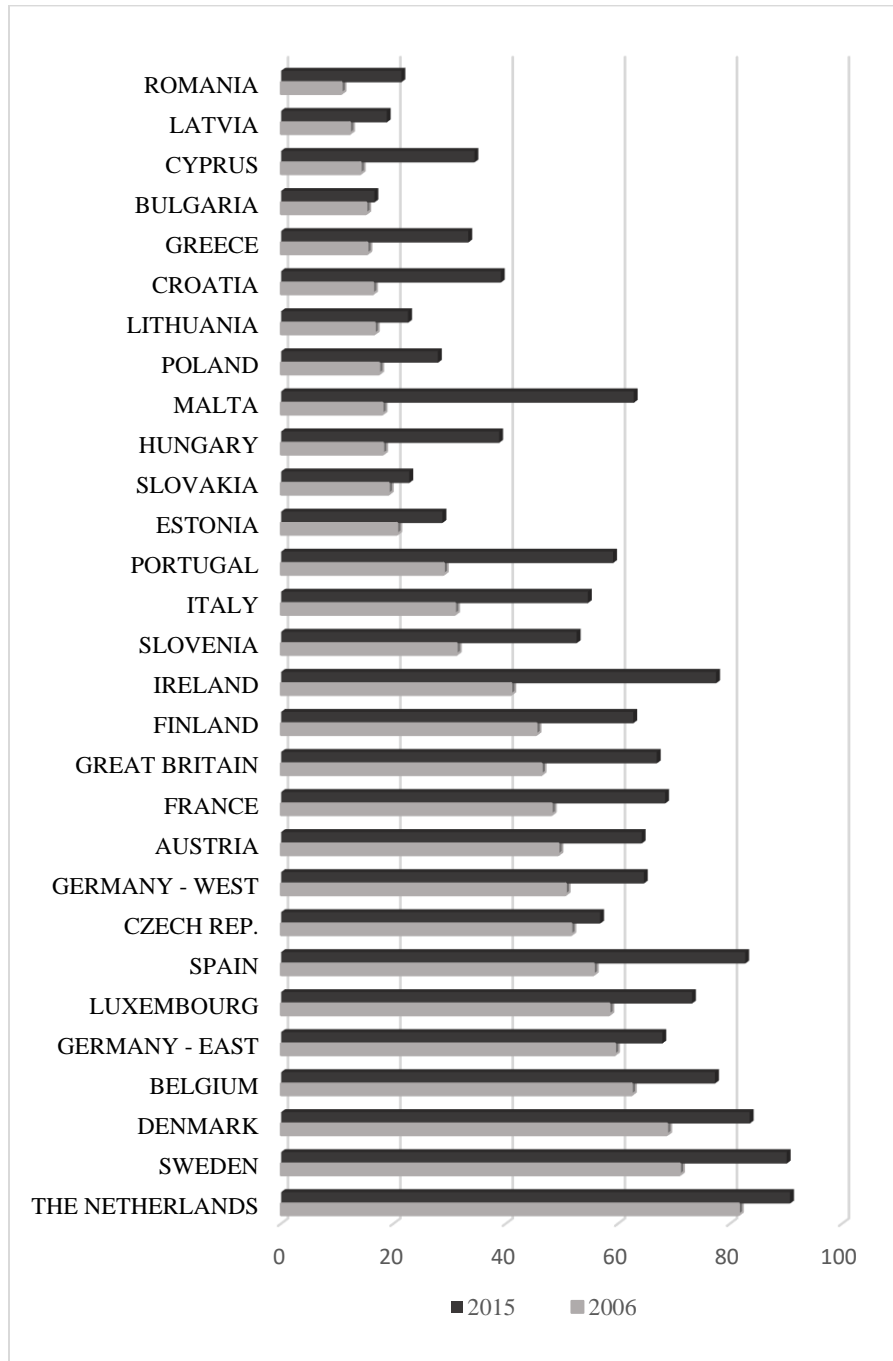
The first set of analyses (Model 1) includes only the main predictors. It can be noticed that with the exception of the indicator used here as a proxy of post-materialist values, the selected predictors have significant and negative impacts on the dependent variable. In sum, persons who identify with the European Union, those who have interpersonal contacts with members of LGBT groups, as well as those who manifest a high level of acceptance and do not distance themselves from persons who are part of a sexual minority are significantly less likely to oppose same-sex

marriage throughout Europe. Although the effects of these variables on the dependent variable appear to be mediated by the control variables introduced in model 2, for the most part, the initial predictors continue to remain significant in the full model. Similar to prior analyses (see Table 2), religious minorities, such as Catholics and members of Neo-Protestant churches, as well as residents of South Muntenia and the Southeastern region are more likely to oppose same-sex marriages than persons belonging to other religious denominations and residents of other regions, respectively. Different from prior analyses (see Table 2), when one's social class did not significantly differentiate equal rights opponents from supporters and the undecided, it can be observed that opposition to marriage equality is stronger among persons who self-identified with the working and low-middle classes. Yet, age, gender, marital status, or place of residence do not appear to influence significantly Romanians' opinions regarding the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Although about seven out of ten Romanians (69%) age 15 and over, oppose marriage-equality rights for sexual minorities, based on historical data (see Figure 2), it can be noticed that in 2015, Romanians became more tolerant regarding same-sex couples than they used to be a decade ago. In figure 2, countries are presented in ascending order based on the percentage of respondents who declared in 2006 that they "tend to agree" or "totally agree" with same-sex marriages to be allowed throughout Europe. Although among EU countries Romania had in 2006 the lowest percentage (10.7%) of supporters for sexual minorities' marriage rights, one decade later, the proportion of Romanians supporting same-sex marriages (21.4%) doubled. This one hundred percent increase in favor of legislative changes that would expand the sexual minorities' civil rights suggests that this positive trend may continue.

From 2006 to 2015, all EU countries registered an increase in public support for the sexual minorities' equal rights to marriage. Consequently, as of 2018, the large majority of EU member states legally recognize same-sex relationships, despite the fact that not in all of them the public support was higher than 50%. Currently, in the EU, only Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia do not offer same-sex couples any kind of legal recognition (Carroll and Mendos 2017).

**Figure 2: “Same-Sex Marriages Should Be Allowed throughout Europe”
 Societal Support in 2015 vs. 2006 (%)**



Source: Eurobarometer 66 (2006) and Eurobarometer 437 (2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study tried to identify the potential sources of Romanians' resistance to social change, which would imply changes in human interactions and cultural norms and would transform social institutions, if LGBT rights would be fully recognized. Consistent with prior research (Barth et al. 2009; Barth and Parry 2009; Bartoş et al. 2014; Becker 2012; Brewer 2008; Dyck and Pearson-Merkowitz 2014; Garner 2013; Lewis 2011; Santona and Tognasso 2018; Swank and Raiz 2010; Wood and Bartkovski 2004) and as it has been hypothesized, interpersonal contact with LGBT persons predicts support for sexual minorities' civil rights and same-sex marriage. Similar to Carlo-Gonzales et al.'s (2017) findings, persons willing to accept sexual minorities as high-rank public officials, colleagues, and/or as family members are less likely to oppose equal rights for LGBT individuals, including marriage equality rights.

As Ayoub (2016, 135) noted, "proponents of LGBT rights in the EU consciously frame the LGBT norm as one of European democratic values and responsibilities." As anticipated and related to prior findings (Ayoub 2016; Sloomaeckers and Sircar 2018), Romanians who feel they have a voice in the European Union, which was considered here an indicator of one's identification with EU norms and values, are also more likely to favor EU norms regarding marriage equality.

Although the multivariate analyses do not suggest that having post-materialist values is necessarily a significant predictor of public attitudes regarding LGBT rights, results should be cautiously interpreted. A limitation of the present research is that it made use of secondary data and a composite measure of post-materialist values could not be created because appropriate indicators were not available. By using a single-item measure, which is more prone to measurement errors, findings could have been affected and future research should try to overcome the shortcomings of the present study. Nonetheless, as several scholars have noted (Ayoub 2016), modernity appears to be an important source of norm and value changes in Romania. As previous research (Carlo-Gonzales et al. 2017) indicated, individuals who had limited access to the internet manifested a low respect for LGBT rights, as well. Additional analyses showed that when the data have been collected, 44.2% of the study participants were never using the internet. About 61% of internet non-users lived in rural areas, they were on average 18 years old when they stopped attending school, 47% experienced financial difficulties, were more likely to be women, and were 55 years old or older. Additionally, those with no internet access showed no interest in political matters, tended to have a negative image of the European Union, and 63% of them did not identify

with the European Union. All these characteristics are generally predicting opposition to gay rights.

As previously noted, prior research observed that in Europe, adherence to the Christian Orthodox Church was usually associated with lower acceptance of sexual minorities (Ayoub 2016). Additional analyses showed that in Romania, where the majority of the population belongs to this church, opinions regarding equal rights for sexual minorities are divided among Christian Orthodox respondents. Nevertheless, results showed that people belonging to religious minority groups, such as Catholics and persons who adhere to other Christian denominations (e.g., Neo-Protestants) appear to express the highest opposition to LGBT rights, in general, and marriage equality, in particular. As Collier et al. (2015, 143) noted, “assessments of religious affiliation alone are, however, limited measures of an individual's exposure to and engagement with specific religious teachings related to homosexuality” and future research should include among the predictors of attitudes about sexual minorities rights a measure of *religiosity*, which was not available in the version of the Eurobarometer used here.

Different from prior research (Becker 2012; Brumbaugh et al. 2008; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2005; Lannutti and Lachlan 2007; Lewis and Gossett 2008; Moskowitz et al. 2010; Olson et al. 2006; Pearl and Galupo 2007), but consistent with prior studies conducted in Romania (Andreescu 2011) and elsewhere (Davies 2004; Hayes 1997; Kite and Whitley 1996), findings show that Romanian women do not differ significantly from their male counterparts in terms of their support/opposition to LGBT rights. Considering the fact that Ayoub's (2016) recent analysis of attitudes toward homosexuality in the European Union also found that in Eastern Europe (EU-12) the gender-based difference in the public perception of homosexuality was smaller than it was in Western Europe (EU-15), this finding is not surprising. Moreover, additional analyses show that even if Romanian women do not differ significantly from men in terms of social interaction with sexual minorities, socio-economic status (education and income), or place of residence, they are less likely to be single and they are significantly less likely to use modern communication technologies. Additionally, while Romanian men tend to have a negative view of the European Union, they are more likely to identify with EU than women do. A combination of all these factors, some associated with support for equal rights, others with opposition toward civil rights for sexual minorities could explain the lack of gender-based difference between Romanian men and women in terms of sexual prejudice and attitudes toward equal rights for sexual minorities.

Although age did not appear to differentiate opponents from supporters of marriage equality rights, findings show that older individuals are generally more likely to oppose equal rights for sexual minorities, as prior research (Hayes 1997; Takács and Szalma 2011) also found. Similar to other studies (e.g., Spina 2016), when controlling for the variables included in the statistical models, one's marital status does not appear to explain variations in Romanians' attitudes regarding equal rights for sexual minorities. Neither does one's place of residence (rural vs. urban). Additional analyses, however, indicate that the lowest opposition toward sexual minorities' rights is found in Bucharest. In the capital city of Romania, less than a third of the respondents (32%) declared that LGBT persons should not have the same rights as heterosexual individuals, while the country average was 55%.

Although the self-assessed social class does not affect significantly Romanians' attitudes toward LGBT rights in general, working class and lower middle-class individuals, which represent 45% of the sampled population, express the highest opposition toward same-sex marriage rights. Additional analyses (not shown) indicate that compared to individuals in higher social classes, persons in this group have a significantly lower level of acceptance of sexual and gender minorities in the work place ($t = -4.983$; $p < .001$) and in the family ($t = -5.910$; $p < .001$). Moreover, they experience more financial difficulties ($t = 6.889$; $p < .001$), stopped attending school at a younger age ($t = -2.897$; $p < .01$), have limited access to or never use the internet ($t = 10.602$; $p < .001$), and are less likely to identify with the European Union norms and values ($t = -7.778$; $p < .001$).

Findings also show that during the past decade (i.e., from 2006 to 2015), some visible changes in the geographic distribution of heterosexist attitudes have occurred in Romania. If in 2006, residents of the Northeastern region of Romania expressed the highest opposition to equal rights for sexual minorities, almost one decade later, the highest proportion (41%) of those who support marriage equality throughout Europe is observed in the North-East. The proportion of those who live in the Northeastern region and oppose equal rights for LGBT persons (48%) is also below the country average. Conversely, the highest opposition to equal rights for sexual minorities was observed in South Muntenia and the Southeast, where in each region, about 71% of the respondents expressed heterosexist attitudes. In these two regions, only 9% (South Muntenia) and 14.3% (South East) of the respondents acknowledged clear support for marriage equality throughout Europe.

