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## Struggles over Europe

### Postcolonial East/West Dynamics of Race, Gender and Sexuality

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## Struggles over Europe: Postcolonial East/West Dynamics of Race, Gender and Sexuality



## Book Reviews

**PAWEŁ LEWICKI** *

# Struggles over Europe: Postcolonial East/West Dynamics of Race, Sexuality, and Gender

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Following postcolonial and race-critical perspectives, a wealth of literature has emerged in recent years in reference to post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, particularly applying critical whiteness studies and discussing the different shades of whiteness of Europeans who come from this region of the continent (Böröcz and Sarkar, 2017; Szillasy et al., 2014; Smoczyński et al., 2017; Krivonos, 2019; 2020). There is also growing interest in notions of gender and sexuality and their role in Europeanization processes and in the expansion of the EU to countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Ayoub and Patternotte, 2014; Bilić, 2018; Husakouskaya, 2019; Keinz, 2010; Ramme, 2019; Slootenmaekers et al., 2016). However, there is little literature on racist and racializing processes of Europeanization that includes the implicit or explicit (self)hierarchizations and essentializations of the East, let alone the intersecting processes that involve gender, sexuality, and race in entangled and reciprocal productions of East and West.[1] While we can observe various trajectories of the concept of sexual democracy (Fassin, 2010) in the West, and terms such as homonationalism (Puar, 2007) shed light on new (racist) discourses about modern sexualities and gender, similar critical analyses focusing on European East–West relations are still scarce. The sexuality and gender politics that enflame public debates in the East of the continent are most often framed within a catching-up narrative, without problematizing civilizing discourses about tolerance and the instrumentalization of sexual rights in processes of democratization-cum-civilization. There have been some attempts to deconstruct these perspectives (see e.g. Kulpa, 2011), and these critics indeed recognize different temporalities and more complex power relations between East and West. But there is still a tendency to approach counter-liberal and nationalist discourses in the *new Europe* from the perspective of sexual freedoms and gender expressions that have their point of reference in the West, thereby reproducing the center–periphery divide in which anything other than the West and its *modernity* is deemed an imitation or catching-up (see, for example, Graff and Korolczuk, 2016).

Given such scholarly developments, this special issue is informed by postcolonial and decolonial scholarship, and interrogates the different ways in which East and West are reciprocally co-constituted within the frames of European modernity, with a special focus on race, gender, and sexuality. The civilizational hierarchizations that come with modern discourses are often hidden and/or detached from Europeanness, but become more visible when attending

[1] I would like to thank Randi Gressgård and Rafał Smoczyński for their precious comments on this text and for the joint effort in bringing out this special issue of *Intersections.EEJSP*.

theoretically and empirically to notions of race, gender, and sexuality within these East/West dynamics.

Postcolonial scholarship emerged from reflection on the art of the *white* European governance of colonized lands and people. It has revealed how Europe and its modernity belabored their cultural superiority in a reciprocal relationship between metropole and colony (Cooper and Stoler, 1997; McClintock, 1995; Randeria et al., 2019). Since the end of the Cold War, there has been growing interest in postcolonial scholarship among researchers in Central and Eastern Europe – aimed at understanding the conditions of (post)imperial rule and process of democratization and Europeanization in this part of the world (Chari and Verdery 2009). Among other things, such research has called into question the modernist notion of linear development towards *real* democracy, capitalism, and Europe – notions that are often implied in what is called democratization and Europeanization processes (Buchowski, 2001; Gille 2010). Still, claims to *proper* whiteness understood as a structural hegemonic position tied to the notion of Europeanness and involving only a seemingly renounced racism are prevalent. They are often occluded in academic and popular understandings of Europeanization, except for in racist far-right discourses targeting various minority populations with essentializations and hierarchizations, both in the East and in the West. Scholars as well as politicians tend to outsource racism and racialized notions of sexuality and gender to *not-quite-Europe* (see Renkin, 2016, Fassin 2010), or to what Pobłocki calls 'the Orient of the Occident' (Pobłocki, 2009). Alternatively, they often conceal the spread of racial colonial epistemology in Europe in what has been called trajectorism (Appadurai, 2012) or transitology (Buchowski, 2001). Nevertheless, racialization works less explicitly to mark the position of people and cultures within the dominant system of dignity, civilizational and moral values. The various contributions in this special issue show that racialized markings and/or claims to whiteness have different articulations depending on the social and historical context (Dzenovska, 2013; see also Stoler, 2008). Moreover, these markings are also applied by self-orientalized people, thereby contributing to divisions within the societies widely perceived as outside the *core* of Europe (Buchowski, 2006; 2017; Herzfeld, 2002; 2004; Tlostanova, 2010). Thus, in the East as well as in the West, struggles over Europe entail the hierarchization and essentialization of populations on various scales. The many converging and interrelated tendencies notwithstanding, they do not constitute unified and unequivocal phenomena.

A wide postcolonial scholarship shows how gender and sexuality was mobilized by racist politics in the colonies and what repercussions it had in the metropole on gender relations and cultural codes governing sex and gender in Western empires (Stoler, 2002; McClintock, 1995). Feminist and queer perspectives informed by Foucault's approach have also contributed to critical discussions of how gender and sexuality are shaped to govern societies. Feminists of color have pointed out how the concept of gender is based on norms of whiteness and how it has been colonized by western feminist scholars, as well as how it perpetuates middle-class norms (Mohanty, 2003). This universalization of particular notions of gender and sexuality has been problematized by queer studies as well (Morgensen,

2016). They have both criticized the reproduction of binaries, fixed constellations of gender and sexuality, and the political application of these categories.

As a consequence of these perspectives, it is not our aim to search for or claim an allegedly *proper place* for Central and Eastern Europe in global knowledge production (Bartha and Eröss, 2015; Buchowski, 2012), or in studies on sexualities (Kościańska and Renkin, 2016). Rather, our ambition is to push further discussions on gender, sexuality, and race beyond the center-periphery axis and considerations of Central and Eastern Europe as a 'referential coeval' (Petrovici, 2016). Breaking with the more or less implicit dichotomous categorizations of tradition/modernity, global/local, center/periphery, capitalism/(post)socialism and their projection onto the geopolitical divisions in Europe (Baer, 2014) brings the East back into focus as an indispensable element of Europeanization and modernization discourses, and not merely as a *victim* of racialized western knowledge production (Buchowski, 2012; Bartha and Eröss, 2015; Renkin, 2016), or as a colonizer of adjacent eastern lands – as discussions guided by postcolonial theory in the region often have it (Zarycki, 2014; Drążkiewicz, 2020). Our contributions variously draw on women of color perspectives, queer perspectives, and post- and decolonial perspectives in gender and sexuality studies (Tlostanova, 2015; Suchland, 2019). In this way, the special issue lends nuance to discussions on Europe and Europeanization that consider production of Europeanness to involve mutual entanglements between East and West (Gille, 2010; Dzenovska, 2018; Adam et al., 2019), thus pointing to the unstable character of Europe's meaning (Loftsdóttir et al., 2018; Adam et al. 2019; Keinz and Lewicki, 2019; Dzenovska, 2018). Such a take inevitably presumes more unstable notions of sexuality and gender, simultaneously paying due attention to particular postsocialist understandings of these concepts – postsocialist legacies that include racialized understandings of the nation and 'the people.'

Most of the authors in this special issue bring to light often still unconsidered racialized histories and ontologies of *Eastern* (less often *Western*) Others in the struggles over the dominant meaning of Europe – whether this involves a postsocialist past (Hall, this issue) and ostensibly peripheral and irrational position in gender and sexual politics (Husakouskaya and Gressgård, this issue; Gressgård and Smoczyński, this issue), or *backward* sexual and gender performances (Diatlova and Krivons, this issue) that recurrently reinstate the *real Europe* in a position of cultural superiority (see also Tolstanova, 2015). In the East, these histories and ontologies are visible in the form of 'gender-ideology' that comes from a 'morally rotten West' and which both threatens *our children* and undermines the *normal* and *natural* positions associated with the original or the *real Christian roots* of Europe. It is on these reciprocal dynamics between East and West in gender, sexuality, and race that we want to shed light in this special issue. Our aim is to highlight research on processes of Europeanization focused on both local genealogies and histories and on broader East/West dynamic with a particular focus on gender, sexuality, and race, and their various articulations and entanglements in Europe.

The special issue begins with a contribution by Randi Gressgård and Rafał Smoczyński, in which they capture the instrumentalization of gender and sexuality

in struggles over notions of civic responsibility, good citizenship, and Europeanness in Poland. They show how gender and sexuality and Europeanness work as empty signifiers that serve to establish moral frontiers. More specifically, they show how LGBT rights and sexual education are instrumentalized by both self-declared liberals and nationalists to defend and guarantee the moral integrity of the nation. In this way, gender and sexual politics functions as a tool for negotiating formal and informal hierarchies of citizenship and Europeanness.

The cultural meaning and productivity of silence is addressed by Dorota Hall in her article on non-heteronormative sexualities and Catholicism in Poland. Based on biographical interviews, she shows how silencing discourses on homosexuality during the communist era were replaced by silenced gay identities among Catholics in twenty-first-century Poland. Rather than adhering to the dominant narrative divide between homosexuality and religion played out as an opposition between a secular-liberal EU (supported by gays) and Polishness, her contribution provides a more nuanced story of gays and lesbians in Poland, thus also challenging the discursive division between an ostensibly restrictive communist past and a liberated, democratic present that guarantees sexual freedoms.

Monika Baer's contribution sheds light on developments of European sexual citizenship in the city of Wrocław. In her ethnographic research among LGBTIQ activists, she shows how abstract notions of Europe and Europeanness no longer form a significant point of reference in struggles for rights and recognition. The notion of European sexual citizenship remains cloudy or dormant for the activist in Wrocław. However, in the face of growing homophobia and the EU being an enemy to homophobic right-wing nationalists, the article highlights local shifts in the notion of homonationalism. The analysis provides a critical understanding of citizenship, and shows new paths in activism. Baer also argues that Europeanization should be conceived not in a teleological way, but as an image that fuels variously conceived social change.

Another article, by Nadzeya Husakouskaya and Randi Gressgård, highlights the boundaries between Europeanness and whiteness in post-Maidan Ukraine that is bringing about unmarked civilizational divisions between the East and West. With an empirical emphasis on gender and sexuality politics, their article shows how racial whiteness is at once marked and unmarked in Europeanization processes – through a mechanism of racial displacement.

Postcolonial and decolonial scholarship points to the powerful symbolic and yet often less visible presence of 'the Other' in the mutual production of East and West. Highlighting these mutual presences of 'the Other' enables us to understand the ongoing and reciprocal post-imperial claims to cultural superiority and the production of gendered, sexed, and racial Western and Eastern norms. Two contributions depict the ways in which these norms are materialized in bodies in relation to all those forms of life marked as not-yet-Western, not-really-white (Lapina, this issue; Krivonos and Diatlova, this issue; see also Lewicki, 2020).