It is possible that differences in perceptions and attitudes could be partially explained by regional differences in migratory trends registered in Romania in recent years, and consequently, by variations in people's direct exposure to modern western societal values. Based on a rigorous analysis of the direct and indirect effects of labor migration experiences at the individual and community levels, Sandu (2010, 284-5) contended that returning migrants brought modernity to their communities. The author also noted that for many Romanian migrants, working abroad was "an opportunity to change one's way of thinking" about work, life strategies, and social relations. Pushed by higher poverty levels, residents from the Northeastern region of the country have longer migration experiences than those from South Muntenia and the South East (Sandu 2010). Additionally, Eurobarometer data collected in 2010 showed that 50% of Northeastern residents had close relatives living abroad, while the percentage of those with family members living in foreign countries was lower in South Muntenia (27%) and the Southeastern (36%) regions. Moreover, 12% of the respondents from Northeast worked abroad, while only 4% of those from the South East and 5% of South Muntenia's residents migrated for work in other EU country. Findings also showed that if about 58% of the residents of North East showed attachment to the European Union, only 33% and 41% of their counterparts in South Muntenia and South East, respectively, shared similar opinions (Sandu 2011). Considering the fact that most Romanian labor migrants worked in Spain (and Italy), a country with very progressive attitudes toward sexual minorities' rights, it is possible that the attitudinal changes registered in North East have been a result of the diffusion of the European Union's LGBT norms. Yet, future research should explore in more detail the causes of the regional variations in sexual prejudice and public opinion about LGBT rights, by considering various transnational channels that may influence public attitudes in Romania (see also Ayoub 2016).

Although more than half of the Romanians tend to oppose equal rights for LGBT persons and seven out of ten respondents do not favor the legalization of same-sex marriage throughout Europe, in 2015, the amount of support for same-sex marriage was twice higher than a decade ago, suggesting that Romanians' reluctance to accept the LGBT norms could diminish in time. Moreover, considering the general trend in the European Union, it is unlikely that the socially conservative countries of Eastern Europe will maintain for long their current restrictive policies and legislation regarding sexual minorities' domestic partnership/marital rights.

Social change, however, is a lengthy process that cannot occur overnight, especially in traditional societies, like Romania. Yet, when more Romanians will adopt secular-rational and self-expression values and the country will be regarded as a post-materialist society (see Inglehart and Welzel 2005), a visible positive change in public attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities' rights is more likely to follow.

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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.¹ 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

¹ Sebastian E. Bartoş, Marius A. Balş 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.² Fearmongering about external and internal foes guarantees activism caused by the “dread of an enemy massing against us.”³ 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,”⁴ which consists of an “informal, multi-denominational grouping [that]-cooperate[s] transnationally on policy goals”⁵ 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).⁶ 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 Right⁷ 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.⁸ Some of these groups have been able to be successful both at home and on foreign ground. One of these is the Liberty

² 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.

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

⁴ Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 37.

⁵ Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 23, 37-38.

⁶ Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 83.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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),⁹ the Pro Vita Association,¹⁰ 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 Right¹¹ 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

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

¹⁰ 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>

¹¹ 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.”¹² 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.¹³ 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

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

¹³Knöbl, “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.¹⁴ 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, banal¹⁵ nationalism, secular and political religions.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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

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

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

¹⁶ 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).

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

¹⁸ 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 identity¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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 19th century Transylvania relied on the Romanian Greek-Catholic and Romanian Orthodox Church which fought for Romanians’ rights.²¹ 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.²² 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

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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).

²¹ 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.

²² 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.²³

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”²⁴ status, obtaining the largest help and logistical support from the state. In parallel with functioning as an institution, Orthodoxy functions as a civil religion²⁵, 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.²⁶ 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,²⁷ enabling a new version of racist discourse designed to maintain ethno-national identity.²⁸ For these segments of the Church, the Orthodox way of life meant more than the simple presence of the Church in

²³ 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.

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

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

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ Nachescu, “Hierarchies of Difference,” 70-71.

²⁸ 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,²⁹ 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.³⁰

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."³¹ 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.³² 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"³³, local and central authorities took immediate action to remove them and threatened the companies which installed the banners. When the Orthodoxist identity was under

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ Duca, "Neolegionarismul," *ibid.*

³¹ Stychin, "Sexuality and European Union Accession in Romania," 122.

³² 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.

³³ 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.³⁴

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.³⁵ 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.”³⁶ 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”.³⁷

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 Hunter³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ Major organization like Focus on the Family, Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America laid off part of their

³⁴ Viski, *An Army of Generals*, 53.

³⁵ Woodcock, “Violent Containment,” 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

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

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

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

⁴⁰ Wilcox and Robinson, *Onward Christian Soldiers*, 54.

staff, experimented budget shortfalls and partially retreated from political activism until the election of Barack Obama.⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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,⁴³ not the same thing happened in Romania where demonizing homosexuality prevailed among Christians and where local gay assimilationist groups are not yet present.⁴⁴ Despite accusations, the UK based *Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement* and the American based *Catholics for Choice*⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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."⁴⁷ 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

⁴¹ Ibid., 78.

⁴² Ibid., 202.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 67.

⁴⁶ Viski, *An Army of Generals*, 44.

⁴⁷ 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.*⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹ 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 Counsel⁵⁰, 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.⁵¹

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,⁵² 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

⁴⁸ Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 11, 13-14.

⁴⁹ Buhuceanu, *Traditional Values*, 27.

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ wanderingeagle, "When Evangelical Christians Export their Culture Wars Abroad: Kim Davis and Liberty Counsel Fighting Gay Marriage in Romania," <https://wanderingeagle.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.

⁵² Buhuceanu, *Traditional Values*, 28-29.

proposals.⁵³ 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.*⁵⁴

In 2006 the Orthodox Church openly accused the government for letting the GayFest take place,⁵⁵ and letting the West interfere with the Romanian tradition, similar to what the godless “communists” did.⁵⁶ 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”.⁵⁷ 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:⁵⁸

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

⁵³ 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.

⁵⁴ Buhuceanu, *Traditional Values*, 29.

⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁶ Woodcock, “Violent Containment.” 7.

⁵⁷ Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 44.

⁵⁸ 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.*⁵⁹

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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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.””⁶² 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.

⁵⁹ Bob, *Clash of World Politics*, 30.

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ Nachescu, “Hierarchies of Difference,” 68.

⁶² 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),”⁶³ it found its way in the mainstream culture. Instead of the earlier morbid views linking homosexuals to incest, pedophilia, madness, and disease”⁶⁴, 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.*⁶⁵

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.”⁶⁶ 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.

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

⁶⁴ Puar, *Homonationalism*, chap. Logistics: mapping the text

⁶⁵ Blücker, *The Church as Nation*, 139-140.

⁶⁶ 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.”⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸ The lens was inseparable from the neoliberal discourse about reforms,⁶⁹ part of the political-economic preconditions that Romania was either very slow or unable to achieve.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ 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,’⁷² 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,⁷³

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

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ Tom Gallagher in Stychin, “We want to join Europe,” 131.

⁷⁰ Stychin, “We want to join Europe,” 118.

⁷¹ Bob, *Clash of world politics*, 46.

⁷² Woodcock, “A short history,” 65.

⁷³ 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.⁷⁴

Conclusions

A 2017 Pew Report showed that compared to other European countries Romania shows the lowest public acceptance of homosexuals.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶ Previous work showed that biblical literalism,⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸

Concerning family values, data from Eurobarometer 2017, shows that Romania is the 4th least satisfied EU member state regarding family life,⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ From 2014 onwards more attention goes towards documenting domestic violence, but a legislation change to protect women is still to occur.⁸¹ 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%

⁷⁴ Woodcock, “A shot History,” 66.

⁷⁵ 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.

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

⁷⁷ Amy Burdette in Bean and Martinez, “Evangelical Ambivalence,” 398.

⁷⁸ 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).

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

⁸⁰ Eurobarometer, “Future of Europe,” 28, 41, 45.

⁸¹ 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.⁸² 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.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴

⁸² Pew, *Religious Belief*, 57.

⁸³ 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.

⁸⁴ 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."⁸⁵ 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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⁸⁵ Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 154.

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2016, a Visible Year: discursive uses of visibility in LGBT activism in Bucharest, Romania

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Summary

This article is a partial result of an ethnographic research of the discursive uses of ‘visibility’ among LGBT activists in Bucharest. Apart from the Introduction and Conclusion, the article has three main sections: one dedicated to the theoretical framework I employ, one dedicated to the methodology of research and one dedicated to the analysis and discussion of my findings.

In the introductory section I will present the starting point and relevance of such analysis. In particular, I will show that 2016, the year in which the research took place, was often discursively framed by activists as a particularly good year for the visibility of the community: in terms of Pride march attendance, media and cultural representation and community growth. I will as well consider the visibility brought by the conservative anti-gay group *Coaliția pentru Familie* (Coalition for Family, ‘CpF’).

In the theoretical section I will present the scholarly debate I engage with, concerning visibility in the Central and Eastern European’s LGBT movements. In current literature, such visibility is either presented as uncritically positive and tied to emancipation, or as deriving from Western-centric values in dissonance with the local context and only falsely positive. I will argue that such distinction is to be broken down and be rendered more complex by looking at the local use of discourses around visibility.

In the methodological section I will describe my own subjective stance, the ethnographic approach and the qualitative methods used during the research.

The analysis section will be divided into two parts. In the first, I will present various discourses concerning the Pride march and the visibility tied to it. I will show how the Pride march is a catalyst for dissonance and contrasting stances within the community, despite being overwhelmingly supported and presented as positive or necessary. In the second part, I will engage



with the type of strategies concerning visibility that the two main LGBT NGOs –MozaiQ and ACCEPT– adopt and sustain. If ACCEPT seems to operate according to what I called *selective visibility*, a careful and architected one, and MozaiQ adopted a more *obstinate* style of visibility, more outspoken and indiscriminate. By analysing such stances, I will refute the idea that visibility is a self-evident concept to be either embraced or rejected. I aim to show how local actors, by means of agency and reflexivity, strategically and politically engage with broader discursive frameworks on visibility in various manners.

Abstract: Over the last years, activists in the LGBT community in Bucharest have pointed out and promoted a significant increase in visibility. From new associations being born to more people attending the Pride, from more media coverage of LGBT topics to flourishing cultural and artistic productions on LGBT issues, visibility appears on the rise, as often argued by local activists. Drawing on a 6-month-long ethnographic research and on extensive interviews with activists, artists and personalities in the community, this article explores and problematizes the meanings of visibility among such actors.

In dialogue with the current literature on LGBT movements and their visibility in the CEE region, the article will address various meanings of visibility on a collective level starting from the diverse stances towards the yearly Pride march and the different political approaches to visibility embraced by the main LGBT NGOs in Romania. This article will point out reflexivity and agency of local actors beyond and within the normative globalising forces of Western LGBT discourses.

Keywords: LGBT, visibility, activism, Romania, Pride, the Coalition for Family.

Introduction

There are small changes, but they are happening and they are significant. Starting from more and more people attending the Pride, every year (...) and more and more people coming out and being able to stand their ground and stand for themselves and just being out. I see a lot of related projects in the art scene, which is very encouraging. I see more people talking on TV about this. (Patrick, TRANSform¹)

¹ Names have been kept original or anonymised according to individual preferences. Roles and titles within associations refer to the time the research was conducted.

I am positive about the direction that the movement is taking. It has never been so good, so visible, so connected as a movement. Never have there been so many out people. (Vlad, MozaiQ President)

The picture painted in these opening quotes, which emerged in dialogue with activists Patrick and Vlad, refers to the moment of change the Romanian LGBT² movement is undergoing at the end of year 2016: more people are attending the Pride march, more people are joining the old and new associations and activist groups, which are currently growing. Despite the literature on LGBT issues in Romania focusing mostly on the processes that in 2001 lead to decriminalization of homosexuality, (Stychin 2003; Nachescu 2005; Turcescu and Stan 2005; Andreescu 2011, 228), and on professional lobbying-oriented activism embodied by the Bucharest-based NGO ACCEPT (Stychin 2003; Nachescu 2005; Woodcock 2011); a much richer scenario is disclosing. ACCEPT is no longer the only NGO, with new associations such as the trans-lead and focused NGO TRANSform, founded in 2013, and the newer LGBT NGO MozaiQ, founded in 2015, working towards an alternative style of activism. An unprecedented number of people attended Bucharest Pride in the summer of 2016, which saw 2500 participants, as opposed to the 1000 people attending the previous edition. In the capital, projects of cultural and artistic nature revolving around community issues are flourishing: with opening of new queer socializing spaces, with steady queer nightlife activity and with growing interest in LGBT topics from the independent artistic, cultural and journalistic scene. As observed by different activists, the LGBT community has never been as visible and represented in its own terms as today.

The importance given to visibility within the community is palpable. During an end-of-the-year meeting of MozaiQ, the handful of young members sitting in the cosy meeting room were explicitly asked by the meeting-leader to brainstorm on the following question: “what made 2016 a good year in terms of visibility?” This question struck me as particularly interesting not only because it implies a shared understanding of the current moment as one characterised by an increased visibility, but also because it presents visibility as self-evidently positive and desirable.