In Linda Lapina's article, empirical insights are provided by her autoethnographical material and memory work in which she gives an account of her two meetings, almost 10 years apart, with two Danish men. While the first

meeting took place shortly after her moving to Denmark from Latvia, the other encounter happened ten years later, when she conducted fieldwork for her doctoral thesis in a district of Copenhagen. Analytically, her article is based on the concept of affordance, which enables her to present 'how possibilities for action emerge in interaction with our environments, constrained by embodied knowledge and experience.' She shows how dominant whiteness is accumulated over time and emerges in situated, affective encounters. Affordance both enables and constrains the possibilities of interaction, movement, and becoming of bodies.

Similar to Linda Lapina, Daria Krivonos and Anastasia Diatlova focus on bodies moving from the East to the West. By giving an account of experiences of Russian-speaking women and their navigating of whore stigma in Finland, they analyze how Eastern European femininity is positioned in relation to European whiteness in general, and white femininity in particular, arguing that it is constituted through ostensibly emancipated sexuality and the exclusion of non-Western *Others* as sexually repressed. The authors show how *proper* whiteness requires liberation from a stereotypically perceived patriarchal Russian culture: from tradition, eroticization, and oversexualization. Krivonos and Diatlova aptly describe how Russian-speaking women learn how to avoid being associated with stereotypically conceived Russianness and how the racializing gaze of Finnish people defines the gendered and sexual embodiment of Russian-speaking women in the context of migration. Their 'liberation' consists of a 'toning down' of their bodies and gender performances.

Both these articles clearly demonstrate how a focus on mobile or migrating bodies escapes methodological nationalism. Critical and entangled approaches to the embodiment of *proper* European whiteness within a broader dynamics of coloniality of power permit us to see the hierarchizations attached to emanations of the East and the West, beyond geographically contained or fixed understandings of these notions, but in situated and embodied performances of intersecting categories of race, gender, and sexuality and various other categories of differentiation (Keinz and Lewicki, 2019; Lewicki, 2020; Lapina this issue). Together with the other contributions to the special issue, these ethnographic accounts provide a more nuanced perspective about ongoing changes in modes of governance that are engaged with the emergence of bodies, which in turn gives detailed insight into ongoing struggles over dominant notions of Europe.

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**RANDI GRESSGÅRD**
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# Noble Polish Sexuality and the Corrupted European Body

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## Abstract

This article attends to the instrumentalization of gender and sexuality in recent Polish political campaigns. Locating current political debates in a cultural-historical context of long-established hierarchical divides, it conceives of gender and sexuality as 'empty signifiers' deployed in political struggles (for hegemony) over notions of civic responsibility, good citizenship and articulations of Europeanness. Similarly, it takes 'Europeanness' as an empty signifier, without any essential meaning, arguing that these signifiers are key to understanding recent mobilizations around moral frontiers in Polish politics. Illustrative examples serve to elaborate how LGBT rights and sex education are instrumentalized among self-proclaimed liberals as well as rightwing nationalists, seeking to guarantee the moral integrity of the nation according to an antagonistic logic. On both sides of the political divide, we witness a self-orientalizing positioning towards the European 'core', whether phrased in terms of sexual modernity or Christian civilization.[1]

***Keywords:*** *Europeanness, gender and sexuality, notions of nobility, political divisions and struggles.*

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## *1. Introduction*

This article draws on critical political theory in the tradition of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) to highlight the instrumentalization of gender and sexuality in recent Polish political campaigns. Our starting point is that political discourses do not merely transmit meaning, but produce the meaningful, social world in the first place. Moreover, we take as our point of departure that post-1989 Poland is characterized by, on the one hand, the disruption or dislocation of old interpretive frameworks of civic responsibility, which, after 1989, lost their efficiency in interpellating political subjectivities, and, on the other, discursive strategies of assessing its actual or imaginary state of maturity according to self-reported European values or ideas (Kuus, 2004; 2007; Böröcz, 2006; Melegh, 2006).

We shall make the case that 'Europeanness' represents ideals of civilization corresponding to a cultural-historical notion of nobility deeply rooted in Polish society. More specifically, we will highlight the impact of an entrenched 'feudal' lord/boor binary on contemporary struggles for hegemony in the Polish public sphere. This framing suggests that it is helpful to consider both local, historical-cultural specificities and global factors when interrogating how antagonistic frontiers originate in dislocated structures (see Nabers, 2017: 421). Illustrative examples will serve to highlight how LGBT rights and sex education are instrumentalized in political struggles across the political spectrum – among self-proclaimed liberals and rightwing nationalists alike.

## *2. Current struggles over civic responsibility*

As in other situations of dislocation of sedimented discourses, when old normative codes are waning (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 1990), the post-communist Polish situation called for new civic responsibility frameworks suitable for the new circumstances. Amid post-1989 weakened legitimacy of institutionalized social control agents, rivalling factions of the Polish intelligentsia struggled for hegemony over citizenship models, notably moral disputes about good and bad citizen ideals. Two discursive currents dominated the struggle: a conservative faction advocating regional protectionism over its resources (political, economic and cultural), and a liberal faction advocating 'European values'.[2]

Lacking a stable, positive content that remains unchangeable in relational contexts, the category 'European values', like 'Europeanness', is an empty signifier in Laclau's (2005) terms. Political rivals seek to transform the particularistic

[2] Arguably, the Polish political landscape is more complicated than the simple binary 'conservative' vs. 'liberal' suggests. While one liberal formation advocates 'European values' in economical and cultural terms, another left-wing formation is economically social-democratic and liberal in cultural terms. Conversely, while one 'conservative' formation is 'instrumentally pro-European' (PiS), another, emerging one, is anti-European (*Konfederacja*). We see similar divides within Polish feminism to which we shall turn in due course. However, these differentiations do not change our assumption that Polish political formations are driven by a culturalist, interpretive framework of social reality.

signifiers into a dimension of universal meaning that resonates with the wider experiences and sensitivities of the public. As indicated above, a set of (empty) signifiers related to gender and sexuality have gradually rose to prominence as a moral indicator of good and bad citizenship in Poland (and elsewhere). LGBT rights and freedoms have fueled political campaigns with various valence, strategically deployed in political struggles over notions of civic responsibility, citizenship and articulations of Europeanness (Graff, 2006; Hall, 2015).

Some conservative elites, including the Catholic intelligentsia, have been adamantly anti-liberal in matters concerning gender and sexuality, although not necessarily stridently anti-gay. As Dorota Hall (2015) observes, 'Catholic intelligentsia' members have on several occasions expressed their friendliness to LGBT people, and the Christian 'Faith and Rainbow' group has pledged allegiance – or entered a chain of equivalence – with the 'Catholic intelligentsia', especially associated with the prominent Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Nevertheless, an antagonistic relationship between religion and homosexuality has evolved over time, engaging various discursive components. We shall return to these antagonistic articulations in due course, but first we will attend to some key cultural-political, historical factors that help explain the evolvement of more recent forms of instrumentalization of sexuality in both 'pro-gay' and 'anti-gay' articulations.

## *3. Polish intelligentsia and divisions between good and bad citizens*

In Central and Eastern European (CEE) societies, where the bourgeoisie has been weakly established and where a high degree of foreign ownership of financial assets has dominated (Jedlicki, 1999; Szelenyi, 2006; Hardy, 2007; Nölke and Vliegenthart, 2009), a post-gentry intelligentsia stratum – the elite of cultural capital – has historically set the parameters of civic responsibility (Gella, 1976; Jedlicki, 1999a; Jasiewicz, 2009). Political struggles have thus had less to do with class conflict over the distribution of material capital and more to do with tensions between different factions of the cultural capital-oriented intelligentsia (Smoczynski and Zarycki, 2016; Zarycki, Smoczynski and Warczok, 2017).

It is beyond the scope of this article to explain the prominent status of Polish elites from the late 19th century onwards. Suffice it to say here that the intelligentsia's dominant position is down to a combination of dispossessions brought about by the 20th century world wars, the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, and the 1944 imposition of the communist regime which gradually wiped out economic elites (mainly bourgeois and aristocratic milieus) from the centre of public life. These composite factors left the intelligentsia as the major actor in the national field of power (Zarycki, Smoczynski and Warczok, 2017; cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1993), accompanied by the communist 'nomenclatura' – the elite of political capital – which was particularly influential in the early communist period (up to the late 1950s) (Eyal et al., 1998). In short, the capitalist elite has not been in the position to significantly challenge the dominant role of the intelligentsia for

the better part of the 20th century in matters concerning civic responsibility (Zarycki, 2015), and its impact in the 21st century remains limited (Drahokoupil, 2009).

Moreover, and most importantly for our purposes, the Polish intelligentsia stratum evolved historically out of the waning landed gentry and their gendered notions of civic responsibility. Even though the intelligentsia's ideological imaginary was mostly shaped by late 19th-century ideas of democratic politics (mainly socialist and nationalist) (Walicki, 2005), their civic frameworks were substantially influenced by the gendered, 'feudal' division between good (noble) and bad citizens: 'lord' versus 'boor' (Tazbir, 2013). During the 20th century, the masculine 'lord' figure gradually lost its association with this pastoral imagery and became increasingly informed by modern meritocratic ideals associated with the figure of the educated intelligentsia member, although the public remained a distinctly masculine coded sphere. The notion of the good citizen was in this process re-defined to signify the paternalistic figure who takes responsibility for the civic sphere and thereby serves the nation, while 'boor' denotes the non-responsible citizen or non-citizen, historically identified with the landless male peasant who did not participate in public life and hence did not take responsibility for the *Rzeczpospolita* (Republic) (Zarycki, 2014). This persistent binary has made the Polish citizenship model strongly hierarchical and exclusive (Chałasiński, 1946), with gender and sexuality distinctions cutting across class divides (see e.g. Fidelis, 2010; Grabowska, 2012).

To grasp the impact of this historical division on post-1989 political discourses, it might prove fruitful to draw a structural parallel with the Netherlands, where political elites at the turn of the 21st century, in a period of rapid social change, sought to recreate a moral civic sphere by discerning between good and bad citizens (Schinkel, 2008). In the Dutch case, the informal moral differentiation was triggered by a declared crisis of the welfare state and the articulation of risks posed by non-Western migrants to social cohesion, national security and cultural norms, especially liberal gender and sexuality norms. It was argued that some non-Western migrants, Muslims in particular, did not actively participate in public life and did not comply with the ideals of secular Dutch society, epitomized by gay tolerance (see e.g. Butler, 2008; Graff, 2010; El-Tayeb, 2011).

Polish citizenship politics, either in the interwar (1918–1939) period, or during the post-communist era, saw similar moralization mechanisms evolve, encouraging the public to participate in the civic sphere and comply with the ideals of the Republic, embodied by the figure of the intelligentsia member: the white, heterosexual male, educated, politically responsible individual (see Zarycki, Smoczynski and Warczok, 2017). Although opposite in substance as well as style, both the Polish and the Dutch culturalist approach serves to establish a hegemonic code of legitimate moral citizenship, and in both cases, the excluded are subjects who supposedly fail to comply with the normative ideals – those who do not fulfil the culturally defined (inherently gendered and sexualized) boundaries of the nation.