² LGBT will be used throughout the paper as the preferred acronym for a matter of clarity and simplicity more than for a political purpose. Moreover, its use is preferred over a distinction between LGBT and queer, in order to avoid a US-centric interpretation and chronology of queer and identitarian politics that might not necessarily apply to the Romanian context (see Mizelińska 2011, 85).

Curiously enough, the main reason listed as answer to this question by the meeting-participants was unanimously: “the *Coaliția pentru Familie*” (“CpF”, in English: Coalition for the Family). CpF is a civil society movement “upholding Christian and traditional values with the purpose of defending family and marriage” whose mission is to “protect and support the family based on marriage between a man and a woman” (*Coaliția pentru Familie*, 2017)³. In 2015 CpF launched a petition which gathered 2,698,447 signatures⁴ aiming at a change in the Constitution, restricting the definition of family to the marriage between a man and a woman. In their view, such a change would make it difficult for same-sex marriages to be legalized in Romania in the foreseeable future. However, the large media and political attention, as well as the visibility received by this campaign and –by proxy– by the LGBT community, were bitter-sweetly welcomed by some activists as unintentionally positive consequences of the debate.

Given these premises, a deeper reflection on the meanings of visibility seems pressing. Strikingly, though visibility is present in both emic and etic descriptions of the struggles against discrimination and inequality, its meaning and mechanism of promoting (social) change are not generally theorized. Moreover, as I will further discuss in the next section, visibility seems to be either assumed as obviously, and quite ethnocentrically so, emancipatory, or it seems to be theorized as alien to the local context and dismissed as falsely desirable. Both these approaches tend to overlook the agency of local actors in strategically engaging with discourses on visibility from various standpoints. In contrast, I tried to investigate precisely the plurality of discursive uses of visibility by LGBT activists.

Six months of research on the LGBT scene in Bucharest led me to obtaining an insight into discourses on collective visibility, particularly concerning contexts such as the Pride march, and LGBT organizations. Rather than merely looking at visibility as either an embraced or rejected concept, the analysis will focus on the shifting contextual meanings given to visibility by LGBT activists. It will be shown how the complexity of meanings that visibility can assume locally cannot be overlooked and that “LGBT visibility” as a commonly understood and monolithic concept should be problematised and broken down with a micro-scale approach.

³ This quote was to be found in an older version of their website, currently unavailable. The new version of the website is being rephrased and currently declares CpF to be apolitical and unaffiliated to any confession.

⁴ See Decision 580/2016 of the Constitutional Court of Romania, para. 32

Theoretical debates

Through this research I aim to engage with literature which approaches LGBT movements and its visibility in Central and Eastern Europe ('CEE') from variously critical viewpoints (Bilić 2016; Fejes and Balogh 2013; Kulpa and Mizielńska 2011; Woodcock 2009), which I will broadly reduce to two opposing stances. On one hand, visibility is presented as self-evidently tied to resistance and liberation and as a goal to be achieved overcoming societal homophobia (see for example Lorencová 2013; Fojtová and Sokolová 2013). Particularly, Lorencová (2013) sees growing media and international visibility of the LGBT community in Slovakia as a form of resistance "contesting heteronormativity and homophobia" (88). This positive take is shared by others, too, such as O'Dwyer (2012), who writes about the EU-fostered visibility of the LGBT cause in Poland as desirable even in face of the societal backlash it caused.

On the other hand, a second approach to visibility problematises the "Western gaze" in general (Navickaitė 2016) and specifically the Western narrative of LGBT liberation as universally desirable and as bound to follow a fixed linearity. For example, Butterfield (2016), Bilić (2016a) and Rexhepi (2016) present manifestation of publicness and visibility such as Pride marches in the former Yugoslav region as mere tools and symbols of EU enlargements politics played out using themes of tolerance and gay rights in an instrumental and colonial manner. Stella's (2012) ethnographic account of queer invisibility in provincial Russia shows how the assumption that visibility is per se positive is ethnocentric and normative, and seems to overlook how in certain contexts invisibility, rather than a sign of passivity and repression, holds potential for empowerment, safety and resistance. Indeed, visibility can not only lead to a potential polarization of the public opinion (Szulc 2011, 164), but it can have dangerous consequences and lead to hostility and violence (Miškovska Kajevska 2016; Stella 2012; Woodcock 2009).

However, both these stances seem— although to different degrees— to overlook the agency of the local subjects to engage with broader frameworks of power and to strategically embrace or resist the normalizing wave of Western discourses in contextual and reflexive ways. For this reason, in the ethnographic section, I will take a micro-focus on local discourses and meanings of visibility in order to move beyond the question of visibility as safe or unsafe, Western or local; refuting the notion that visibility is a monolithic and commonly understood concept.

Moreover, in order to unveil the complexities of local agency, a critical stance towards queer Western temporality and linearity is necessary. An Anglocentric conceptualization of LGBT

history and movements falls into a certain mainstream problematic discourse that presents Western narratives of LGBT liberation as universally desirable in their chronology. Such discourses present an imbalanced relationship between an enlightened and tolerant West that can teach and eventually redeem a homophobic and backward East: a colonial dynamic that Kulpa (2014) names “leveraged pedagogy”. As an alternative analytical tool, Mizielińska and Kulpa (2011) propose to look at LGBT movements in the CEE area through the lenses of *(geo)temporal disjuncture* and *queer asynchronicity* (Mizielińska 2011, 91), tools for de-centering queer theory from Western temporality. These concepts problematize narratives that see Central and Eastern Europe as in need to “catch up” with Western Europe, and to go through the various stages that the gay and queer movement went through in the West. Geotemporal disjuncture and queer asynchronicity acknowledge different stages, often contradictory discourses and tactics of LGBT movements as coexisting in a different linearity in the CEE region, not possible to be resumed and synthesized in an Anglocentric and Western model, that, despite appearing universal in discourse, is actually only applicable to a handful of local contexts, even within the “West” itself.

Methodology and Subjectivity

The ethnographic methodology provides great tools to look into the nuances of local uses and understandings of often taken-for-granted concepts, as shown by the good practice of the previously mentioned work by Stella (2012) on queer invisibility in provincial Russia and the research by Ross (2008), who explores local notions of visibility in urban LGBT Italian communities. These researches show how notions of visibility can be broken on an ethnographic level, as I will do.

I conducted ethnographic research from August 2016 to January 2017, which comprised participant observation at numerous events in Bucharest concerning LGBT activism and culture. I took part in relevant artistic and night-life events, as well as social and political events. Moreover, I conducted text analysis of online publications and posts, leaflets and community-related publications. I conducted 18 interviews with actors in the local LGBT scene, of which 4 are informal conversations and 14 are semi-structured in-depth interviews. While participant observation was conducted in Romanian, interviews were conducted in English and the quotes reported in the analysis section are original and not translated citations. My informant sample was a heterogeneous mix of activists of various gender identities and sexual orientations, but all having

in common their involvement in the scene. The majority of the informants belong to a younger generation of activists, the main current demographic involved in activism, who work on different projects: from NGOs (MozaiQ, ACCEPT, TRANSform) to artistic projects (narrative, theatre, photography, films) and festivals (Faqiff – Feminist and Queer International Film Festival); from university-based LGBT community organizations (CampusPride) to grassroots political and leisure collectives (Macaz, QueerNight). Through this sample, I attempted to cover most aspects of LGBT life in Bucharest concerning that specific timeframe.

Additionally, it is important for me to make use of this section to address my own subjectivity as a researcher, and the subject position I embody. On one hand, as a queer person involved in feminist and LGBT activism for some years, I felt a deep affinity and intuitive understanding of many of the community issues. My position granted me easier access and bond with many of the people I talked with, whose struggles and desires I largely share. On the other hand, my position as a Western researcher in the CEE region risked replicating a toxic and academically colonial system where Western and particularly Anglophone narratives and standards are arrogantly imposed on the region. Having experienced being an Italian student adapting to Northern European university standards, I kept wondering at what stage my own perspective and discourse became the one that I initially had to adapt to. At what stage did I stop being a –as they like to call us– “international” at a British or Dutch University and did I actively *become* that University? From which layer of privileged positionality was I conducting my research? If an awareness of these questions is by no means an answer in itself, such doubts became a present reminder over my data collection and analysis stages of the fact that my own identity was as much impactful as problematic, and that attention towards local knowledge, decolonial voices and critiques would be the only path to be followed to minimize my own biases.

Ethnographic Analysis

In the first section I will focus on discourses around the Bucharest Pride. I will emphasise how activists report a dissonance between such a visibility model, the socio-political context and the local format.

In the second section I will present two discursive approaches to visibility: a *selective* visibility (visibility desired only in certain contexts and under certain conditions), forwarded by the older and more institutional NGO ACCEPT; and an *obstinate* visibility (visibility desired in

most circumstances), forwarded by the newer NGO MozaiQ. The contrapositions of these two reflexive stances will emphasise the agency of activists in approaching a same goal of visibility from different political and strategical angles.

Visions of Pride

Gay Pride parades are increasingly globalised and widespread milestones of gay culture (Johnston 2005). Their institution in the CEE region is welcomed by some as a sign of liberation: “the emergence of annual Queer Pride Parades suggests the gradual overcoming of internalised shame and a growing emphasis on the desire to proudly and openly present diverse gender and sexual identities”, wrote Fojtová and Sokolová (2013, 108) concerning the situation in Czechia. However, other more critical voices challenge self-evident notions of visibility as paving the way towards LGBT liberation pointing at instances of EU-colonialism. For example, Bilić (2016a) stresses how the Sebian Pride was merely a political tool to favour EU entrance at the expenses of the LGBT community, which became an endangered pawn used in the political game. In dialogue with these debates, starting from the fact that activists embrace complex and varied stances towards the Pride march, I will further problematize what notions of visibility do Pride marches entail locally and show that the theoretical categorisations of visibility should be much more nuanced when placed in the Romanian context.

First of all, a discourse that pictures the kind of visibility obtainable through the Pride marches as positive and as sort of indicative of advancements of the movement was presented to me by ACCEPT’s president, Florin, who emphasised how the emergence of new voices and public figures is desirable, although not enough:

I mean, the fact that so few known LGBT people are vocal, are visible, embrace their identity in public is a big... continues to remain a big minus. So unfortunately this is still part of our reality today. And that's why it's so important to have this public gathering once, twice, as many times per year, like Pride marches, public events that are related to the LGBT, queer culture. (Florin, President of ACCEPT)

In this case, Florin highlighted the absence of LGBT public figures as negative. Given this absence, collective public visibility is even more needed. Both the need of individual and collective public visibility are framed as desirable, and their absence as undesirable, and as a sign of

‘backwardness’: “this is still part of our reality today”, hinting at need to catch up to a more advanced present, which is already a reality elsewhere.

Navickaitė (2016) pointed out how “the binary logic of “the West versus the Rest” which apparently relies primarily on a *spatial* partition of the globe, always operates in *temporal* terms as well, constructing the non-Western other as a backward other” (129). This temporal and spatial separation sets the basis for framing the CEE region as perpetually in need to catch-up to the West, to—as I formulated—a present happening elsewhere: an almost-there-yet-not-quite state of disparity that is well present in discourses over LGBT rights (Kulpa 2014, 432; Butterfield 2016, 49). This is not to say that such stances are adopted uncritically by activists. Indeed, as Giddens pointed out more than two decades ago, the reflexive nature of modern subjects is unavoidable, which comes from “the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices” (Giddens 1990, 38). Moreover, such subjects hold agency which allows them to navigate power frameworks and resist domination by sustaining personal and cultural projects (Ortner 2006, 143-145). Given these premises, LGBT activists’ discourses explicitly appealing to Western or EU models and values can be seen as reflectively and actively embraced by activists for a variety of strategical reasons. Those can vary from the necessity to appeal to funders, international networks and national and supranational institutions (Butterfield 2016) to the need to appeal to the larger local public opinion (Ayoub 2013, 299).

A second stance presenting the Pride and public visibility as a positive engine of change emerged in dialogue with Vlad, the president of MozaiQ, who belongs to a younger generation of activists. Before one of our meetings, I found interesting points of debates in an academic article he wrote on the recent history of Romanian LGBT activism (Viski 2016), where he critically approached the politics of visibility and Pride as not in line with Romanian locality. When questioned about it, his answer disclosed a strategic and reflexive stance:

The thing is that the Gay Pride itself, the going out in the streets in more colourful manner is obviously an imported concept. (...) It created a tension in the gay movement in Romania. First, the lack of compatibility between the Pride itself and let's say the local context -and the local gay community- is shown through [scarce] participation. (...) The second one is that if we look at the debates in these gay blogs and in all sort of community instances you have a discourse of the LGBT community saying "we don't wanna show ourselves in public, we do not agree with this type of, of Pride...". So there's

a rejection from the community of this idea. But obviously myself I don't agree with this view, because I think visibility is the only way you can go. (...) I think slowly, slowly (...) you do have more acceptance of these Gay Prides. (...) I think without the Gay Prides we would not be where we are today. (Vlad)

The discourse forwarded by Vlad renders the issue more complex. On the one hand he integrates in his pro-visibility and pro-Pride stance with a critical awareness of its foreign origin and its partial incompatibility with some local actors. On the other hand, he refuses to accept such incompatibility as prescriptive, which means that he refuses to let this premise block further action. The incompatibility between the local community and the kind of visibility proposed through the Pride format is thus highlighted as forming a sort of dissonance between those who do not wish for publicness and those activists who embrace it. The stance taken by Vlad, which reflectively challenges the perceived local hostility towards visibility, resonates with James Baer's statement (2009, 39 in Navickaitė 2016, 130) who argued that an attachment to 'local' non-Western stances as *per-se* liberating falls into a false rhetoric that romanticise what might be an oppressed position. The strategic adoption of Pride's visibility, in such discourse, entails a refusal to idealise local ways of being as immutable and a willingness to take action despite and in face of such premises, even with the full awareness of the dissonance to the local context that an "obviously imported concept" carries.

Given this dissonance, it is important to emphasise how the Pride became a catalyst of local plurality of community stances, and indeed it evoked different reactions among many of the people I interviewed. The importance to make sense of such a format in the Romanian context and its specific needs often emerged. For example, activist and film critic Andrei pointed out how the Pride is not political enough, and too party-like in dissonance to the needs of the current climate:

The queer Pride here should be more political...because, you know, you just take the pattern which is exploited abroad without taking into consideration the needs of the queer community here. And yes of course in, let's say, countries like France, England and so on, you do have the Pride conceived as a huge party. But here the needs of the community are slightly different... and of course I am not against parties! I support that thing, it has to be something cheerful, but it also has to be something more aware of the political context. (Andrei)

On the other hand, others considered it not like a party at all. Adrian –anthropologist and author of a successful semi-autobiographical gay novel– stated:

[the Pride is] still more like a parade. The party... it doesn't convince me as a party, you know. Because people feel stressed, you know, to party. The party is after. (...) I think it is about the fear of exposing, you know...the stress to be exposed. (Adrian)

While Andrei's and Adrian's positions appear antithetical, they do similarly address the fact that the Pride format and the local context interact and collide. Particularly, Adrian's quote highlights the aforementioned tension of exposure that Vlad mentioned too. Moreover, during our interview, Adrian critically added how the "Pride is about middle class". This critique is echoed by artist J., working with marginalised fringes of the community such as transgender sex workers. J. bitterly declared to me: "No, the people from the world that I am photographing, they are not the Pride people". They added:

In Romania the Pride is super fun. There were some incidents back in the past, but in the last years not. And it's like, very under the vibe of fun. But we should point out some things too, that we have this context...that's the problem with the Pride, that we're trying to mask things with "everything is fun", but deep down there are laying like huge problems, undiscovered problems, everyone's like...too laid back. (J.)

What emerges from these contrasting views is the fact that the Pride represents a point of dissonance for activists. Such dissonance can be interpreted through the lenses of *(geo)temporal disjuncture* (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011) and *queer asynchronicity* (Mizielińska 2011, 91), analytical tools that acknowledge alternatives to Western temporal narratives of sexualities. Such lenses relate to the Pride being a point of dissonance, because temporal disjuncture and queer asynchronicity point at how different stages and discourses on LGBT liberation do coexist in a non-linearity, contradictory and tangled matter.

In this sense, disjuncture and asynchronicity can as well be seen as potentially rich for alternative political developments of the movement. Such stance is for example framed by activist, artist and scholar Veda who criticised the recent commercialization and presence of corporations as sponsors of the Pride:

The Pride still is not that bad, although it is bad. If we don't move quickly... like the tendency globally, all the Prides are appropriated by megacorporations and they're highly used to pinkwash all kinds of governmental shit. And if we don't, you know, if we don't do something soon, this will naturally just come about in Romania. (Veda)

Tangled and not-aligned alternatives to an Anglo-American narrative linearity and chronology of the LGBT movement could be potentially seen as an occasion to create a different and better narrative for the movement; a narrative informed by the Western origins of Pride, that entails its commercialization and its instrumentalisation for political purposes. The need to “move quickly” that Veda refers to is the urgency to enact a different pathway from the prefixed and dead-ended-looking narrative of Western LGBT movements, which are currently endangered by nationalist, imperialist and capitalist threats, as argued for example by Puar (2007) and Schulman (2011), who pointed out at phenomena such as homonationalism and pinkwashing. Imagining alternatives to the Anglocentric LGBT linearity, in this case, means imagining alternatives to the hijacking of social movements by corporate speculations and State interests.

As it will be shown in the next section, the Pride is not the only occasion to be publicly and collectively visible. Furthermore, issues of political visibility are often discussed in the community.

Visibility and Political Strategies

19 November 2016, a sunny day of protest. After a couple weeks of online campaigning, the day has come for the ‘Susțin LGBT’ (Eng. ‘I support LGBT’) march, a street protest organised under the slogan of ‘Dumnezeu nu face politică’ (Eng. ‘God does not do politics’). The march is meant to protest against the CpF initiative for changing the Constitution. It involves mostly young people, known faces from the community and many allies. While we gather waiting for more people to come, the organisers walk around distributing lyrics for the chants to be shouted, banners and tools to make noise. Most of the chants include slogans pro equal rights and against homophobia. Some slogans such as “homophobia destroys Romania” or “my country will not be taken by Putin or Russia” (which was eventually not chanted) create some controversy with the more radical participants, who refuse to carry “nationalist” signs and choose instead to parade with a banner reading “Queer is not a middle-class cause”. Plenty of police and journalists surround the gathering, which nonetheless proceeds uninterrupted and without tension in the city, with an

attendance of more than 500 people. I overhear excitement among people about the exceptional circumstance of having the voice of the LGBT community loud in the city.

However, this protest is not the Pride, and not everyone chose to participate: the association ACCEPT is not present. When I questioned the association's president about the reasons for the absence, I received this explanation:

[Susțin LGBT] was not organised by ACCEPT, that's the first thing. Secondly (...) as an organization dealing with political parties it was our engagement that we will not raise the issue during the electoral campaign. We take seriously our own engagement with our allies. (...) We do understand why [other organizations] are doing and how they are doing... I have some debates regarding how strategic they are. But that's a long discussion and I think any organization is entitled to have its own strategy or lack of strategy or whatever. (Florin)

This quote discloses the position towards visibility adopted by the ACCEPT branch of professional NGO activism, which could be called *selective visibility*. The official discourse of ACCEPT, highlighted both in this interview and through monitoring of their online presence, is pro-visibility. However, such desirable visibility is one strategically architected, which concerns carefully selected court cases possibly leading to significant legal changes, alliances with other organizations on a national and international level, appeals to European Union organs and supranational institutions and so on. This choice implies a careful relationship towards visibility, which, as highlighted in the quote, might come at the cost of previous political commitments. While not rejecting the need for visibility and publicness, and organising and supporting the annual Pride, selective visibility is a carefully measured one, to the point that actually a short-term invisibility is considered in certain circumstances more desirable, if eventually leading to positive strategic goals:

We managed to convince the main political parties to de-couple the referendum from political elections. I think this is an important small victory, but still a victory; otherwise the whole election cycle will be saturated by 'anti-', by hateful messages related to sexuality. (Florin)

This position was also sustained online, on the official Facebook page of ACCEPT, which praised the small victory obtained with the separation of the political elections from the proposed constitutional referendum. The temporary invisibility obtained by the de-coupling of the

‘referendum for family’ and the political elections is seen as strategically desirable, since it would avoid an unfavourable instrumentalization of the topic. The strategy of visibility adopted by ACCEPT matches the description that Butterfield (2016, 24) provides of professionalised NGO activism, mostly focused on lobbying and advocacy, discursively constructed as more ‘serious’ and hierarchically above grassroots activism.

A middle ground between professionalised and grassroots activism is adopted by younger associations such as MozaiQ and TRANSform. A board member of the former, explicitly defines ACCEPT as dedicated to mostly lobbying, while MozaiQ as dedicated to “political visibility debates” (Ovidiu, board member of MozaiQ and feminist scholar). These newer associations rejected the tactic of selective visibility, as it emerged in interviews with MozaiQ board members, since they were dissatisfied with the scarce public visibility fostered by such a carefully strategic approach:

Anyways ACCEPT refused to be part of that protest. That's another instance in which ACCEPT in many ways was just going on their own path and they (...) weren't convinced of this idea of going out on the streets being a good idea. I still think it was a great idea because we had 250 - 300 people. For the first time in University square, which is symbolic in Romania because that's where all the protests happened. (Vlad)

This quote refers to a previous protest that happened in the spring, but might as well apply to the Susțin LGBT March, where again different associations chose to either not participate or to participate according to their own vision of public visibility: strategically unsound or symbolically and politically necessary. Newer associations with less strategic limitations can choose to operate according to more *obstinate visibility*. TV debates, online controversies, political marches, workshops and lectures: visibility is desirable in itself, and obtainable through various means.

Because for example ACCEPT, they refuse any participation in any debate with any opposition. So they only go to these TV shows which are civil and which are, ok maybe you have opposition but only one, and it's very official discourse, whereas I prefer to go also on debates with, let's say, more aggressive people. (Vlad)

Visibility by various means is here preferred over carefully orchestrated visibility. However, obstinate visibility is not to be considered un-strategic. As already stressed, to understand the reflexive nature of the adoption of any of these styles of visibility is to acknowledge

the agency of all activists, who have different reasons for opting for one or the other. For example, obstinate visibility could be seen as a strategy in its allowing for very different stances to coexist without clashing: contextually shifting discourses can coexist in the same line of activism – ‘nationalist’ banners and an anti-classist and anti-racist stance, as described in the vignette. As Mizielińska (2011, 89) explained in a study on Poland, queer asynchronicity allows for identitarian and queer discourses to coexist and be formulated by the same association. In this context, obstinate visibility encapsulates a plurality of stances, prioritising visibility per se. Furthermore, obstinate visibility can allow for a plurality of alliances and dialogue with more interlocutors: changing audience and allies either over time or navigating them simultaneously. As Ovidiu stated:

It's true that [MozaiQ] was [started] in response to a specific reluctance with ACCEPT, let's say. It was an anti-movement, let's say. But then, we actually started to collaborate with ACCEPT (...). (We) are now collaborating, yeah I think pretty well. (Ovidiu)

Obstinate visibility is seen as almost an end in itself and as a position more favourable and desirable than closeted-ness. For this reason, it can happen that concerns of people opposing such visibility as dangerous more than beneficial are dismissed by younger activists as fear-based and coming from a position of oppression:

Most of them [concerns] are fear-based. Based not on things they directly experienced but on things they heard within their family and in society all their lives... so they just repeat what is being said. And there's always gonna be people like that I mean, but it's fine, that's why we go out and do stuff like that, so we do it (...) also for the people that are still afraid or are not able to talk like that. (Nina, activist)

With such discursive stance, the circle seems to be complete. Despite being strategically and reflexively embraced, visibility is yet again made to appear as obviously positive and self-evidently desirable, to the extent that activists who are visible are discursively constructed as vicariously fulfilling the desires of those who cannot be visible, or even don't wish to be, maybe victims of some sort of ‘false consciousness’.

Conclusion

This article stands as a contribution to current scholarly debates around LGBT issues in the CEE. The article addresses and unveils the complexity of the often taken for granted notion of ‘visibility’. In the context of the previous literature on LGBT issues in CEE that presents visibility as either a self-evidently desirable outcome to be reached or an alien and imposed state of being, I showed how activists in Bucharest complicate this view by assuming various strategic reflective stances, and by diversifying the contextual meaning of visibility. It is not sufficient to ask whether visibility is embraced or rejected, as some of the previous literature has done. What needs to be asked is to which extent is visibility embraced or rejected and how is visibility framed locally? In which occasions is visibility embraced or rejected? The agency of activists is not to be overlooked, nor is their capacity to navigate different discourses and stances that complicate previous notions of LGBT visibility.

More discursive layers have been explored by looking at how the Pride is talked about and conceptualised by activists. The strategic adoption of Pride as a tool for visibility leaves room for engagements in debates over its dissonance with the local context and its potential to follow a different path than the Western model. Moreover, I analysed different strategies of visibility adopted by the two main NGOs in Romania, revealing how visibility can be promoted and embraced while using quite different discourses. I described the approach of ACCEPT as promoting *selective visibility*, while the one of MozaiQ as promoting *obstinate visibility*. In both the first and second section of the analysis, this article has shown how different conceptions of visibility coexist in the LGBT community in Bucharest, and how, although they seek to reach similar objectives, they are consciously framed in different ways.

Further research is needed to cover topics left out from this analysis, such as how and whether discourses on visibility imply underlying struggles over representation, respectability and deviance or how is visibility conceived outside the area of Bucharest. In particular, an important contribution would be made by studies conducted from an intersectional perspective meant to show how factors such as geographical origin, level of education, ethnicity, class or gender influence the discourse on LGBT visibility in Romania.