We have thus far argued that in the post-communist era, boundary-settings between 'lordish' and 'boorish' citizens (and non-citizens) have largely been characterized by antagonistic tensions between liberal and conservative factions of the intelligentsia. This is not to deny, however, that the 'entrepreneurial secular individual' who – according to this ideal – is capable of managing various types of risks (such as employment risks), achieved a high level of prominence in the 1990s. Self-proclaimed 'real Europeans' among the post-1989 liberal intelligentsia expressed a moral superiority attitude (typical of this stratum) towards 'not real Europeans' on the basis of possessing entrepreneurial qualities required for a successful European integration. Informed by the lord/boor binary, liberal intelligentsia members sought to combat cultural forces said to impede European integration (Sztompka, 1993), casting various categories of citizens as out of joint with the modern world (Horolets, 2006; Koczanowicz, 2011). This was particularly the case in political campaigns against the 'homo sovieticus' figure coined in the early 1990s public discourse (Zarycki, 2004). The 'homo sovieticus' figure ,commonly juxtaposed with the entrepreneurial urban-based individual, was allegedly failing to adapt because of its lacking self-management skills. A corresponding opposition is the one between educated and the poorly educated, the latter presumably incapable of taking advantage of socio-economic transformations. Related polar oppositions include open-minded versus closed-minded, secular versus religious, and rational versus superstitious (Buchowski, 2006: 466).

Techniques of moral regulation, which are vivid in the above-depicted dichotomies, are crucial to the formation of prudent citizenship (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985; Hunt, 1997; 1999; Valverde, 1994; 1995), and as feminist and queer scholars have demonstrated, formations of nation – notions of proper citizens – are inextricably linked to formations of gender and sexuality (see e.g. Mosse, 1985; Parker et al., 1992; McClintock, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Pryke, 1998; Nagel, 2003; Kulpa, 2011). For instance, Sam Pryke (1998: 541) points to two principal ways in which sexuality has figured within nation building: through attempts to delimit what is normatively acceptable sexual behaviour on the part of a national citizen, and through controlling fertility. Both mechanisms are central to nationalist politics in Poland, but even liberals have advocated regulations of gender and sexuality, albeit in more indirect ways (through governmental regulations rather than disciplinary control) and with slightly different aims. It should be noted that Polish liberal elites have until recently wielded a relatively conservative gender and sexuality agenda compared with their 'Western' counterparts. In line with liberal formations elsewhere, however, their strategy has predominantly been to address 'prudent individuals' capable of managing risks and avoiding harm through governmental techniques of responsibilization. As Hunt (2003) and others (see e.g. O'Malley, 1996) point out, the strategy of identifying prudent citizens has achieved a dominant regulatory position in everyday life.

## *4. Moralization of citizenship and self-orientalization*

Once implemented in the post-communist CEE region, the regulatory discursive machinery generated its own interepellating efficiency, usually within the self-orientalizing register of 'nesting orientalism', that is, the extension of the symbolic topography of the original Orient to other places and people, implying a gradation of Orients: Asia is cast as more East or Other than Central and Eastern Europe, and the Balkans and Russia are designated as the most Eastern within Eastern Europe (Bakić-Hayden, 1995: 918; Zarycki, 2015). In Poland, the prudent citizenry has in various historical contexts been perceived as torn between the empires of the rational, civilized West and the barbarian, alien East (most commonly linked to Russia in its different political forms), the latter being variably associated with nationalism, authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, and suppression of women and sexual minorities. Although this East/West antagonism could be traced back to exponents of the Polish Enlightenment, we shall concentrate on the post-1989 discursive dynamics between the European 'core' and the eastern 'peripheries'.

It bears noting in this context that over the last three decades, there has been a strong asymmetry between pro-European elite discourses (associated with the liberal intelligentsia) and Euro-sceptical ones (associated with nationalism) in their capacity to shape formal and informal hierarchies of citizenship. Political hegemony has unequivocally belonged to the elite factions, which have presented their ideological stand in line with the self-reported dominant neoliberal compromise reigning in 'core' European countries. Put differently, the political elites have enjoyed the hegemonic position of being able to articulate an undisputable universal model of good citizenship that ought to be implemented in the 'semi-peripheral' CEE countries. This asymmetry did not change significantly until the 2008 'economic crisis', when the neoliberal compromise started to unravel globally, followed by the so-called European migration crisis of 2015. The two moments of articulated 'crisis' paved the way for the rightwing Law and Justice (PiS) party, whose victory in the parliamentary elections in 2015 meant that the cultural hierarchy between Euro-enthusiastic and nationalist or protectionist discourses gradually crumbled. This displacement surely weakened the neoliberal ideological agency in its capacity to address Polish political subjectivities, but it also gave rise to a more moralized and polarized debate revolving around gender and sexuality.

Before illuminating some of these moral-political tensions, it should also be noted that Euro-scepticism does not amount to a full-blown anti-EU ideology. Given Poland's fragile geopolitical location, EU membership is widely regarded (either instrumentally or idealistically) as a national security assurance in the face of Russian revisionist policies. Hence, the major Polish nationalist formations, most notably the PiS party, do not want Poland to leave the EU. They target instead what they consider as undesirable foreign influence. As we shall see in the following, PiS strategically portrays homosexuality as a 'foreign invasion' and do not shy away from invoking anti-Semitic tropes, such as 'the homosexual lobby'

seeking to undermine 'the family' according to a carefully prepared plan (Graff, 2010: 594). Apparently, 'the corrupt European body' is embodied in the Europeanized gay person (Graff, 2006: 448; cf. Lewicki, 2016; Keinz and Lewicki, 2019).

From a critical political theory point of view, we could argue that the articulation of corruption of the social is made possible by reference to some mythical purity that is lost (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 1990). In a comparable manner, Dirk Naber (2017: 425) shows how the 'nation' functions as an empty signifier in the US 'war on terror' in a sedimented discourse of American exceptionalism: 'a deliberate attempt to suture a dislocated identity by drawing on previously established sedimented practices'. Antagonism is crucial in this process: opposed elements are articulated as conflicting and are excluded from the alleged fullness of the mythical national community, the national imaginary. The subsequent institutionalization of this imaginary – which excludes alternative frames of intelligibility – is experienced as a solution to the crisis threatening the national identity, that is, a recovery of something that has been there all along: a lost origin, identity or 'core' (Naber, 2017: 422).

## *5. The politicization of homophobia and 'gender ideology'*

Agnieszka Graff (2010: 585) notes that after Poland's EU accession, rightwing nationalist forces increasingly portrayed Europe as morally corrupt, juxtaposing 'European perversion' with 'healthy Polish traditionalism' capable of resisting the pressure to conform to EU-imposed standards (see also Graff, 2006). Because EU resolutions are meant as responses to state-sanctioned discrimination against sexual minorities, Graff continues, so-called homophobes can score political points by non-compliance, and homophobia can function as a sign or discourse of patriotism and national sovereignty (Graff, 2010: 590–591, 600–601; cf. O'Dwyer and Schwartz, 2010). This is of course the reverse of the Dutch case, where 'homo tolerance' – in accordance with official EU policy – serves as an index of democracy and civilizational development. In both cases, though, sexual boundaries are assumed to coincide with national ones, underpinned by the same gendered, culturalist binaries (Graff, 2010: 584, 601; cf. Kulpa, 2011; 2014; Bilić, 2016).

The privileged position of the Catholic Church in Polish public life has arguably played an important role in the post-communist politicization of homophobia. Church leaders' 'family first' rhetoric resonates with nationalist sentiments and gives legitimacy to the rising tide of homophobic hatred and hostile environments for sexual minorities. The 'family first' refrain became particularly prevalent in March 2019, after Warsaw's newly elected liberal mayor, Rafał Trzaskowski, proposed a series of commitments towards LGBT people, including anti-discrimination measures and sex education in schools. In response, the leader of Poland's ruling PiS party, Jarosław Kaczyński, warned against same-sex marriage and 'sexualization' of young people at a gathering in the city of Włocławek. By way of moral protection, he took aim at so-called risk-related sex

education, LGBT rights and gender theory, claiming that these 'ideologies' pose a threat to the traditional Polish way of life: 'These ideologies, philosophies, all of this is imported, these are not internal Polish mechanisms […]. They are a threat to Polish identity, to our nation, to its existence and thus to the Polish state'.[3]

Homosexuality is not only alien to Polish traditions, according to this script, but poses a threat to the Western civilization itself. To combat the alleged menace posed by foreign-hearted enemies, it is imperative – so the dominant claim goes – to reassert 'authentic' national and European traditions of which political and religious leaders claim exclusive ownership. According to a study by Justyna Kajta (2017) on nationalist discursive strategies, there is a growing tendency to depict homosexuals as enemies according to a slippery-slope logic: it is believed that gay marriage would eventually lead to pedophiles' beginning to organize, which ultimately would result in a national *and* civilizational crisis.

Given the messianic tendencies embedded in Polish society, it does not come as a surprise that Catholic/rightwing articulations elevate Poland as 'the last bastion of Christian civilization' (Kajta, 2017: 100) which should be protected or saved by dint of cultural self-defense and, in turn, could help protect or save Europe from itself (cf. Mizielińska, 2011: 87–88; Korolczuk and Graff, 2018: 806, 812; Jarkovská, 2020). As Srdjan Sremac and Roard Ganzevoort (2015: 8) point out in their discussion of religion and homosexuality in the CEE region, the sacred social order is fundamentally antagonistic towards the constructed enemies, and the authority of their ethno-national and religious powers thrives on the principle of exclusion and their exhibited will to 'moral defense' (by mobilizing moral panic). We may infer from this that the postulation of Polish exceptionalism concurs with exclusions of sexual minorities through phantasmatic articulations of evil forces, thus consolidating 'noble' Polish sexuality as a norm underpinning the sacred moral order of nationhood, which in turn epitomizes (lost) 'original' or 'authentic' European values.

## *6. Rightwing, anti-LGBT election campaigns*

In the political campaign leading up to the European parliamentary elections in May 2019, we saw an unprecedented coordinated effort to create sexualized antagonisms and a sense of social and civilizational crisis in Poland. Leading ruling party members and the media associated with PiS strategically interlinked homosexuals and pedophile rings menacing children's well-being, all the while referencing Catholic doctrine on marriage and the family. In a sermon to mark the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, the archbishop of Kraków, Marek Jędraszewski, warned about a 'rainbow plague', comparing gay rights to Nazism and Soviet communism.[4] This message dovetails with how senior member of the ruling party likened 'LGBT ideology' to Soviet-imposed communism.