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LIVED STORIES. TOLD STORIES. PERSONAL NOTES

Exploring Experiences of Transgender Identity Development in Romania

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Abstract: This article is looking at gender identity as a range of beliefs, perceptions and experiences. These are shaped in a life-long process of self perception, often triggered by cognitive dissonance, and also by interacting with the forms of social and political power manifesting in an individual's milieu.¹ We focus on the beliefs and experiences of transgender persons with a view to explore their perceptions of their own gender and their take on how transphobia in Romania might be addressed effectively. For the purposes of this article, we have had interviews/correspondence with members of the Romanian transgender community.

Keywords: gender identity, transgender Romania, beliefs, social change.

Background: What shapes and moves Romanian gender norms?

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the conversation on transgender rights and legal gender recognition has gained momentum and even a few important victories – but not in Romania. Romanian society is miles behind mentalities, policy trends or academic discourse regarding gender diversity, compared to Malta, Germany, or Sweden, for example. In Romania the conversation is still dominated by straight cisgender ‘normal’ men – and priests. Power is fiercely defended by preservers of ‘family values’ or ‘our 2000-year old orthodox traditions’ – who often preach sexism or domestic ‘corrective’ violence as ‘god-ordained’ normalcy. Naturally, this state of affairs has a heavy impact on gender construction, maintenance and enforcement.

¹ Jeanne Marecek, Mary Crawford, and Danielle Popp, “On the Construction of Gender, Sex, and Sexualities,” in *The Psychology of Gender*, ed. Alice H. Eagly, Anne E. Beall, and Robert J. Sternberg (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2004), 192–216.



In this section we are going to discuss three of the most important determinants of Romanians' understanding and acceptance of gender diversity. We believe that it is useful for readers with less exposure to Romanian culture to get a gist of the general atmosphere in Romanian society as far as the discussion on gender identities, roles and expressions is concerned.

The Romanian Orthodox Church

In 2009, the US State Department's report on religious freedom said about the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR):

*'Due to its dominant role, the Romanian Orthodox Church has a substantial influence on the majority of the population and the legislators, and Orthodox religious leaders are the only ones participating in public events of national importance. Thus, many Orthodox leaders have appeared publicly alongside important politicians, and announcements from this religious institution often make political promises or lay forth political goals and support to certain political positions.'*²

Things have not changed much since this report was issued, quite the contrary: we're sitting on the brink of a national referendum costing well into an 11-digit figure (in Euros), which will make it even less likely in the near future for gay people to get married. The Orthodox Church keeps a strict watch over Romanian politicians, and many suspect the Church's leverage comes not only from politicians' thirst for image capital, but also from serious financial interests. BOR's assets and revenue are all tax-free. The overall worth of the Romanian Orthodox Church has been assessed at over 3 billion Euros – which puts it in the same league as oil company Petrom or the Romanian Commercial Bank, for example.³ In 2015 only, the net profit declared by BOR was almost 4 million Euros.⁴ The most dangerous effects of BOR's power can be found in the public system of education.

Bigotry in education

Although Romania is a lay country, religion is taught in all schools, K-12. It surreptitiously entered the stream in the early 90's and by the beginning of the new millennium it had become a by-default ingredient of the core curriculum at all levels. Alarm signals about infringements to freedom

² "Freedom of Religion Report" (Washington, DC: US State Department, 2009), <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/132848.pdf>.

³ "Averea Bisericii Ortodoxe Depaseste 3 Miliarde Euro," *Standard.Ro*, August 19, 2007, <https://www.money.ro/averea-bisericii-ortodoxe-depaseste-3-miliarde-euro-1/>.

⁴ Bianca Dobrescu, "Sfintele Afaceri Ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române," *Capital.Ro*, June 22, 2016, <http://www.capital.ro/sfintele-afaceri-ale-bisericii-ortodoxe-romane.html>.

of conscience began to be raised by social sciences high school teacher Emil Moise in 2005 (the case against *icons* in public schools)⁵ and then again in the fall of 2012, when we formed a coalition of 30+ nonprofit organizations, which met with the Ministry of Education to insist that instead of it being an opt-out, confessional religion should be an opt-in class. This finally came through in 2014 thanks to the same Emil Moise, who took the case to the European Court for Human Rights: now, students are no longer by default registered for the religion class, but have to opt in – meaning their parents have to write file a request that their child be registered for this class. In reality, students who do not attend religion are either bullied by religious teachers for being an ‘atheist!’ or their parents sign them up for the class against their own beliefs, because schools do not offer alternative activities/spaces – which makes safety an major issue in Romanian schools.

What makes the presence of confessional religion, priests and such, so problematic for gender inclusive education is that it maintains codes of behavior inside a very patriarchal, sexist, homophobic and transphobic frame. Teachers continue to say things like: ‘Well, you’re actually not bad at all in Maths, for a girl,’ ‘Mihai, don’t move your hands like that when you talk – what are you, gay?’, ‘What kind of girl are you, look at your hair and your clothes!.’

At the same time, if a girl comes to school dressed as if she will go to a club straight after school, few if any will comment – and male teachers will remark on a female student’s prurience openly, in the school staff room.

Media sensationalism

There is little of note in the Romanian mass-media regarding trans persons – in the sense that the coverage is quite uniformly presenting self-objectified and self-oversexualized trans women like Naomi or Rodica Moroșanca.⁶ In the host’s and therefore public eye, these persons are men, dressed as women – therefore what they are retained as is gay men – especially as they sometimes make sexual allusions to male hosts or other guests.⁷ Perhaps one of the most negative effects this kind of coverage has is precisely on the beliefs of members of the LGBTQIA+ community itself. The over-self-sexualization of these women is seen as an embarrassment by many LGBTQIA+ persons who

⁵ “CNCD Decision 323/2006,” *Wikipedia*, n.d., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CNCD_Decision_323/2006

⁶ For an example of a self-sexualized trans person who enforces the general confusion gender versus sex, and also rubs many transgender persons the wrong way: <http://www.stiridecluj.ro/divertisment/bataie-la-emisiunea-acces-direct-video>. The video is in Romanian, but it’s really not consequential if you do not speak Romanian.

⁷ Anca Simionescu, “ROMANII AU TALENT. SEXY MOROSANCA s-a Dat La Smiley in Culise,” *Evz.Ro*, March 8, 2014, <http://evz.ro/romanii-au-talent-sexy-morosanca-s-a-dat-la-smiley-in-culise-1085989.html>.

consider themselves as ‘proper’ people. We would like to note here that the over-self-sexualization is done in the belief that that’s what a ‘real’ woman is like: make up, breasts, augmented lips, high heels. If you are a trans woman, it is natural to overdo these characteristics in the first stage of your transition – sort of catching up on all the lost years when you had to dress like a man – or as a rule, if you are a performer or other professional who gets a lot of attention. In this same passage we must mention also that ‘passing’ (passing unnoticed, not as trans; fitting in) is something that is often made fun of by the media: cameras zoom in on trans women’s lips, breasts or hips for no reason, the comments to the trans woman’s answers are sarcastic etc. This entertains the public – and sells. So why change it?

Even less biased coverage, like trans activist Sasha Ichim’s 2013 interview⁸, repeats the mistake of insisting on sexuality as a clarifier of ‘what’ exactly this ‘transsexual’ person is: gay or straight?! The interviewee is talking about judges and gender politics in the family, and ambassadors and such – but the interviewer goes back to ‘so how do you have sex’ type of questions a few times.

However, while presenting non-cisgender persons in the media sells, we would not say this happens too often. So we would end this section with the observation that the media does have a penchant for sensationalism when it comes to trans identities, journalists exercise much caution, or much control is exercised on them, that the quantity is not too big – due the general public’s rejection of ‘too much’ on this type of subject. Ultimately, media outlets’ priority is that they do not lose viewers/readers.

On a positive note, the most recent (to date) coverage of transgender life in Romania comes from ‘Stiri de Iasi’, in the form of two wonderfully unbiased pieces, albeit with sensationalist titles – a good strategy to attract but also educate readers on what transgender means. The author makes no reference to sexual or romantic intimacy, which is a definite glimmer of hope.⁹

⁸ Sabina Fati, “Interviu Cu Sasha Ichim, Transsexual: „Sunt Judecători Care Spun Că Suntem Niște Monștri”,” *Romania libera*, June 9, 2013, <https://romanalibera.ro/opinii/interviuri/interviu-cu-sasha-ichim-transsexual-sunt-judecatori-care-spun-ca-suntem-niste-monstri-304217.html>.

⁹ Emilia Nedelcoff, “Povestea Mariei Care Vrea Sa Fie Matei: ”Doamne, Fă Să-Mi Crească Cuc!”,” *Stirideiasi.Ro*, March 31, 2018, <https://www.stirideiasi.ro/povestea-mariei-care-vrea-sa-fie-matei-doamne-fa-sa-mi-creasca-cuc> and Emilia Nedelcoff, “E Băiat, Dar Stă În Camera de Cămin Cu Fetele. Pentru Că În Buletin e Și El Fată,” *Stirideiasi.Ro*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.stirideiasi.ro/e-baiat-dar-sta-camera-de-camin-cu-fetele-pentru-ca-buletin-e-si-el-fata>.

Conceptual frame

Gender is often used interchangeably with ‘sex’. However, as gender diversity is gaining recognition in some parts of the world, public policies and institutions are beginning to integrate an increased social awareness that gender is rather the expectations and beliefs associated with people endowed with certain physical characteristics. These beliefs and expectations are often short-handed as ‘norms,’ built around a binary (male-female) axis: the idea that we ‘naturally’ identify as either male or female. The nature-nurture debate regarding gender is still very much on: is our gender identity rooted in biology, in other words born ‘naturally’ as an effect of the biological characteristics we are born with, and only refine-shaped by culture and socialization? Or is it molded socially, culturally – with biology playing a secondary role? In the discussion of our findings, we will look at whether/how the interviewees relate to the nature/nurture debate and whether this has an effect on their self-perceived gender identity.

Gender roles and expression norms/beliefs are also of great importance in any discussions related to gender conformity or recognition. The expectations of society and oneself to perform certain functions in certain ways are very important in the process of self-realization, for healthy social interactions. In weighing the potentiality of social change, we must consider both internal and external awareness of how these expected roles have come to be. To avoid any ambiguity: personal identification of one’s own gender is nothing to be debated; internal awareness of gender roles or gender expression can, however, be the direct reflection of societal norms and our allegiance to them, born out of a desire to belong, to be safe, or both.

Our individual and collective psyches are deeply imbued by historically, geographically, socially and culturally constructed notions of (the roles and expressions of) masculinity, femininity and (if the case) neither or both. Without prompting any guidance, most of us never come to realize that what we hold as profoundly intimate beliefs, or other psychological triggers of behavior, attitudes, even emotions, are not only the result of socialization and discipline by parents and others, but also the reflection of practices and interests that meddle with our self-awareness and construction of our selves in rather perverse and insidiously intrusive ways. But does that make our beliefs false – or wrong? My answer is that when it comes to gender, there is no wrong answer.

If we stop to look at two of the oldest explicitly acknowledged transgender identities – South-Asian hijras and Native-American two-spirit people – this approach may seem less radical. While hijra means neither male, nor female, two-spirit means both. Both identities were socially integrated

for millennia before heteronormativity became an instrument of political power and coerced conformity. Nowadays, two-spirit people are trying to regain the respect and security severely damaged by white christian colonialism. The surviving 500 nations native to the North American continent still use a wide range of terms on the 4 main gender axes they operate with: feminine woman, masculine woman, feminine man, masculine man. Two-spirit is a pan-nation or pan-tribe term, sometimes confused with gay and native American, often appropriated by non-native persons – but definitely a term that incorporates feminine and masculine, regardless of biology. Hijra, on the other hand, is a term that means neither male, nor female – again, biology is dismissed, although in some South-Asian countries hijra do sometimes undergo castration rituals/surgery. It is in addition imbued with the social, cultural and political consequences of the economic precarity, high HIV infection rates, sex work and/or begging as often integral parts of hijra communities. Spirituality also plays a huge part in how hijras are integrated in South-Asian societies. Interestingly, despite high levels of transphobia, hate crime and hate-speech, South-Asian trans activism has been instrumental to the passing of third-gender recognition – first in Asian countries like Nepal, India, Thailand, and now also in European countries like Germany or Austria. Two-spirit and hijra can be intersex, but that is not the norm. Hence, we can conclude that being aware of one’s biology plays a role in realizing one’s gender identity only inasmuch as it leads to an awareness of the norms regulating the social functioning of a body. If these norms are very constricting and there is danger for one’s physical, social and emotional well-being, naturally cognitive dissonance will break the self-perception process – as we will see in some of the findings below, and the ensuing discussion.

Finally, before going into the presentation and discussion of our findings, let us lay forward 3 key concepts for our discussion. They have already been integrated in this conceptual frame already, but for the sake of academic convention, we will now offer an explicit albeit brief discussion of what they mean, and what makes them relevant to our topic.

Self perception

Observation of own behavior is what makes self perception possible; people understand how they feel and what they believe by paying attention to how they behave.¹⁰

¹⁰ Daryl Bem, “Self-Perception Theory,” in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. Leonard Berkowitz, vol. 6 (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1972), 1–63.

Self-knowledge is essential for decision-making, therefore for moving forward with one's life. When individuals are not self-aware and especially when they are forced away from self-knowledge into conformity at all costs, the body of society, as that of the individual, can be but corrupt, unhealthy. The outcome of poor self-knowledge allows for totalitarianism and/or crime as norm. This is highly relevant for our discussion, given that Romanian society is still dominated by patriarchy in social and political structures (see Background notes on the Romanian Orthodox Church below), which means that self-perception is not only not socially enforced as a positive thing, as in most collectivist societies, but is often detracted or corrupted through social control under different forms, as we will see in the findings and ensuing discussion below.

Cognitive dissonance

This is a clash between an individual's preferences, values, 'normality' – and what they are told these should be, ought be, they should enjoy or have.¹¹ In dealing with this dissonance, individuals clarify their values and identities – which sometimes means conforming and embracing something they do not feel is their own view or identity, but that seems safe and gives them the security of acceptance from the larger community. This is actually often the case of LGBTQIA+ persons, as we will see in some of their accounts below.

Social control

Social control is exercised through rules and norms that are internalized by individuals, who will voluntarily refrain from expressing or committing certain things, so as to remain tied to the larger community.¹² Initially used to explore and understand criminal deviance, it was expanded in the direction of identity mechanics with the birth of queer theory. Thus, heteronormativity is power exercised through social control: individuals experience personal self-perception crises and stigmatization/exclusion if they do not match the profile of 'normal' gender identity. Moreover, they internalize hetero-'normality' so deeply, that self-acceptance is a very long process in the case of

¹¹ Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (California: Stanford University Press, 1957).

¹² John E. Farley, *Sociology* (Prentice Hall, 1990).

LGBTQIA+ persons, especially when pathologization is also involved – like in the case of transgender persons.¹³

Finally, a note on Foucault’s ‘biopower.’ He begins his ‘History of Human sexuality’ by questioning the 20th century Western belief that, beginning with late 17th century until quite well into the 20th century, open mention of sexually-related matters was repressed, due to the ascent of the bourgeoisie and capitalism. He calls this the ‘repressive hypothesis’ and from it he traces the emergence of sexuality as a construct used to control people and power.¹⁴ In the shift of power defined not so much as ‘the right to death’ (feudal lords could rightfully kill virtually anybody anytime) but more like ‘the right to live’, modern states now exercise ‘biopower.’ This biopower is built on the outlook of the human body as a machine – which can and should be disciplined and optimized in the name of ‘safety and progress.’

Thesis statement

Gender recognition in Romania, socially and legally, is dependent on the interactions between the gender-related beliefs and experiences of gender-conforming and gender-diverse persons, legislators, judges, public and social institutions. These interactions need to be documented and put forth for a discussion on gender recognition to become possible in our country. This is why our thesis is not a hypothesis, a contention – but rather a first attempt to make Romanian transgender voices heard in an academic journal, speaking about those interactions that need to be documented towards legal recognition and social acceptance of gender diversity. In this first contribution, we are exploring what are some of the things that shape transgender people’s gender-related beliefs, how/when people become aware of these beliefs as their ‘own’ – and how social control is exercised in the process of self-realization, acceptance and affirmation.

Findings and discussion

For the purposes of this article, we have interviewed 10 Romanian transgender persons between the ages of 25 and 35. We have used these questions to guide our discussions:

¹³ While in June 2018 the World Health Organization moved ‘gender incongruence’ from the mental health disorders section to the sexual health conditions, this news is expected by trans activists to take a long time before it reaches the practice of Romanian law and the medical professionals. In support of this, we still do not have any protocols or standards binding legal or medical professionals in cases of legal cases or medical care.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (London: Allen Lane, 1979).

- When did you first become consciously aware of what it means to be boy or girl?
- How do you think you came to have these notions?
- What about other people's beliefs about what it means to be a boy or a girl?
- How did you become aware of them, and what impact did it have on you/your beliefs?
- What would be most effective in re-shaping/influencing Romanian's beliefs about gender – especially those beliefs which propagate transphobia and homophobia?

Below we will paste selections from the participants' discourse in response to above prompts, as well as a brief analysis for each discussion we have had – the analysis will also make reference to points in the discussions and personal observations of the interviewer, who has had a long-standing friendship with some of the interviewees.

My voice has always been too shrill and thin, not masculine at all, this has always been a disappointment for me. I guess I might have taken up smoking when I was very young in hopes that my voice would get thicker. When I was in middle school, I was very tall and big, and I was always hanging out with the boys. But when I would speak, they would say I'm making fun of them (If you have that voice, why are you so big?! What kind of girl are you?!) and then I would be bullied and beaten. My mom's reaction when I told her I thought boys were cooler and that I wanted to be more with them than with girls: oh my god, you'll be the village slut!

What we first notice in this answer is the respondent's reference to early dissonance caused by self-disappointment with own not-masculine-enough voice, which led to bullying, which then led to a coping behaviour (smoking) to alleviate it. Based on my empirical observations in the pre-teen and teen years of our respondent, bullying was doubled by self-harmful behaviour for a good 2-3 years, thus emphasizing the subject's internalization of the bullies' message that they were less valuable as a human being for not sounding like a man and not behaving and looking like a 'proper' girl. The (biological) mother the respondent lived with was never supportive of their non-conformity to binary gender patterns, and since early childhood criticized their opinions and behavior – see above for the parent taking completely amiss the child's preference to spend time with boys more than with girls. While socialization was not forced upon the respondent, and thus could not have contributed to social control in their case, social control was performed through constant bullying and stress of having to justify and defend their opinions, outfits, behaviours.

Transphobia and homophobia will be combated if we patiently and calmly try to influence people's mentalities, by offering information on gender and sexuality and being more visible in the public space. Unfortunately in Romania gender identity and sexual orientation are confused by most, and both of them are understood as sexual

practices. If we continue to give people correct information about these things, eventually the public image of the (trans) community will be de-sexualized. I am very against negative visibility, due to the fact that 80% of the people I interact with socially associate the LGBTQIA+ community with 'clownery, circus, lack of education, sexualization...' I am a great supporter of positive visibility in the public space, and educating society gradually and correctly.

This respondent preferred to focus on the last question in our discussion guide: how to effectively re-shape Romanian people's beliefs about gender. The confusion between sex and gender is seen as harmful because it makes people confuse identity with sexual preference. Education (and time!) as well as positive visibility are offered as ways to change transphobic and homophobic mentalities. While we agree fully with what the respondent is proposing, we would like to point out that the bigotry in our education system and the prevalent sensationalism of media coverage (see background section) make the outlook appear quite grim.

Boy, girl, non-binary – in the end what it comes down to is what your heart tells you. These are innate positive identities, which can only be felt – like sexual orientation. These things cannot be seen. Fortunately they are natural and diverse, and most importantly they are only reflected by your feelings. Gender identity is like this too. I am repeating myself but these are positive and innate characteristics – like the colour of your eyes, hair, skin etc.

We will label this response as the 'this is just who I am' type. In this type of response, there is no apparent dissonance, and self-awareness is rooted strongly in the biological and psychological. It could be acknowledged that this type of attitude might be a coping mechanism too, given that this transgender woman did decide to emigrate outside of Romania to a Western European country, and was able to have surgeries and live openly as herself without fear of mistreatment, isolation and precarity – as most MTF (male-to-female) women in Romanian society. This respondent is a very loving and good-vibes person, often posting positive and motivational message on her social media; her contribution to the virtual transgender community is as refreshing as it is singular.

*To understand how gender, sex**, and sometimes gender identity are perceived and learned in Romanian culture, we must look throughout the entire and diverse spectrum of cultures, created in every social category. Intersectionality is the mother of us all. I want that Romanians stop hating transgender and transvestite and gender diverse people and understand how we can fix this. One must look at what unites us all, and that is: fear of the unknown. Look around. People that know stuff about gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexuality, sociology, psychology etc are not afraid of gender and sex diverse people.'*

In this response education, or knowledge expansion, is again offered as a solution to social change. The mentioning of intersectionality is most interesting, as it points to the need to customize approaches so as to suit the different coexisting cultures in our country. This is very relevant as there is indeed a great divide between the Romanian majority and the largest ethnic minority, the Roma (estimated at around 4 million). And since we have mentioned this, I feel compelled to say that Romania remains a violently racist country. There is also a growing religious diversity, as well as an ever-increasing number of Romanians working and living abroad and supporting and influencing their families here. This means that, while homophobia and transphobia are strong across ethnic, social status or religious groups, the intersections between their beliefs about gender nonconformity and their experience of it may take different forms and expressions, socially and politically.

I was aware of the difference between sex and gender thanks to other people. I wasn't really aware of much at that point, and was just starting to learn about how diverse everything in the world actually is. I met someone who didn't identify as a man or a woman, and that definitely opened my eyes. I then had a very close person figuring out they were agender, and, later, another close person figuring out he was a trans man. So by that time I had done some research and it was obvious there was a huge difference between gender and sex. I do think half of it is related to gender roles, and I wonder how the world would be if those didn't exist at all. But I also know it is very much an internal thing as well, not just dependent on society's expectations. I do know nonconforming cis people, men who wear make-up or masculine women, who still are men and women, but who don't agree with what society asks of them as men or women. [I like makeup and skirts and stuff, so I am almost always seen as my assigned sex, a woman. I like looking cute, but I don't feel like a woman, no matter how femme I look, my internal sense is still set on what I can vaguely describe as neutral]. I myself figured out I was non-binary some time ago, quite late, to be fair, and, luckily, I already had the vocabulary. I don't suffer from dysphoria, I like my body quite a lot and don't want to make any changes in a transition sense. I don't, however, feel that my gender is my body, at all. Or what society thinks it should be, at least.

This person was just over 20 when they started meeting people of diverse identities under the trans umbrella. This helped a lot with self-perception, as the person was able to observe their own reactions and feelings when interacting with other nonconforming persons. This also stimulated them to do research and thus better realize their own gender identity as non-binary. Another important idea touched on here is the dissonance between gender expression and gender identity: cisgender men who wear make-up etc. Thus, the ways in which someone dresses/makes up, speaks/moves are not indicative of their gender identity. Finally, this person makes it clear that they feel gender identity and biology are completely unrelated. The absence of dysphoria and the

lack of interest in (medical) transition are also elements that support this respondent's perception of own gender as not connected with their biology, and the experiences that clarified that perception.

'I never thought much about gender norms or expression, because they didn't mean so much to me. But when I was little, I had to confront them quite a bit because of my parents: my haircut, my outfits, my toys, my behavior – they had a say in all of these. I became aware of other people's notions of boy or girl long before I had my own, and I took them at face value: boys are like this, girls like that. This gave me a strong sense of inadequacy, which haunted me up to the moment I started my transition.'

This is a classical example of dissonance and struggle with self-acceptance and social integration. In this transgender man's experience, what dispelled the dissonance and led to self-acceptance was the beginning of HRT (testosterone, in this case). Perhaps it might be relevant to add that, about a year after starting HRT, this person started the process of applying and interviewing for employment in a Western European country, where surgeries are covered by insurance. His quality of life improved substantially after completing the goal of emigration to his satisfaction.

'Romania is dominated by preconceived ideas about gender, which affects not only trans persons, but also cisgender ones, and with heavy consequences – like domestic violence. A loosening in the strictness of the expectations related to gender identity and expression should not be just the fight of queer people and their allies for recognition and acceptance. It shouldn't be ignored by the many, under the excuse that 'I have nothing against them, let them do what they want.' Changing the general opinion about gender norms begins with awakening people to the idea that contesting gender roles is not something exclusive to queer people or feminists, and that it is something that needs to happen to the benefit of the entire society.'

This contribution has a strong message related to social control, and it links transphobia to sexism and violence in the family. While no concrete way towards the 'awakening' is offered here, there is clear urgency and a very relevant discussion of the oppressive potential of traditional/strictly binary gender norms.

Conclusion

From media sensationalism to the influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church on political discourse and mainstream mentalities imbued through the education system, the Romanian public's personal beliefs related to 'normal' womanhood or manhood are laden with patriarchal or pathological gibberish.

The perceptions and experience of own gender identity among the Romanian transgender persons we have talked to are often laden with cognitive dissonance resulting from the clash between their own normality and that imposed by their milieu – same-age peers, family. Self-perception of own gender identity is a process influenced both by this dissonance but also, in some cases, by a clarity coming ‘from the heart’ or from expanding one’s social milieu to include more and more gender diverse persons.

As far as re-shaping beliefs related to what gender identity is, and what constitutes ‘normal’ behaviour/expression of one’s gender identity, our interviewees have repeatedly iterated the importance of education, with one emphasizing the value of positive visibility and another one the merits of reshaping these beliefs not only for the benefit of transgender persons, but for a healthier society for cisgender persons as well.

For ‘what now’, we leave you with the words of Michel Foucault, to whom we admit to being subjective: *There exists an international citizenry that has its rights, and has its duties, and that is committed to rise up against every abuse of power; no matter who the author, no matter who the victims. After all, we are all ruled, and as such, we are in solidarity.*¹⁵

We end with the words of a Romanian transgender activist calling to action in the same spirit as our last interviewee in the findings section: awaken and fight, for the sake of all.