[3] See https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/22/european-elections-sex-and-religion-dominate-campaigning-in-poland

[4] See https://www.euronews.com/2019/08/02/archbishop-warns-of-rainbow-plague-amid-lgbt-tensions-in-poland

Ahead of the national elections in October 2019, PiS intensified its homophobic rhetoric, claiming that 'LGBT ideology' or 'gender ideology' is an 'invasion' and that gay people are 'foreign agents' or 'traitors' against which the national community – symbolized by innocent children and the traditional family – must be protected. The run-up to the parliamentary elections also inspired physical homophobic violence, such as the brutal attacks by far-right groups on participants of the so-called Equality March in the city of Białystok in north-eastern Poland in July 2019.[5]

Following this line of events, regional PiS officials pushed to declare cities and entire provinces in Poland's conservative southeast 'LGBT ideology free zones'. For instance, the council of Lublin designated the city as an LGBT-free zone to signal that LGBT and other gender non-conforming citizens do not fit into Polish society, thereby marking them as alien. Another example of LGBT ostracism is the declaration by mayor of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Augustyn Ormanty, of the town as a LGBT-free zone and his attempt to adopt a resolution stating that gay ideology is annihilating Christian values. (The resolution was rejected by the council in favor of a milder one pledging to protect the 'traditional family'.)[6] Such designations and resolutions, though legally dubious, are instances of symbolic violence serving to aggravate anti-LGBT moral panics nation-wide.[7]

Against this background, we see that by incorporating religious elements into the ethnonational ideological matrix, LGBT rights and freedoms can readily be made to appear as detrimental to the integrity of family, tradition, nation and Western civilization alike (Sremac and Ganzevoort, 2015: 2). When the proscribed term 'LGBT ideology' is paired with the juggernaut 'gender ideology',[8] politicized homophobia becomes part of the wider incursive strategy of 'anti-genderism', with the potential to galvanize a large number of conservatives around destabilization of 'natural' gender roles and patriarchal structures. These crisis narratives are often informed by anxieties about depopulation (playing into 'the great replacement' conspiracy theory) and the ultimate destruction of culture and humanity (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018: 803). Elżbieta Korolczuk and Agnieszka Graff (2018: 805) comment: 'today the interests of the Vatican, US Christian fundamentalists, and European nationalists appear eerily convergent with those of Putin's Russia, which is perceived as a moral rejuvenator of the West.' The different actors are symbolically united by a yearning for universalism, which necessitates the defense of 'original' universal Western values represented by a (white) Christian civilization (ibid., 806, 807). The road to universal European values is, in other words, paved with nationalist, anti-elitist struggles for gender and sexuality conservatism.

[5] See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/28/lgbt-gay-rights-poland-first-pride-march-bialystok-rage-violence

[6] See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/05/family-faith-flag-catholic-religious-right-battle-polands-soul Accessed 05-10-2019.

[7] By the end of 2020, over 100 cities and regions had declared themselves 'LGBT-free zones'.

[8] 'Gender ideology' is an abbreviated shorthand for a variety of practices and freedoms associated with LGBT, queer and feminism. In some religious objections, Judith Butler (2019: 10) notes, '"gender" simply is the same as, or a cover for, homosexuality'.

At the same time, anti-LGBT articulations have triggered counter-discourses and mobilized people against homophobia, such as the 'LGBT welcome' actions by Lublin-based restaurants and other institutions. What interests us most in this context, however, is the antagonistic ways in which PiS opponents and pundits, home and abroad, have condemned what they see as an increasingly anti-liberalization of Poland, accusing the government for exaggerating the dark sides of European liberalism and discrediting liberal principles and institutions – to which we shall turn next.

## *7. Liberal anti-populist rhetoric*

Under PiS, it is often argued, Poland has emerged as an opponent of the EU's liberal-democratic values, culminating in the declarations of LGBT-free zones and the homophobic violence in Białystok.[9] Describing the attacks on the Equality March from a first-hand perspective for the British newspaper, the *Guardian*, author and columnist Jacek Dehnel vividly writes:

> Now and then, a lorry drives along the march with a megaphone, spitting out Catholic propaganda about how gays and lesbians rape children by the dozen. […] We march doggedly, through a series of blockades, and it seems as if we are marching through the darkest valley, a lions' den, though these are definitely less noble animals.[10]

Although the described acts of violence are disgraceful, the column is not without its own symbolic violence in its invocation of the Polish nobility imaginary. This is not to say that the two political sides are equally violent, because that would be to construct a false moral equivalence between them and tap into rightwing 'what-about-ism'.[11] But given the long-established lord/boor divide, the designation 'less noble animals' (in the quote) is firmly rooted in the intelligentsia-informed symbolic framework underpinning and animating Polish public debate, and the transmission of meaning through such discursive framing speaks to political

[9] In September 2020, the head of the European commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said that Poland's 'LGBT-free zones' are 'humanity-free zones' that have no place in the EU. See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/16/ursula-von-der-leyen-says-polands-lgbt-free-zones-have-no-place-in-eu A few months earlier, the Dutch town Nieuwegein ended its longstanding ties with Puławy in eastern Poland after the latter municipality had declared itself a LGBT-free zone. Following the decision to 'unfriend' the Polish municipality and terminate all contact, stickers with a rainbow flag were – in a symbolically laden gesture – placed on one of the town's entrance signs to cover up its Polish counterpart's name. See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/16/dutch-city-ends-ties-with-polish-twin-declared-gay-free-zone-nieuwegein-pulawy

[10] See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/28/lgbt-gay-rights-poland-first-pride-march-bialystok-rage-violence

[11] An examplary example of 'what-about-ism' or 'two-side-ism' is Donald Trump's infamous comment 'there were very fine people on both sides', uttered after the clash between fascists and antifascist at a rally in the Virginian city Charlottesville in 2017, where a white nationalist (suprematist) drove his car into the crowd and injured a civil rights activist who died shorlty after the attack.

subjectivities in ways that risk exacerbating existing political divides and the sense of crisis of democracy and (sexual) freedom.[12] As Jason Glynos and Aurelien Mondon (2016) argue, the tendency to present an overly simplistic picture of one's opponents is not confined to populist discourses but can also be found in liberal responses to rightwing populism. One dimension of the 'hyped', anti-populist response is the use of disaster rhetoric to convey a sense of existential threat to 'European values' and 'democratic ideals' posed by 'irrational and irresponsible (populist) voters' (ibid, 7–10).

In Poland, many in the liberal camp viewed the 2015 PiS parliamentary victory as a triumph of the political pariah, purportedly opening up for an inflow of plebeian aspirations in public space and giving rise to unacceptable political articulations in terms of 'nationalism', 'homophobia', 'anti-democracy' etc. Instructive here is liberal reactions to the PiS party's leading welfare policies, the so-called 500+ program, which provides parents with a monthly welfare subsidy per child.[13] One of the most striking results of the program is a growing domestic tourism: families visiting Poland's seaside resorts, a phenomenon frequently ridiculed by the liberal intelligentsia. For instance, Anna Szulc expressed her aversion for the 'boor' tourists in a 2016 *Newsweek Weekly* article in which she describes the invasion of 500+ Barbarians (*Inwazja Hunów*) on the Polish coast.[14] Much like anti-Brexiteers in Britain, social media users and newspaper columnists in the Polish liberal camp have resorted to classism and ageism when fingering majority constituencies as rural, uneducated, elderly peasants from underdeveloped regions. Symptomatic of this deriding form of social commentary is a 2017 Facebook post by Krzysztof Łoziński, who at the time served as leader of the civic movement KOD (Committee for the Defense of Democracy):

> Everything that is taking place now should be understood as an ennoblement of the boor, these are boors in the courtyard. Once the time comes and PiS loses its power, the biggest problem will be removing the halo from the boor's head. The boor is being elevated on monuments. The boor wields power.[15]

In this quote, 'ennoblement of the boor' is clearly a derogative term used to delegitimize PiS voters and simultaneously raise warnings about their affront to liberal rights and freedoms. The storyline figure of the irrational voter, Glynos and Mondon (2016: 10) note, energizes narratives about threats to European liberal democracies. Another top-ranked KOD activist, Walter Chełstowski, went even

[12] The fact that the story is published in the British newspaper, the *Guardian*, suggests that its readers are mainly liberal-minded (in moral quesitons), well-educated European cultural 'elites'.

[13] At its start, the program did not cover the first child, but was later extended to cover every child, including the first one. See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/05/family-faith-flag-catholic-religious-right-battle-polands-soul

[14] See https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/polacy-nad-baltykiem-czyli-najazd-hunow-panstwo-kiepscy-i-mlynarska/cjnvxd9

[15] See https://studioopinii.pl/archiwa/184061

further, expressing his disillusion with the equal right to vote (suffrage) when commentating on the elections results on his Facebook page:

> This is a result of equality policies towards the foolish and independent thinkers that are being practiced in the free democratic elections in many countries. The vote of the boor, simple-minded, the foolish and poorly educated, counts exactly as much as the vote of all others among us.[16]

Incoherent as they may seem as far as the enshrinement of liberal rights and freedoms is concerned, these anti-populist statements express and provoke feelings that clearly tap into symbolic registers rooted in the lord/boor distinction: 'we' are civilized and morally responsible citizens, whereas 'they' are unruly and irresponsible. As with nationalist-populist discourse, liberal anti-populist articulations of threatened identities draw on sedimented practices, predicated on mythical ideas of the pure but lost origin – the moral (dis)integrity of society (cf. Nabers, 2012: 422–424). Moreover, these attempts to articulate a cultural and moral crisis within a civilizational frame are enmeshed in the East/West dynamic of (self)colonialization. It could be argued that efforts – home and abroad – to shame Poland (or the CEE region more broadly) as backward and parochial, while construing the West as essentially progressive, do not merely belie the more complex realities, but inevitably reinsert the colonial-imperial moral and cultural superiority of 'core' Europe (Sremac and Ganzevoort, 2015: 2; cf. Kulpa, 2014). We have seen that LGBT rights-related signifiers, customarily used in shaming practices to exert political leverage, are readily available in anti-populist liberal politics insofar as they symbolize civilizational Europeanness (cf. Gressgård, 2015). We shall now turn to the equally divisive struggles over sex education.

## *8. Modernization and struggles over sex education*

If we look at how sex education in schools was politicized in the 2019 European parliamentary election debates in Poland, a similar antagonistic pattern appears. A chain of equivalence was articulated, on both sides of the political divide, between various sexuality-related practices to establish a national imaginary. By drawing on sedimented practices, both liberals and nationalists sought to guarantee the moral integrity of the nation according to the crisis logic described by Naber (2016: 427): 'The articulation of binaries, the depiction of an 'evil' Other, and antagonism are […] significant for the establishment of hegemonic relations in times of crisis'.

A case in point is the February 2019 decision of the President of Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski, to sign a LGBT+ declaration identifying areas in need of policy intervention (following World Health Organization (WHO) standards), including anti-discrimination and anti-violence education in schools, the establishment of a hostel for LGBT+ people and the introduction of comprehensive sex education.

[16] See https://www.tvp.info/35384763/bydlo-na-salonach-nobilitacja-chamstwa-o-kim-mowia-tuzy-kod

The declaration was indubitably a deliberate move in the ongoing European Parliament election campaign, calculated to polarize public opinion, and as one would expect, rightwing activists swiftly mobilized against it. For instance, PiS president, Jarosław Kaczyński, stated: 'Polish parents have the right to raise their own children, we will defend the Polish family. It's hard to call it education; this is not education; it is social engineering aiming to change a person. What's in the centre of it? It is the very early sexualization of children.'[17]

When the debate took off, liberals seized the opportunity to portray conservatives as enemies of modernization, morally backward and sexually repressed, orbiting towards non-rational arrangements owing to their religious, superstitious inclinations. The inclusion of sex education in the national curriculum and the implementation of sexual minority rights into the legal framework are, as they see it, necessary steps towards deeper integration with the secular, liberal-democratic West. Accordingly, they promote a rational and non-sectarian approach to sexuality which allegedly invests minors with the competence required to avoid risk-based sexual conduct. In the liberal intelligentsia optic, inhibiting minors from receiving sex education amounts to blocking their opportunities for gender and sexuality empowerment, hence putting them at risk. Once again, we see how gender and sexuality issues serve as political instruments for building a new, more liberal citizenship model (cf. Dzenovska, 2018; see also Gressgård, 2015). For the conservative/nationalist faction, on the other hand, universalization of their ideological stand entails strategies of social control in the name of 'child protection'. Mirroring the widespread Euro-Atlantic anxieties over children's safety, they symbolically link LGBT rights and freedoms to abuse of minors, while conflating sex education in schools with premature exposure to sex and linking it to risky sexual behavior. In both cases, an equivalent relationship is established between risk-oriented signifiers, and on both sides of the political divide, the hegemonic discourses purport to overcome a politically articulated crisis.

At this juncture, we may ask where – in this polarized debate – Polish feminist movements are positioned. Around the turn of the century, Graff (2019: 474) explains, contemporary Polish feminism was divided along two main strands, one radical left-wing and another mainstream liberal. Both were distinctly anti-populist-cum-nationalist, but while the former resolutely rejected national symbols, the latter had a more affirmative (patriotic) relationship to the national heritage (ibid., 475; cf. Grabowska, 2012). This symbolic logic changed, however, with the Black Protest in 2016, which brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets and involved symbolic activity on an unprecedented scale. Graff highlights how the protest complicates the neat divide between anti-nationalists and patriots, making it impossible to stabilize the meaning of symbols along established lines. She concludes that 'the Black Protest mobilization was a breakthrough for Polish feminism, bringing joy, hope, and enthusiasm, but also chaos and unpredictability' (Graff, 1019: 492–493).

[17] See https://polandin.com/41692741/lgbt-warsaw-declaration-stirs-emotions-in-polish-politics

## *9. Concluding remarks*

In our discussion of current struggles over moral gender and sexuality issues in Polish political debates, we have demonstrated that it is helpful to take into consideration the historical emergence of Polish cultural elites and its relationship to the empty signifier 'Europeanness' or 'European values'. Given the prevalent role of cultural capital in Polish public life, it does not come as a surprise that rightwing nationalists-cum-populists take criticism of their policies as attacks on 'sacred' resources, whereas the Euro-enthusiastic camp takes EU integration as a modernization process (including sexual modernization): a movement away from 'Eastern superstition' towards 'Western rationality' (Zarycki, 2014). For self-proclaimed nationalists, moral panics pertaining to gender and sexuality serve to justify moral responsibilization techniques in the name of 'defense', while also giving a mythic explanation for why desired family values are deprived of their social fullness. Nationalist campaigners seek to expose European corruptness that must be blocked by 'good citizens' representing – and yearning for – the genuine, non-corrupted European universal civilization. Their liberal counterparts, on the other hand, make claims to 'European values' through a civilizational discourse of modernization. On both sides of the political divide, whether phrased in terms of sexual modernity or Christian civilization, we see a self-orientalizing positioning towards (the empty signifier) 'European values'.

Considering the largely unchallenged position of the intelligentsia in Polish society and the prominence of gender and sexuality signifiers in political conflicts over normative citizenship models, it is likely that polarized struggles over 'the European body' will continue to dominate political debates in the medium-run perspective. But in keeping with Graff's cautiously optimistic view, which suggests that entrenched cultural imaginaries might be less stable when looking at the more complex realities beyond the vantage point of key enunciators (politicians, political commentators, etc., with voluminous media exposure) (Glynos and Mondon, 2016: 3, 6), we want to end on a theoretical note that reminds us of the contingency – and instability – of these polarized factions: while efforts to re-suture a dislocated structure is necessary for the constitution of society, it is also its condition of impossibility (Laclau, 1996).

If we recognize that indeterminacy is the constitutive feature of society, antagonism is not reducible to concrete political conflicts, but is better understood as *constitutive* of political conflicts and, more generally, of the social world's pluralistic nature (Mouffe, 2005: 17). So, while every social order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities through antagonism, any moment of antagonization is also a moment of undecidability, pointing to the contingency of every order. Put in slightly different terms, if antagonistic politics serves as a (symbolic) reminder of the ungroundable nature of society (Marchart, 2007; Gressgård, 2011; Glynos and Mondon, 2016), it also tells us that polarized debates are moments of political volatility and great social stress. And, as Gayle Rubin (1984: 267) highlights, conflicts over sexual values and erotic conduct acquire immense symbolic weight and should be treated with special respect in such times.

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**DOROTA HALL** *

# Shifting Silences: Changes in Living Religion and Homosexuality in Poland between 1970s and 2010s

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## Abstract

In Poland between 1970s and 2010s, the discursive landscape involving issues of religion and homosexuality radically changed, which influenced the possibilities for combining religiosity with non-normative sexuality at a personal level. This paper draws on biographical interviews with Polish Roman Catholics who experience homoerotic desire. It shows that the shift of homosexuality from being a phenomenon surrounded by silence to becoming a 'gay' identity has produced new silences and new problems in integrating the religious and the sexual spheres of life. The paper is concerned with the integration at both the cognitive level and in the context of social interactions, highlighting possibilities and limitations specific for the past and the present, respectively. However, it tells a non-linear story of gay and lesbian experience that complicates a clear division between the communist past, customarily seen as totally restricting sexually non-normative individuals, and today's democratic conditions, seen as decidedly beneficial for their self-expression.

***Keywords:*** *religion, homosexuality, discourse, lived experience, communism, Roman Catholicism.*

This paper addresses the tension between religion and non-normative sexuality in biographies of those living both lives, that is, those adhering to Roman Catholicism and experiencing homoerotic desire. My aim is to highlight the change in the possibilities for combining Catholic religiosity with same-sex attraction that have taken place in Poland between the 1970s and recent years. We shall see that this change closely corresponds to the increased importance of homosexuality and the development of a strong dichotomy between homosexuality and religion in public discourse. The shift from being a phenomenon surrounded by silence (in Poland of the 20th century) to becoming a 'gay' identity (in the last two decades) has not brought full comfort to Catholic believers experiencing non-normative sexual desire. While opening up new possibilities, the new identity discourse has imposed on them new limitations and silences due to the emergence of a strong LGBT–religion dichotomy.

Three stipulations should be made at this point. First, I do not consider silences and discourses on homosexuality as two concepts totally separated from each other. Following Foucault (1978) and queer studies scholars (e.g. Sedgwick, 1990), I recognize that, on the one hand, silence is never entire, singular and evenly distributed throughout a discursive landscape, and on the other hand, many silences underlie and permeate discourses. Although I highlight how homosexuality was scarcely commented on in public debates between the 1970s and the new millennium in Poland, and the impact this silence had for the gay Christian experience, I also discuss the work of silence after homosexual discourses entered the public realm in the first years of the 2000s. And although I emphasize the silence over homosexuality in the 20th century, I still show the vitality of religious and therapeutic sexual discourses which governed human bodies, emotions and identities in the de-centralized way identified by Foucault (1978). The focus on silence seen as contrasting discursivity would distort the history of homosexuality in Poland under the communist regime and shortly thereafter. Meanwhile, my paper contributes to the project of recuperating the homosexual experience from the last century, in concert with other Polish scholars (see e.g. Kurpios, 2001; Szulc, 2017; Majewska, 2018; Kościańska et al., 2019).

Second, while the analysis does not challenge the academic view that the gay emancipatory discourse greatly facilitates the process of integrating sexual non-normativity with religion at the personal level (e.g. Lukenbill, 1998; Yip, 2005a), it introduces a nuance to the discussion of gay Christians' potential to harmoniously combine religious and sexual aspects of their life. On the one hand, it highlights available pathways for reconciliation before this discourse entered the public realm, and on the other hand, problems that are specific to the present moment. Again, my paper follows Foucault's (1978) observation that the past discretion over homoeroticism not only resulted in extreme severity targeting the 'sodomites', but also allowed for quite widespread tolerance. The subsequent proliferation of homosexual discourses has led to both tightened social control and development of a 'reverse' discourse that legitimizes homosexuality and yet exerts pressure on individuals, as do all discourses.

Third, the problems faced by gay Christians today are related to the fact that the gay emancipatory discourse is strongly entangled in secularist approaches, and the belief that religious commitments are detrimental to the advancement of sexual equality. Many important works have commented on the discursive structure building an opposition between homosexuality and religion, mainly by reference to the American 'war on terrorism' and how it has strengthened the polarization between a so-called secular and progressive 'West' and a religious and backward Islamic 'East' (Puar, 2007; Butler, 2009). Critical scholars have addressed the conjunction between nationalism and sexuality in this context, especially under the rubric of 'homonationalism' (Puar, 2007). The latter term is deployed to demonstrate how secular pro-gay articulations are pitted against religion, Islam in particular, and how LGBT rights and freedoms are instrumentally used to legitimate racism and xenophobia. In Poland, secular, nationalistic and homosexual emancipatory discourses form a different kind of assemblage, connected to the cultivation of an association between Polishness and Roman Catholicism and the simultaneous geopolitical location of Poland as the 'Eastern' and 'new' part of the – perceived as secular – European Union (Kulpa, 2011). The opposition between religion and homosexuality in Poland is therefore played out as the opposition between Polishness and the image of the secular EU supported by gay people.

Here, I leave this issue aside, as I have discussed similar issues elsewhere (Hall, 2015). What I take from the 'Western' scholarship is the concept of gay religious individuals 'who cannot properly be gay' (El-Tayeb, 2012), a phrase originally referring to gay Muslims in Amsterdam caught up in the homonationalist imagery, but still relevant to Polish gay people who do not subscribe to the dominant secular emancipatory gay discourse. By situating the discussion of Polish nonheterosexual Roman Catholics in the context of wider discursive structures, the paper engages with sociological scholarship on homosexuality and Christianity concerned with the issue of combining conflicting religious and sexual identities at the individual level, but that scarcely comments on the entanglement of this process in discourses governing individual experience.

My discussion draws on biographical interviews with Roman Catholics in Poland of various ages, who define themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. After referring to Anglophone scholarly publications on Christianity and homosexuality and situating my analytical perspective in relation to this body of literature, I devote one section to the Vatican's standpoint on homosexuality and a specific trajectory of its reception in Poland. I also show how the Polish context influences my paper at the conceptual level. In the subsequent section, I briefly present evolving discourses on homosexuality in Poland, followed by a methodological account. Finally, drawing on the interviews, I discuss (im)possibilities for combining Catholic religiosity with same-sex attraction, closely related to the discursive changes outlined in section 3. I then summarize my findings by way of concluding remarks.

## *1. Theoretical background*

Many social studies discussing the intersection of religious and sexually non-normative engagement focus on 'cognitive dissonance' and its resolution (e.g. Mahaffy, 1996; Gross, 2008; Meek, 2014), that is, the individually experienced tension between religion and homosexuality and how that tension might be resolved. Thumma's (1991) publication on a gay Christian organization called Good News, followed by Mahaffy's (1996) study of lesbian Christians, and Rodriguez and Ouelette's (2000) discussion of the experience of members of the Metropolitan Community Church, consolidated a typology for managing the tension: rejecting the religious identity, rejecting the homosexual identity, compartmentalization, identity integration.