*In a corrupt state people are desperate. The social status gap is enormous. In a corrupt state there are HARD working people that are poor. There is frustration. Unhealed frustrations lead to violence. If you allow the right to be master of your own sex and sexuality to be taken away from the masses, then you’ll be part of turning those masses into puppets ready to kill and go to war and beat and torture and murder trans people, gay people, gender diverse people, Roma people, black people, sex workers, drug addicts, homeless people.*¹⁶

¹⁵ See Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Eribon’s most reputable biographer quotes Foucault as saying this during their discussions.

¹⁶ My friend prefers to not be named. I am leaving here my warm thanks for all the help with this article – and for the patience and trust to share so many things with me along the years.

BOOK REVIEWS



Love from the Mirror: About sex and
 identity
 coord. Tatiana Niculescu

Humanitas Publishing
 Bucharest, 2017, 224 pages.
 ISBN: 978-973-50-5888-3

Cover illustration by: Egon Schiele, *Women hugging*
 (detail)

Book review by Paul-Daniel Golban

The anthology *Love from the Mirror: About Sex and Identity* represents a singularity in the Romanian literary landscape and it was published in 2017 by one of the most well-known publishing houses, Humanitas. The volume reunites articles about sexuality and sexual identity that have various topics of discussion, ranging from historical views, literary interpretations, biblical explanations, personal accounts and legislative examples. We can notice that one pro-LGBT article is followed by an anti-LGBT piece, bringing in this way objectivity for the readers that get to know opposing viewpoints on the theme of homosexuality. It is very fair to do so because the reader is exposed time and time again to ideas of authors from both parts of this debate. This way of alternating the articles instills the act of reading with a feeling of impartiality: you are all the time questioning each idea and therefore you find a mandatory need for reflection and inner-search. The volume has only to gain from this choice of moving between various perspectives.

The book is coordinated by the journalist Tatiana Niculescu-Bran. She mentions in a short foreword that the idea for this volume started from an epistolary dialogue between two writers, both defending their way of being: Andrei Pleșu and George Bălan. She adds that this book is for all audiences, both heterosexuals and homosexuals, because we, as humans, have an universal and innate need to love and be loved. The general statement that the anthology tries to bring front and center is that we should put all our differences aside when it comes to the right to love whom you want.

It is relevant to mention that out of the 17 collaborators for this anthology only two are women: Domnica Petrovai and Florentina Ionescu. This disproportion broaches a key question: are women discredited when it comes to the literary field? It is no doubt that misogyny is a problem in Romania, where fewer women are published than men. We believe this anthology could have benefited from the inclusion of more female authors and feminist points of view.

The anthology comes at a time when the whole country finds itself at a debate regarding the referendum proposed by the *Coalition For Family* to redefine marriage in the *Romanian Constitution* (art. 48) as the union between a man and a woman. The movement started earlier in 2006 or 2007 with “Alianța Familiilor din România” (AFR) / “The Romanian Family Alliance”, but what we know now as the so-called *Coalition for Family and Constitution* appeared in 2013¹. Since then, the ultraconservative group (formed by Orthodox, Catholic and Neoprottestant churches) has fought for a ban on gay marriage or civil partnerships, as well as a ban on sexual education and abortion. For this purpose, the *Coalition for Family* has raised nearly 3 million signatures (2.698.477 to be more exact) for their referendum but not all of them legally, as shown in the play “3 millions” by Adina Lazăr. The dialogue on the referendum is still on-going and the President of Romania Klaus Johannis has sent and resent the referendum law to the Constitutional Court. However, the possibility of a referendum still exists.

The anthology could have touched more upon the Romanian context and how the people belonging to the LGBT community are perceived or affected by the inexistence of laws which protect them. After the publishing of this book, a message of hope was sent to them: the Justice Court of the European Union ruled on 5th of June 2018 in the Coman Case that “The term ‘spouse’ within the meaning of the provisions of EU law on freedom of residence for EU citizens and their family members includes spouses of the same sex”². This means that the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) had to recognise the right of residence for Relu Adrian Coman’s partner, Robert Clabourn Hamilton (July 18th, 2018)³.

The first text starts with a dialogue between George Bălan and Andrei Pleșu called “Mărul otrăvit/The Poisoned Apple”, the first author writing about the refusal of a series of articles called

¹ Viski, Vlad (2018). «“Istoria *Coaliției pentru Familie*”/ “The History of the *Coalition for Family*” ». *Adevărul.ro*. Accessed: 14.06.2018. URL: https://adevarul.ro/news/societate/istoria-coalitie-familie-1_5b225235df52022f75248c0a/index.html.

² Read more here: <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-06/cp180080en.pdf>.

³ <https://www.ccr.ro/noutati/COMUNICAT-DE-PRES-319>.

The Other Eros by “Dilema veche”, a magazine that the latter writer founded. Responding that he does not have a say in the magazine anymore, Pleșu makes a statement that appears to be off base, saying that it is disgusting to be considered at fault because he is not homosexual and that he does not apologize for that. It is indeed a very sensitive issue, but it is obvious that Pleșu does not reflect profoundly or in essence about the topic or what sort of obstacles people from the LGBT community have to go through in their day to day lives.

The second article by Martin S. Martin called “Ieșirea la lumină/Coming to the Light” reviews more the beliefs of the American society regarding homosexuality than the Romanian reality which is not well represented throughout the anthology as we said before. Some important concepts discussed here talk about ‘homonormality’ and homophobia as a disease. Homonormality refers to social normality, like marriage, monogamy, raising children adequately, social productivity and creativity and impeccable social behaviour with valuable contributions for community (page 26). Homophobia is viewed not as a reaction of refusal of religious and moral deviations as before, but as an anxiety mechanism kept by repressed homosexual inclinations (page 28).

Other articles can be grouped in such a way that they create a thematic unity. One is based on individual narratives. For example, we can read a personal account on finding out about the other (“Cum am aflat ce e un homosexual/How I Found Out What is A Homosexual” by Gabriel Liiceanu), an intimate story about the tribulation of accepting yourself (“Autoportret gay/Gay Autoportrait” by Victor Bărbulescu), a personal take on the pride of being oneself - a homosexual - or, more or less, about the notion of gay pride (“Mândria de a fi homosexual?/The Pride of Being Homosexual?” by George Bălan), an Orthodox priest’s personal beliefs (“Vine timpul ca oamenii să-și piardă mințile?/It comes the time for people to lose their minds?” by Constantin Necula), a therapist’s story about a lesbian couple in Romania and their son accepting them as mothers and another about a gay man’s difficulty to and have a monogamous relationship (“Nebun(ă), ciudat(ă), defect(ă), bolnav(ă) psihic.../Mad, Weird, Flawed, Psychically Sick” by Domnica Petrovai) and the experience of a pro-LGBT activist from ACCEPT (the first non-for-profit organisation in Romania that fights for LGBT individuals) organising the first gay pride in Bucharest and the violence that occurred, but also about the struggle to accept herself (“Soție, mamă, iubită – povestea unei regăsiri/Wife, Mother, Lover – The Story of Remeeting” by Florentina Ionescu).

Another theme refers to biblical illustrations of homosexuality. One article underlines the importance of *paid-erastia* in Platon's "Symposium" ("Banchetul lui Platon și pederastia antică/Platon's Symposium and Ancient Pederasty" by Petru Creția); another discusses the relationship between David and Jonathan with illustrations from the Bible ("Prietenii, sau mai mult decât atât?/Friends, or more than that?" by Michael Fieger); one explains the tie between a man and a woman in the book of "Genesis" and introduces the significant second representation of creation ("Adam – bărbat și femeie. Poemul celor șapte zile/Adam – man and woman. The poem of the Seven Days" by Tarciziu Șerban Adam); and another tackles the theological aspect of homosexuality and homosexual celibacy ("De la Sodoma la Gomora la apostolul Pavel/From Sodom to Gomorrah at Paul the Apostle" by Emanuel Conțac).

Another thematic line that unites some of the texts refers to contemporary society. For instance, one essay introduces arguments from both sides of the discussion, whether it is religious or not ("Libertatea sexuală între Biserică și Stat/Sexual Freedom Between Church and State" by Teodor Baconschi), and another one shows the history of accepting the LGBT community in Romania and offers a clear-sighted analysis of the anti-LGBT organisation *Coalition for Family* ("Familia ca utopie iconografică/Family as iconographic utopia" by Florin Buhuceanu). One article undertakes the problem of accepting gay priests in Catholic churches ("Preoții gay – virtute și discreție/Gay Priests – Virtue and Discretion" by Wilhelm Tauwinkl), and another one offers a narrow view on the sensitive topic of adoption ("Experimental înfierii/The Adoption Experiment" by Andrei Șerban).

Cristi Danileț's well-researched article "Familia și legea/ The Family and The Law" concludes the anthology and offers insight into the Romanian legislation system with examples from international law. The author clearly explains how family legislation has suffered mutations through time. Danileț states:

"the clasical family is not threatened by nobody. It suffocates itself from the interior because of some unacceptable unwritten laws that relate to abuses Romanian society is not prepared to discuss. Any debate about marriage and sexuality is not, essentially, a discussion about family, but about values. [...] It is not even about the marriage of a couple, but about the human rights as an individual" (page 215).

In relation to the referendum proposed by the *Coalition For Family* to specifically redefine marriage as the union between a man and a woman, Cristi Danileț reasons that CCR already has affirmed in the decision nr. 580/2016, paragraph 42, that marriage is exclusively understood as the

union between „a man and a woman“ (footnote 2, page 211). In the judge’s opinion, the referendum is unnecessary.

All in all, the anthology *Love from the Mirror: About Sex and Identity* offers different answers to contemporary questions through the perspective of contributors from different cultural backgrounds. Most of the articles can be reunited under specific themes, whether it is personal accounts on intimate topics, academic views on biblical interpretations, or sociology and legislation. Thus, the book can be an enjoyable read for both students and scholars, but also for anyone who is interested in the development of ideas regarding sensitive topics such as homosexuality and sexual identity.



Transnational Homosexuals in Communist
 Poland. Cross-Border Flows in Gay and Lesbian
 Magazines

Lukasz Szulc

Palgrave Macmillan

United Kingdom, 2017, 253 pages.

ISBN: 978-3-319-58901-5

Book cover by: --

Book review by **Andrada Nimu**

Lukasz Szulc is a Communication Studies researcher¹ (Marie Curie Individual Fellow in the Media and Communications Department of the London School of Economics and Political Science), published author in journals such as *Sexualities*, *New Media & Society*, *Social Media + Society*, *International Journal of Communication*; and in chapters to books such as *Queer in Europe* (2011) and *Everyday Nationhood* (2017). He is co-editor of the book *LGBTQs, Media and Culture in Europe* (2017) and contributor to the blog Notches: (Re)Marks on the History of Sexuality. His approach stands out better than any other Political Scientist's endeavor in addressing gay activism, because, in doing so, he is de-constructing numerous myths that have hampered our understanding of this type of activism.

Starting from Altman and Symon's book (2016) *Queer wars*, Szulc says: it's a hoax! And, like any other hoax, although almost beautifully true, it is not. 'Queer wars' are a myth and should be treated accordingly. Enough with the narrative divide between 'the West' (North America, Western Europe, Australia and Israel) and 'the Rest' (the Middle East, Arabs and Islam) in the rhetoric of a sexual clash of civilizations (Puar 2007, 2013). Szulc analyzes the literature in the field of LGBT studies, by accounting numerous articles, books, and debates that generally polarize world politics. He explains that the polarization gets the form of 'Othering' countries: the Western ones, in which the levels of LGBT rights have been incorporated in the 'national identities' (Puar 2007) and those in which the battle for sexual minorities' recognition is still ongoing. In the mapping of such countries, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in Owczarzak's words (2009), is seen as 'neither fully civilized nor fully savage'. By addressing the LGBT specific issues, Szulc

manages to challenge several myths attributed to this space, and in this endeavor, argues that the key factor enabling and sustaining such myths involves the de-historicization of homosexuality in the region.

The issue of de-historicization should be made according to the following myths that he identifies. These myths are the homogeneity of the gender and sexuality issues (1); the essence of the region (2); the teleological narrative of the CEE's 'transition' after 1989 from communism to Western ideals of capitalism, democracy, and ethics (3). The idea of homogeneity refers both to the CEE and to the West, in which the differences are many times exaggerated in the pursuit of making 'cross-cultural divides' and the similarities inside the geopolitical entities are treated relatively the same. In doing so, many authors get trapped into essentializing the regions, in which "the West is imagined as essentially progressive, that is, post-racial, post-feminist and post-gay, and CEE as essentially backward, that is, racist, sexist and homophobic" (p. 5). The first two myths are seen as 'spatial' (or cultural), while the third one is of temporal nature. It refers to the end of the Communist regimes in 1989 in the CEE, in which the time before the countries began their process of transition (economically/politically/ethically) post-1989 is treated by many scholars as a 'non-time'. Most researches of the LGBT issues in the CEE begin post-1989, which only condemns the respective countries to a state of perpetual belatedness. In Navickaitė's (2016, 128) words "everything that will ever happen in post socialist societies is going to be just an imitation of what has already happened in the West".

Altogether, these myths are built on the idea of the near-total isolation of CEE during the Cold War (4). The near total symbolic separation of the CEE from the West in terms of gender and sexuality issues enables and reinforces the other three myths, create a 'historical amnesia'(p.7) and only de-historicizing the CEE region can we start to better understand it and implicitly understand the LGBT issues. The book proposes and successfully manages to identify the first forms of activism in the region, tracks the connections between activists from CEE countries and the West, and shows that one can discuss about the globalization of homosexuality, LGBT identities and politics, in CEE already before 1989.

The research of the book is based on archival analysis of gay and lesbian magazines in late communist Poland. The author addresses a transnational approach to the study of sexuality (...) which is multiscalar, that is, it stresses the interconnections between different spatial scales of analysis such as the local, the national, the regional and the global (p.9). Poland is a puzzling case

for selection. It is often given as an example due to its civil society movements that overthrew the communist regime in the region, however, the involvement of the Polish Catholic Church in terms of gender and sexuality post-1989 hampered the laws drastically. There is the 1993 abortion law, according to which abortion is illegal unless (1) the mother's life or health is endangered, (2) she became pregnant because of a criminal act or (3) the fetus is seriously malformed (Kulczycki 1995; Zielińska 1993, 2000). The debate between nationalism and sexuality is a constant feature regardless the period (pre/post EU accession), and the rising wave of right-wing activism against the so-called gender ideology. On top of these, the Law and Justice party, in power since 2015, recently pledged 'to wage a 'cultural counter-revolution' in Europe (Foy and Buckley 2016).

Two Polish gay and lesbian magazines stand at the center of the research, namely *Biuletyn*, later renamed *Etap*, published by Andrzej Selerowicz in Vienna between 1983 and 1987, and all issues of *Filo*, published by Ryszard Kisiel in Gdańsk between 1986 and 1990 (p. 11). In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with three of the magazines' authors: Selerowicz, Kisiel and Paulina Pilch. Moreover, the author links the two magazines with the main activist groups the Wrocław-based *Etap* and the Gdańsk-based *Filo*, "which makes the history of the magazines inseparable from the history of homosexual activism in the country" (p. 11).

Primary and secondary sources are also used in the analysis. They include all Eastern Europe Information Pool (EEIP) reports published annually between 1982 and 1989 and commissioned by the International Gay Organization, later known as International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). Also, documents from the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) regarding Operation Hyacinth (launched in Poland in 1985 by the police forces in order to create a 'homosexual inventory'); articles on homosexuality published in popular and alternative media in Poland in the 1980s; as well as a 1988 survey on Poles' attitudes towards homosexuality (p. 12), to name the most important ones.

The book is divided into two parts and 8 chapters. The first part, Global, Eastern and Polish Homosexuals, de-constructs the myths mentioned in the first Chapter, namely the region's homogeneity, essence, teleological 'transition' after 1989 and near total isolation during the Cold War. In Chapter 2, the literature review addresses the emergence of dominant modern LGBT identities and politics, virtually only recognized after the fall of communism in Europe. The author draws on postcolonial and transnational literature in the deconstruction of these myths, putting to question the idea of 'Westernization', as a one-way process. The chapter represents a compendium

of LGBT studies, at the global level. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is seen as a catalyst for the emergence of gay and lesbian identities and politics in the West (p. 38), however non-Western identities remain problematic in this endeavor. The HIV/AIDS epidemic also became a ‘hot topic’ in CEE after 1989, especially due to the greater mobility of people after 1989, the introduction of new market economy and the decline of state services, resulting in increased sex tourism, rapidly growing prostitution and higher rate of needle use (Altman, 2008). In this manner, the idea that Europe changed many issues of the LGBT population is thought as a ‘catalytic event’ (Darsey 1991), rather than the beginning of the LGBT movement or sexual globalization (p. 47).

Chapter 3 brings the results of the EEIP reports to light, in the way in which the reader finds out about laws and practices regarding homosexuals, public discourses on homosexuality as well as the emergence of gay activism. This chapter emphasizes the complexity of the Eastern Bloc in relation to homosexuality and highlights the transnational dimensions of early homosexual activism in the region (p. 62). The chapter offers authentic descriptions made by the members of the ILGA member organization HOSI, in their visits to the former Yugoslavia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland or Romania, to name a few. The unfavorable perceptions of communism (p. 70) or the ‘Balkan mentality’ clashes with the idea of the West either as ‘progressive’ or as ‘decadent’ (p. 71). Self-organizing aspects of some LGBT groups are also presented in the reports, at the beginning of the 1980s. More information on how these groups organized and mobilized are presented in Chapter 4. The chapter begins with the political and social context in Poland in the 1980s, by focusing on the role of the communist state, and the political opposition of the Roman Catholic Church. The undercover operation against homosexuals code-named ‘Hyacinth’ in 1985 had the purpose to detain, interrogate and register both actual and alleged homosexuals in order to create a kind of state ‘homosexual inventory’, or ‘pink archive’ (p. 106) – made of 11,000 files. The way in which activists organized and mobilized facing police’s harassment; their first framings and demands for official recognition, make this chapter by far the most interesting of the first part.

The second part, Transnationalism in Gay and Lesbian Magazines, draws on how transnational elements shaped *Biuletyn/Etap* and *Filo*. This part of the book incorporates the empirical analysis. Chapter 5 addresses theories of alternative media and discusses their importance for social movements (p. 126). The author also portrays the history of gay and lesbian publishing in the West, pointing to its crucial role in both creating national homosexual movements and connecting their activists transnationally, and in inspiring authors of *Biuletyn/Etap* and *Filo*

(p.126). These magazines did not only play the role of a key communication channel for homosexual activists but also created an actual space within and around which formed the first more systematically organized homosexual groups in Poland (p. 148).

Etap's story intertwines with Andrzej Selerowicz's personal history: 20 issues of the magazine, carried out in Vienna, given/mailed to people he met during his stays in Poland. The entire content of *Biuletyn/Etap* was focused on men only, because "didn't want to participate in the lesbian movement because I knew very well that I was completely unfit for this job" (p. 141). *Filo* magazine also started as a one-man project - Ryszard Kisiel, who published 17 issues (100 copies) since November 1986 until May 1990; and which later developed as an editorial team of 6 people. Kisiel handed over his position of editor-in-chief first to Remigiusz Placyd (1988) and then to Artur Jeffmanski (1989). There were no women involved in the magazine during the first years of *Filo* but Kisiel did sporadically include some information related to lesbians. Paulina Pilch started sending her articles in June 1989, when she was only 16 years old and became the first female author (p. 144).

Next, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 offer plentiful evidence by highlighting the content of the two magazines, around the issue of identity (coming out/sexuality/collectivity) and politics (activism/writing histories/mobilization/visibility/community). In both chapters, as well as in Chapter 7, the reader is guided in seeing the bricolage of the gay activism in Poland. Gay identities and politics in the magazines were "reconstructed and rebuilt because they were much influenced by Western ideas about what it means to be a homosexual and what it entails to do homosexual activism" (p. 179). These magazines played the role of alleviating these problems, for instance, by providing their readers with dreams and hopes of such romantic-erotic relationships (p. 179). These magazines also provided the space and worked towards creating a homosexual solidarity and aimed to turn it into political identity (p. 205): "Homosexuality is not just about two men going to bed, it has also a socio-political aspect if it is related to discrimination" (*Biuletyn* 1985, 1, p. 2). Activists adapted and adopted Western ideas in the magazines and these two intertwined processes make these chapters' explanatory power fully understand why the myths of the CEE region should be understood and de-constructed by any scholar in the field.

Conclusions are drawn in Chapter 8, in which the author resumes the most important insights from each chapter and further refines them in order to encompass broader issues (such as the globalization of homosexuality). The last part addresses the puzzle of the book: that queer wars

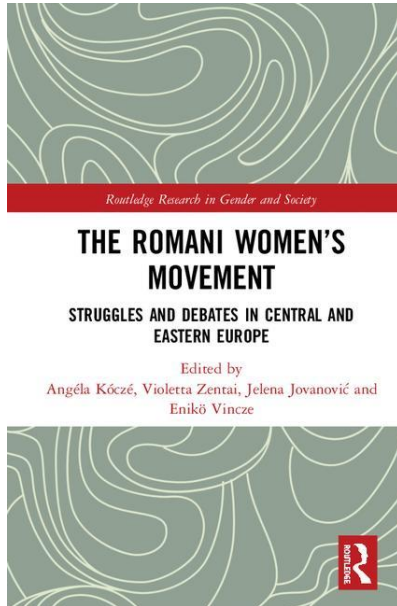
are a hoax. The author further argues that homosexual identity paradigms and activism models have been traveling from the West to the East, but also (to a lesser extent) the other way around. They were already products of multiple cultural influences and as such, they informed, without therefore determining, the understandings of homosexuality at their places of arrival (p. 225). The mutual co-constitution of different geopolitical entities is vital to be recognized.

Finding shortcomings of Szulc's book is a hard endeavor. The theoretical model, the empirical findings and assuming the role of the 'Myth buster' of CEE gay activism stand as groundbreaking in the LGBT literature (with few exceptions that the author mentions thoroughly in the book). Perhaps the next scholar who intends to enlarge the transnational approach to other countries in the CEE region could argue, at some extent, if this model may fit other geographical scales.

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The Romani Women's Movement. Struggles and Debates in Central and Eastern Europe

edited by Angéla Kóczé, Violetta Zentai,
Jelena Jovanović and Enikő Vincze

Routledge

2018, 271 pages.

ISBN: 9781138485099

Book review by **Enikő Vincze**

Four editors and over 20 female authors from 10 countries, brought together by the ideal of intersectional feminism and also by the activism of Roma women starting as early as the 90s, try through this book to reposition their discourses (and the discourse about them in academic and public spaces), from the periphery towards one which enjoys a well-deserved attention.

One foreword, one introduction, 11 chapters structured in three sections and also two afterwords extend the definition of Roma women's movement toward an understanding that includes actors, debates and practices which address the power relations enclosed in the wider system of domination of any kind, reflecting upon the activism of Roma from different contexts, also upon the controversies related to their involvement in it. This short presentation of this collective volume will bring attention to the Romanian public (of the AnaLize journal) the contributions related (also) to Romania.

Margareta Matache, author of the foreword of the volume, reveals and appreciates the ways in which Roma ethnic researchers have proved, throughout the decades, that the intersectional nature of the oppression systems affects Roma women, thus contributing to a better understanding of racist and patriarchal practices.

The Introduction of the book places the discussion about the activism of Roma women in four conceptual frameworks: Roma feminism inspired by the feminism of women of color and post-colonial feminism; theories of intersectionality; studies about social movements; investigations about citizenship.

The first section of the volume explores the exclusive nature of male discourses and practices inside the Roma movement and the diversity of the political positions of Roma women, analyzing the complex relations between their movement, the LGBTQ Roma movement, as well as the Roma movement and the wider movement of women. Here we must mention the first chapter of the book, where Roma feminist from Romania Nicoleta Bițu, together with Debra Schultz, reflect upon the *Roma Women's Initiative* program started from 1999, which led the way towards a transnational understanding of this type of activism. Given the theme of this issue of AnaLize journal, we would also like to draw attention to the second chapter of the volume, which endeavours to reconceptualize Roma identities through the use of non-normative *queer* concepts.

The authors of the second section of the book reveal personal experiences incorporated in social positions created at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, class and age. Bringing into discussion the context of Romania, chapter 5 historicizes, personalizes and politicizes the intersection of academic and activist spheres and highlights the potential of Roma women's movement in the fight against racism, different forms of oppression and social injustice. Carmen Gheorghe, Letiția Mark and Enikő Vincze argue in favor of intersectional feminism as a political tool, starting from the solidarity among women, with the clear aim to dismantle the wide structures of exploitation.

The third section opens the discussion about Roma women's movement in Eastern, Central and Southern Europe, towards the inspiration this movement receives from the *Gitanas* in Spain, from the approaches of anti-racist feminism and from the feminist critique of the neoliberal state. In one of the two afterwords of the volume, Alexandra Oprea brings the discussion towards the functioning of the intersectional exclusion in the academic sphere and underlines the effort of the volume to disrupt the practice of representing Roma women as alterity, without including them among those who speak about them.

Regarding the contributions coming from Romania to the volume *The Romani Women's Movement. Struggles and Debates in Central and Eastern Europe* (*Mișcarea femeilor rome. Lupte și dezbateri în Europa Centrală și de Est*), it is important to also acknowledge in these terms the precedent value of *the Nevi Sara Kali. Revista Femeilor Rome. Roma Women's Journal. Romane 3uvleange 3urnalo* magazine. Born between 2008 and 2011 from the friendship between Roma and non-Roma women from Romania, the magazine created a trilingual, transnational and

transethnic discursive space about both the intersectional oppression of Rroma women and their social, cultural and political activism.

(Transl. Ciprian Șiulea)

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