Social studies drawing on personal accounts have also highlighted various strategies by nonheterosexual Christians to harmoniously combine the conflicting identities. For instance, they have pointed to the reinterpretation of the Bible and the questioning of church officials' authority (Thumma, 1991; Yip, 1997; 2005b), as well as the reliance on positive personal experience of the sacred (Mahaffy, 1996; Yip, 1997), which usually goes hand-in-hand with the retreat from the image of a punitive God in favor of the image of a loving and unconditionally accepting deity (Gross and Yip, 2010; Deguara, 2018). The studies have also accentuated the spiritual-seeking Christian communities that best respond to the need for reconciling the religious and sexual spheres of life, arguing that participation in such communities facilitates the process of identity integration at the cognitive level (Rodriguez and Ouelette, 2000; Wilcox, 2003; Levy and Reeves, 2011).

Whether the research focus has been on the experience of nonheterosexual Christians affiliated with various Protestant traditions (the majority of studies referred to above), or the Roman Catholic Church (e.g. García et al., 2008; Deguara, 2018), the common feature is that the studies assume two pre-established, conflicting identities: the religious and the homosexual (or, more broadly, nonheterosexual), as if both were essential attributes of the individual. If they introduce a dynamism at all, this is either to acknowledge the psychological process of identity formation (e.g. Levy and Reeves, 2011), or to show that the religious engagement and the tendency to act upon one's nonheterosexuality may change throughout the life trajectory (e.g. García et al., 2008; Meek, 2014).

Thus, scholarly publications on Christianity and non-normative sexuality rarely take account of the observation made by Foucault (1978) and queer studies scholars (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990) that the 'homosexual' or 'gay' identity is historically and culturally contingent. This is probably owing to the fact that the above-mentioned publications, rapidly proliferating since the 1990s, report on those who have had a chance to identify themselves with the 'gay' subject position already well rooted in the North American and Western European context. My research conducted in Poland between 2011 and 2014, with the gay emancipatory discourse at work for not more than some 10 years, called for taking into account the non-obvious nature of gay identity and for perceiving individual experience and identity formation as shaped by discourses and silences available in the public

realm at a given historical moment (Foucault, 1978). Accordingly, while still concerned with the religion–homosexuality dichotomy, I do not take homosexual identity as a starting point for discussion, and I do not isolate the issue of living religion and homosexuality from the broader discursive setting.

Another problem with the main current of the sociological scholarship reporting on non-heterosexual Christians' lived experience is that it usually points to religion as the main producer of the tension between the two conflicting identities. This even applies to quite nuanced studies that introduce a historical perspective (e.g. Meek, 2014). To be sure, some scholars mention the mainstream emancipatory discourse as the other side of the coin, pointing to secular gay/lesbian circles' exclusionary approach to religious individuals. For instance, both Wilcox (2003) and Yip (2005a) notice that revealing one's religious commitment in these circles bears traits typical of 'coming out' and is rarely met with approval. But by focusing on inner struggles for harmonious integration of one's sexual and religious identity, and sometimes also on the experience of gay Christians in mainstream religious, gay religious or secular gay activist communities, the studies typically leave aside the issue of living religion and homosexuality in everyday life, especially at home and the workplace. Nor do they discuss the fact that these social settings are also governed by dominant religious and homosexual discourses which translate into the increase or decrease in gay Christians' well-being. My presentation below is informed by such a broader perspective.

## *2. Roman Catholicism in context*

Since more than 90 per cent of Poles declare their affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church (CBOS, 2017), those experiencing homoerotic desire live in social environments (family, other institutions) where religion plays a significant role, and if they define themselves as religious, they typically adhere to Roman Catholicism.

In many countries of the 'Western' part of the world, reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) with their emphasis on *aggiornamento*, that is, the adjustment of the church's message to contemporary cultural conditions, and greater subjectivity given to lay people, awoke high hopes for the liberalization of the Roman Catholic Church's standpoint on sexuality. In the 1960s and 1970s, the emergence of gay Catholic groups and ministries, e.g. *Dignity* in the US, *Quest* in the UK, reflected such an optimistic attitude. However, these hopes soon appeared groundless. From *Persona humana* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1975), through the *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (Congregation…, 1986), to statements opposing anti-discrimination legislation (e.g. Congregation…, 1992) and the call for parliamentarians to vote against any acts regulating same-sex partnership (Congregation…, 2003), the Vatican tightened up its view on homosexuality. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993: paras. 2357–2359) put it, 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered', 'homosexual inclination […] is objectively disordered',

and homosexual persons are 'called to chastity', which in practice means sexual abstinence.

In his auto-ethnographic account, Dominic Wetzel (2014) shows how this conservative shift influenced his experience of a male adolescent discovering homoerotic desire within a traditionalist Catholic family in the US. His article diverges from the main current of the scholarship on gay Roman Catholics by destabilizing the issue of identity, and it brilliantly documents the correspondence between the dominant religious discourse on homosexuality and personal experience. It also tells an alternative story of living religion by 'queers raised conservative Catholics' – by pointing to the potential of neglecting the tension between religion and sexuality in specific homosocial spaces within the church, such as a parish choir for boys. My approach follows the analytical path taken by Wetzel, that is, it employs the Foucauldian logic of teasing out how discourses permeate personal experience and self-understanding (Foucault, 1978). It is concerned not only with limitations imposed by discourses on individuals but also with possibilities for minimizing the tension between religion and non-normative sexuality. At the same time, it diverges from Wetzel's account in two important ways, both resulting from the embeddedness of my discussion in the Polish context.

First, the story about the Roman Catholic Church going conservative after the Second Vatican Council, and especially under the papacy of John Paul II (1978–2005), may hold true from a 'Western' perspective. However, this narrative does not resonate in the Polish context. In the 1970s and 1980s, the local church was preoccupied with state-level politics; it supported the democratic opposition and served as mediator between dissident circles and the communist government (Grzymała-Busse, 2015). Poles perceived John Paul II not as a figure toughening moral standards, but rather as a powerful leader capable of inciting a wide-scale anti-communist drive in society; his contribution to the fall of communism is undeniable. The reception of the Second Vatican Council in Poland was quite selective and superficial. While the reforms changed the way in which the mass is celebrated, they did not spark any debates on the issue of sexuality, and they have not led to a wide-scale promotion of lay people's independent judgment of their moral performance (Grabska, 1996). Similarly, there were no debates on the first comprehensive Vatican document on homosexuality (Congregation…, 1986), which restricted the development of gay ministries in many 'Western' countries. The church has shown its conservative face regarding homosexuality, but only after the fall of communism, when church officials rushed to capitalize on their 'moral authority' developed under the previous regime (Grzymała-Busse, 2015), particularly after the LGBT emancipatory discourse entered the public scene in the first years of the 2000s. Before that, the church in Poland rarely took a stance on the issue, and this silence corresponded with a widespread silence over homosexuality in the public space. Personal stories by Polish believers experiencing homoerotic desire are therefore entangled in a discursive trajectory fundamentally different from what Wetzel (2014) describes in a US context, and as I will elaborate on below, their personal accounts reflect these different conditions.

Second, Wetzel's (2014) story begins after the 'gay' subject position has been soundly articulated within the US discursive landscape and, at least outside of the Roman Catholic Church, has become an obvious point of reference for individuals experiencing homoerotic desire. When Wetzel mentions silence over homosexuality, he refers mainly to techniques of silencing structurally inscribed in the church institution (cf. Jordan, 2000). Stories that I encountered begin when the silence dominated not only the church, but also the broader public space. Hence, my focus is on a dynamism involving not only discourse produced by the church, but also other discourses on homosexuality. Over the last couple of decades, religious, therapeutic and emancipatory discourses have converged in complex ways in Poland, and the interplay between them has produced different possibilities and imposed different limitations on individuals' efforts to integrate their religiosity with non-normative sexuality. The following analysis identifies spaces of silence pertaining to the impossibility of articulating a religious gay identity, showing how silence relates to shifting positions within a mutable discursive structure over time.

## *3. Discursive transformations in Poland*

In Poland under the communist regime, homosexuality was surrounded by considerable silence, both within the Roman Catholic Church and in the broader public space. Sexologists, in line with prevalent medical recommendations at the time, offered techniques to 'treat' homosexuality, but they did not advertise them widely, and they never set up a significant therapeutic industry targeting homosexual people. In the last two decades of communism, they rather recommended that homosexuality should be depathologized, underlining the need to increase societal acceptance of people of homosexual orientation (Kościańska, 2014). Since the communist state never penalized homosexual acts, it gave weak impulses for counteracting its sexual policy, and authorities took advantage from keeping homosexuality in the scarcely commented and minimally opposed sphere of shame. This allowed them to approach the phenomenon instrumentally and strategically, for instance, to blackmail people with homoerotic interests into cooperation with the secret services (Kurpios, 2001; Szulc, 2017; Majewska, 2018).

Careful reading of the press of that time reveals traces of discursive pathologization and criminalization of homosexuality, accompanied by efforts made by some columnists of socio-cultural magazines of the 1980s to prove that 'homosexuals', although different in their sexual behaviors, are not different to other people in society (Fiedotow, 2012). If at all, it was male homosexuality that was problematized; lesbians were virtually absent from the public discourse during communism. Nevertheless, state control of the media, followed by a restrictive law on associations, did not allow the variety of standpoints on homosexuality to fully manifest themselves in public and interact with each other.

In the first decade after the fall of communism, gay and lesbian activists, whose self-organization (though not recognized by the wider public) could be traced back to the 1980s (Kurpios, 2001; Szulc, 2017), gained freedom to register

their associations. Still, they operated in niches, and focused on community actions rather than on political campaigning. In the public discourse, homosexuality was overshadowed by multiple issues of prominent importance in times of political and economic transformation. If the mainstream media referred to gay organizations newly emerging in Poland, this was usually to point out the diversity of society under democratic rule. The issue did not spark significant controversies, although one could hear the voice of church officials opposing any form of gay activism (Hall, 2015).

The beginning of the 2000s saw wider references to homosexuality in the public realm in two specific contexts. First, in 2000, homosexuality became a topic in connection with the international gay pride in Rome, which overlapped in time with the Great National Pilgrimage of Poles to Rome for celebrations of the Great Jubilee of 2000 Years of Christianity. Contributing to an atmosphere of scandal around this coincidence, the media established the opposition between promiscuous 'homosexuals' from abroad and Christian values protected by Poles (Hall, 2015). Second, in 2002, the press revealed that Juliusz Paetz, Archbishop of Poznań, had sexually harassed subordinated seminarians, and Catholic media of various political affiliations (with no significant opposition from the mainstream liberal media) began to promote religiously motivated ex-gay reparative programs, considering them the proper way to deal with homosexuality among both the clergy and lay people (Hall, 2017).

The gay emancipatory discourse dynamically entered public space in 2003 as a result of the first large-scale, and widely contested, anti-homophobic project: the billboard campaign *Let Them See Us*, which displayed gay and lesbian couples holding hands (Mizielińska, 2011). In their public statements, campaign leaders opposed the exoticization of homosexuality, the church's views on the issue, and the reparative programs (Hall, 2015; 2017). In subsequent years, the discursive dichotomy between religion and homosexuality was further entrenched. On the eve of Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, right-wing political parties and conservative columnists reinforced the image of the homosexual as the 'other' threatening Poland's sovereignty and national values, closely linked to the Catholic religion (Hall, 2015). The conflict reached the streets in connection with gay pride initiatives in Poland, their ban, and counter-manifestations, mainly in 2004 and 2005 (Graff, 2006). Issues related to homosexuality and sexual minorities' rights, popularly referred to by the 'LGBT' acronym, had by then entered the headline news. In 2011, the leader of the organization that had implemented the *Let Them See Us* campaign in 2003, as well as a transsexual activist, joined the Palikot Movement, a party employing anti-clerical rhetoric and winning parliamentary elections. Their electoral success, followed by subsequent initiatives of the party they represented, such as an effort to remove a cross from parliamentary premises, preserved the discursive polarization between LGBT issues and religion (Hall, 2015).

## *4. Methodological account*

In the remaining part of this paper, I draw on my sociological research on religion and non-heteronormativity in Poland, conducted in 2011–2014.[1] The project involved interviews with 52 cis-gendered women (24) and men (28) who adhere to Christianity, the vast majority to Roman Catholicism, while staying in same-sex romantic relationships and/or declaring themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. These were thematic biographical interviews focusing on issues related to religion and sexuality.

Starting from my personal network, I used snowball sampling to contact one-fourth of the interviewees. I reached the rest through *Faith and Rainbow (Wiara i Tęcza)*, the first and only nationwide community targeting Polish LGBT Christians, established in 2010. The community's mission is to work for the revision of religious – mainly Roman Catholic – leaders' views on LGBT issues, and to support those who wish to harmoniously combine their religiosity with non-normative sexuality.[2]

My interviewees were aged between 19 and 77; mainly people in their twenties and thirties. All had university degrees or were studying. The vast majority were raised in religiously engaged families in various towns and cities across Poland. At the time of my study, almost all lived in big cities.

## *5. Personal experience and changes over time*

### *5.1 Limitations in the past*

The silence that surrounded homosexuality up until the early 2000s translated into individuals' difficulties in defining their non-normative sexual desire. As a rule, it did not allow my interviewees to develop a gay/lesbian identity. This applies in particular to women whose sexual non-normativity remained socially unrecognized. As Ewa[3] (b. 1976) told me, 'I didn't call it being a lesbian, or homosexuality, but, well, I knew I had this tendency'. Male same-sex attraction was more exposed to naming: 'it was commented in the context of a joke, maliciousness or very negative judgement' (Adam, b. 1983). Still, memories of many male interviewees do not significantly differ from those presented by female respondents:

> I didn't know and I didn't have any tools to investigate it. Does the fact that I'm attracted to men mean I'm gay? Or is it a developmental stage, for

[1] The research received funding from my project *The Institutional and Individual Dimension of LGBT People's Religiosity in Poland* financed by the National Science Centre in Poland, based on decision DEC-2011/01/D/HS6/03877.

[2] *Faith and Rainbow*: http://www.wiaraitecza.pl/

[3] I use pseudonyms throughout the paper.

> instance? Nothing at all was said about it. It's only now that I can even call it by its name. (Tadeusz, b. 1975)

Faced with difficulties in capturing their homoerotic desire in existing idioms, my respondents tended to situate it within the religious perspective, especially since they were strongly socialized into religious engagement. However, in the 20th century, Polish church officials were far from providing a clear guidance on how to conceptualize non-normative desire and handle it. Moreover, priests to whom my interviewees turned to with their concerns did not know how to respond:

> They had no knowledge of the issue, neither positive nor negative. They didn't know whether you can or you cannot treat it. They tended to suggest this is transitory, they ignored the problem. (Jacek, male, b. 1977)

> I didn't face a strong condemnation from priests. It was rather a kind of approach like towards a disabled person, an approach with a wink: 'Relax, you're so young… What are you saying? Is there something a man did to you? Eehh, you'll probably be alright'. No constructive conversation. And in fact, for many years I tried to handle it on my own. (Marta, female, b. 1978)

Obviously, this ignorance imposed a huge burden on people. While specific discourses on homosexuality, even those recommending the 'treatment' of the 'problem', were practically absent from the religious realm, other disciplining discourses hugely affected my respondents. In lack of explicit statements on homosexuality, and hence lack of any 'reverse' discourses (cf. Foucault, 1978), people relied on general Catholic advice on sexual matters, reinforcing the silence and peoples' experience of marginalization within the church. Situating homoerotic desire within the religious sphere 'on their own' often resulted in self-condemnation. Such a reaction was supported by the limited reception of the Second Vatican Council: the Polish church of the 20th century did little to break with the pre-Council image of a punitive God. Church representatives cultivated this image and spread it over everything that went beyond traditional moral standards, including in the realm of sexuality. As Jacek (b. 1977) commented, 'I had a very neurotic approach to all these issues'.

Karol's (b. 1935) account shows a detrimental work of silence at the level of social interactions. In the 1970s, he experienced marginalization as a member of the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (CCI):

> In one of the first conversations with me, she [a person from the CCI management] said… It wasn't directly to me, she said it like into the air: ladies in CCI warn me about you. They say, 'he is kind of… kind of, kind of, kind of…' I'm sorry I'm saying it like this, but she was just repeating it like a scratched record, and she could not go beyond and say, kind of what. He is kind of, kind of, kind of… and so on.

Karol had no discursive resources to rely on and oppose the marginalization: 'I tucked my tail, well, what could I do? After all, I can't deny or confirm it, so everyone knows'. In the atmosphere of understatements and hazy suggestions still giving him the feeling that 'everyone knows', he was not able to freely develop his activity: 'They rather kept me away from everything. […] I really felt that I was just a nobody in CCI'.

Karol's recollection might be better understood if we take into account the Polish political context of the 1970s and 1980s and the fact that the CCI was a very specific milieu: with scarce support from the Polish Episcopate, it worked for the dissemination of the message from the Second Vatican Council, especially in the realm of inter-religious dialogue. Additionally, CCI relied on the Council's vision of human dignity to promote human rights against the communist regime. Karol pointed exactly to the dissident aspect of CCI's activity when explaining his experience: 'it was difficult to trust a person like me in conspiracy-related issues, such a person could easily give in to the pressure from the secret services'. Thus, although silence over homosexuality did not allow for naming things (as apparent in the conversation between Karol and the lady from CCI's management), it created room for discourses like the one about gay people's cooperation with the secret services. It created a platform for both Karol's exclusion and making this exclusion legible to the excluded party.

### *5.2 Possibilities in the past*

Ewa (b. 1976), who was engaged in the Charismatic Renewal during her university studies under democratic conditions of the 1990s, had a different story. In her case, the silence still surrounding homosexuality in the church and the public realm proved beneficial; it allowed her to personally deal with the relationship between religion and homoerotic desire, achieving a comfort in everyday life. At that time, Ewa shared a household with two female members of her religious community, of which one was her girlfriend. The second woman was therefore a witness to their sexual intimacy: 'Our friend knew about it. She did know, but we never spoke about it.' Whether or not the friend accepted the partnership, she apparently lacked the language to comment on what was going on. Other members of the religious community also tacitly approved of their partnership, which resonates with Foucault's (1978) comments on spaces of relative tolerance in times characterized by the discretion over homoeroticism.

Aleksander's (b. 1979) story points to the work of silence at the cognitive level, suggesting that the lack of explicit condemnation of homosexuality might have diminished inner struggles involving homoerotic desire. Aleksander told me that in his teenage years, it was not homosexuality but masturbation that was his largest concern: '[Sexuality] was not an issue until... When, you know, I discovered what masturbation is, and when a catechist told me that this is a mortal sin'. While falling victim to the work of long-standing 'war against onanism' inside and outside of the church, he was able to put aside his inner struggles related to the

erotic interest in boys, which again speaks to Foucault's (1978) perspective on possible beneficial results of discretion over homoeroticism.

Meanwhile, Stanisław's (b. 1944) account shows that the church's silence over homosexuality could – in the long run – lead to quite smooth integration of religiosity with sexuality. The man told me about a confession when young; he confessed his homoerotic desire, but the confessor did not give him any special guidance, except for staying away from people with similar interests. After having faced the confessor's relative indifference, Stanisław kept searching for an answer to the nagging question about his non-normative desire. He came across sexologist publications which in the 1970s were the only source of comprehensive information regarding homosexuality. Inspired by these publications, he travelled across Poland in search of effective treatment, trying out a range of therapeutic techniques, including hypnosis. His main battlefield was hence in the realm of medicine rather than religion, which was far less explicit on the subject matter. It took him 15 years of inner struggle before deciding to get involved in same-sex relationships, and stop considering them as incompatible with the Roman Catholic tradition:

> Can anyone be celibate? […] Several doctors told me: get married. I mean, specifically the urologist, he told me to have a regular intercourse. [He told me] that if I didn't, then things will get rotten, or something like that. […] I had inflammations, and the urologist gave me antibiotics. He finally got upset, he went like 'take a wife, a woman, have sex, and you'll be fine'. So that's why I ask, can anyone go celibate? I mean, not if they [actually] can. Rather, without endangering their health. The saints are saints because they professed faith, risking their health, life. But should every believer be required to do that?

In the case of Stanisław, it was – somehow paradoxically – the strong medicalization of his problems that led him to finally accepting his active homosexuality. It could be argued that Stanisław's experience is a result of the work of discourses under the dominant silence; his account shows how the beneficial aspects of discretion over homoeroticism might have come to the fore (Foucault, 1978). As long as homosexuality was scarcely commented on outside of the sexologist context, other medical discourses could come into play and create a certain space for non-normative desires. Similarly, the disciplining effects of church discourses on sex, not yet fixated on the issue of homosexuality, would be eased or counterbalanced by other religious discourses, such as a religious imagery that separates the devotion of saints from the experience of regular believers.

### *5.3 Possibilities in the present*

After the LGBT emancipatory discourse – that is, the 'reverse' discourse (Foucault, 1978) to formerly disciplining sexual discourses – entered the stage in the first

decade of 2000s, the situation for my interviewees changed dramatically. They could now draw on new discursive resources and develop a positive gay identity.

People born in the late 1980s and 1990s were immediately able to recognize their homosexual desire, without experiencing the silence that former generations were faced with: 'I looked through some websites about the issue. It was raised there, I simply began to browse, to read that it is not a disease, that it is normal' (Wiktor, b. 1985). This new perspective made it easier to align their sexuality with religiosity. High self-esteem enhanced by the emancipatory discourse, combined with their own relationship with the sacred and their own interpretation of the Bible, gave many of them pride and courage to assert that the problem of interpretation lies with traditional commentators of the Scripture:

> Sixteen, seventeen years – you search the Internet, you follow biology, all these theories, psychoanalysis and the like, right? And you read carefully. You are better educated than those little priests. I was thinking 'well, if we were to live according to the old theories, we wouldn't go to the doctor, we would have our wounds burnt, our leg removed'… But the whole of our life is subject to more and more scientific discoveries which we accept because they are good [for us]. And if we perceive the most beautiful sphere of life, sharing ourselves, our sexuality, our love with another person, from the point of view of rapists, conquerors from three thousand years ago or more, then sorry, but I don't play that game. Well, I think it is YOU who are wrong. (Jan, b. 1982)

The quote above illustrates a viewpoint shared by many Polish LGBT Christians. The activist group *Faith and Rainbow* draws on the LGBT emancipatory discourse, confronting the negative approach to homosexuality articulated by dominant church representatives. Since 2010, the community has supported people wishing to integrate religion and sexuality at the personal level, and my interviews confirm findings from other social studies suggesting that participation in an LGBT Christian community greatly facilitates this process (Rodriguez and Ouelette, 2000; Wilcox, 2003; Levy and Reeves, 2011).

### *5.4 Limitations in the present*

In parallel with LGBT organizations entering the public space, the Polish church started to voice their concerns over homosexuality, thus breaking the silence. As a result, it is no longer possible to neglect the lack of approval of homosexuality in religious contexts; the contentious issue can no longer be ignored, neither by those who themselves experience homoerotic desire, nor by their social environment.

Since 2002, Catholic activists and commentators have promoted a reparative approach to homosexuality, considering it a developmental disorder that can and should be treated. However, the reparative approach was never officially approved by the Vatican or the Polish Episcopate, and it lost momentum after a few years (Hall, 2017). Elements of this discourse have nevertheless continued to saturate

Catholic communities and individual believers. Some of my interviewees reported on participation in ex-gay programs, especially in the first decade of 2000s, and many were met with expectations from family members and members of their religious communities to enroll in these programs. Sometimes religious groups excluded members who did not follow the instructions or expectations.[4]

While affiliation with *Faith and Rainbow* can ease the difficult tension between belief and sexual desire for some people, the community cannot break the strong public polarization between religion and LGBT issues, which clearly diminishes the possibilities for believers to articulate their experience and viewpoint. It is obviously difficult for gay/lesbian Christians to criticize or fully diverge from the views of religious institutions to which they adhere, and it is equally difficult to voice critique of the secular LGBT community from a religious point of view. It is like being stuck between a rock and a hard place, leading to a particular kind of silence: the impossibility of articulating a position that is not caught up in the binary. Many respondents criticized the gay and lesbian community during the interviews, mainly for lacking religious sensitivity (cf. Wilcox, 2003; Yip, 2005). However, aware of the political importance of secular LGBT communities, my interviewees did not want to be too loud in their opposition; they did not want to use their critique in the fight for recognition of the gay Christian perspective. For instance, Dominik (b. 1986) recalled a situation when his partner had managed to protect a cross from profanation by several activists of a well-known Polish LGBT organization. At this point in the interview, he repeated several times: 'I am not going to tell any unfriendly people about it'.

Additionally, Dominik talked about a general lack of comfort as a gay Christian due to the lack of recognition in everyday life, especially among his co-workers:

> I often find it painful, y'know. Even at work when I tell people about it. Because I boldly say: 'I went to church with my partner' or something. The reaction is immediate: 'How come? To church? – But I'm a believer! – But you're gay!'

These reactions indicate that the 'gay' persona, discursively created in antagonistic struggles between supporters of LGBT people's emancipation and their opponents, is recognized by mainstream society. This is a figure endowed with specific attributes, notably a secular self-identification. A religious gay identity becomes incomprehensible within this scheme, and thus cannot be recognized as 'proper' (cf. El-Tayeb, 2012). While Dominic in his professional life dares to confront the mainstream view, his heroic attitude does not seem widespread among gay Roman Catholics.

Kajetan (b. 1981) talked about a similar, if not bigger, tension at his workplace, which shows that the very same discursive mechanism that allows people to name and make legitimate their non-normative desire pushes them back

[4] For more developed discussion about ex-gay programs' participants in Poland see Mikulak (2020).

into the closet, as it were, as soon as their religious belief comes to the fore. Kajetan is hiding his homosexuality from his co-workers, not in fear of their hostility to sexual non-normativity but because of his theological education, which he thinks will lead to wrong associations among colleagues; he is afraid they would automatically assume that his monastery life and his homosexuality are mutually exclusive. He is also afraid of being called a hypocrite:

> I can't come out as gay. Why? Because most people would assume that I left the seminary because I'm gay. However, the fact that I left the seminary wasn't so much related to my [sexual] orientation. […] Nobody would understand it, it would be a very straightforward association. Or probably, I would be accused of duplicity, of hypocrisy: 'such a saintly person, so pious, a cleric, a former seminarian, such a theologian, and – alas! – a fag with a double life'. And in fact, they push me even more into the double life. At least, this is how I feel.

Dominik's and Kajetan's stories suggest that the gay emancipatory discourse, inherently linked to anti-clericalism, coupled with the anti-gay mobilization within the church, make it difficult for gay Catholic believers to gain recognition on their own terms. Both Dominik and Kajetan pointed to practices of self-censorship and to problems with articulating their gay Catholic perspective in front of members of their everyday community, hence pointing to the new kind of silence that issues from this irresoluble conflict. This silence is different from the silence over sexuality that seemed to dominate the social imagery in the past, but in fact, as Foucault (1978) showed, was underpinned by a multitude of sexual discourses. Today's silence corresponds better to Foucault's remarks on the permeation of discourses by various forms of silence. One of the disciplining effects of gay emancipatory discourse is that it establishes a secular gay identity to which all people experiencing homosexual desire are expected to conform. Those who do not or cannot be recognized as 'proper gays' (El-Tayeb, 2012) are inevitably silenced.

## *6. Concluding remarks*

Drawing on accounts by Polish Roman Catholics who reflected on their living religion and homoerotic desire between the 1970s and the 2010s, this paper departs from the dominant current of studies on gay Christians, starting with Thumma (1991) and others, which present homosexuality and religiosity in essentialist identity terms, that is, as essential personal characteristics in tension with each other. Instead, I draw on Foucault's (1978) perspective that individual experience and identity are shaped by discourses and silences available in the public realm in a given historical moment. This perspective allows for more nuanced comments on the relationship between religion and non-normative sexuality in personal biographies, beyond the prevalent focus on religion as the source of tension. The above discussion has highlighted the complex discursive structure forming the

basis for individual experiences and identity formations. I draw my conclusions from the analytical assumption that discourses and silences permeate the awareness of all social actors, situating the issue of combining religiosity with non-normative sexuality at both the cognitive and the social level of interaction.

Over time, the discursive structure has produced different possibilities and imposed different limitations on individuals' reconciliation of religiosity and non-normative sexuality. The silence over homosexuality in 20th-century Polish public space did not allow individuals to develop a positive gay/lesbian identity, or a language for criticizing exclusionary practices by members of the closest religious community. It kept homoerotic desire in the sphere of private shame, which often resulted in self-condemnation among homosexual believers. Yet, silence did not completely prevent the integration of sexual and religious spheres of life. At the cognitive level, the impulse triggering such integration could come, for instance, from the field of medicine, which recommended having regular sexual intercourse. At the level of social relationships, including religious communities, silence could translate into a tacit approval of homoerotic activity.

Today's possibility for developing a positive gay/lesbian identity hinges on the LGBT emancipatory discourse which has been widely promoted in Poland since 2003. The new discursive resources arguably enhance non-heterosexual people's self-esteem and provide them with tools to resist the church's anti-gay stance. The emancipatory discourse has also prompted LGBT Christians' activism in an attempt to reconcile religion and nonheterosexuality at the cognitive level. However, breaking the old silence surrounding homosexuality has also resulted in anti-gay politics, manifested in right-wing, nationalist discourses in the public, as well as in intra-church pressure on religious gay people to partake in ex-gay programs. Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, breaking the silence has led to a new kind of silence pertaining to unintelligibility: the impossibility of articulating a perspective and an experience beyond the LGBT–religion opposition. The gay/lesbian emancipatory discourse draws its strength from this dichotomy which informs public debates and permeates the awareness of all social actors. I have argued that this severely restricts the self-expression and ability for gay/lesbian religious individuals to be recognized as 'proper' in their gayness (El-Tayeb, 2012) and live a livable homosexual-Christian life (that is, a life recognizable as such) (Butler, 2004).

My discussion also follows Foucault (1978) in his critique of the progressive vision of sexual history that relegates discipline to the past and celebrates today's freedom of sexual expression. In line with recent scholarship on homosexuality in Central and Eastern Europe (Szulc, 2017; Kościańska et al., 2019), it problematizes the binary structure between the communist past and the democratic present, showing that the religious-sexual history cannot be told according to a strongly linear scheme moving from the impossibility of accepting non-normative sexuality in the context of religion in the past to greater possibilities for being accepted in the present.

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**MONIKA BAER** *

# Europeanization on the Move: LGBT/Q Activist Projects in Contemporary Poland

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## Abstract[1]

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in Wrocław, Poland, the paper analyzes grassroots workings of European sexual citizenship. Against this backdrop, it attempts to problematize a concept of Europeanization as vertical and horizontal diffusion which spreads specific ideas, practices, and institutions among actual and prospective EU Member States. Whereas (neo)liberal LGBT rights, seen as a symbol of Europeanness, have definitely inspired struggles for sexual freedom in Poland, abstract notions of Europe and Europeanization do not form an important point of reference, at least at a local level. Moreover, premises of European sexual citizenship are in many ways contested by non-heteronormative persons unwilling (or unable) to use this frame for the conceptualization of their own experiences. On the other hand, because the EU and neoliberalism constitute significant antagonists of Polish right-wing nationalism, this allows for a certain resignification of interrelated phenomena criticized elsewhere as 'homonormative' and 'homonationalist.' While these phenomena undoubtedly trigger specific inclusions and exclusions, they also have the potential to contribute to critical citizenship. Consequently, instead of grasping Europeanization in a teleological way, the paper argues for taking it as an image that may fuel social change, variously conceived of.

***Keywords:*** *Europeanization, the EU, LGBT/Q activism, Poland, right-wing nationalism, sexual citizenship.*

[1] The abbreviation 'LGBT' is used to cover both the legal terms SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) and non-heteronormative experiences defined as 'lesbian,' 'gay,' 'bisexual,' and 'trans*.' 'Q' stands for queer and pertains to all other forms of non-heteronormativity. In this context, 'non-heteronormative' refers to all identities, practices, policies, and ideas which do not adhere to expectations rooted in the concept of heteronormativity.

## *1. Introduction: Europeanization and LGBT rights*

Europeanization is usually envisioned in dynamic terms, as if on the constant move. It is mainly analyzed in relation to European integration and seen as 'the "downloading" of EU policy into the national polity, and [...] the "uploading" of national preferences to EU level' (Grabbe, 2006: 4). Some scholars apply a wider perspective to cover the multidimensional nature of this process. Alongside certain policies and institutions, they also stress that 'styles,' 'ways of doing,' 'shared beliefs and norms,' or 'values' have been diffused (Slootmaeckers et al., 2016: 5). Moreover, they point not only to the vertical, but also to the horizontal character of Europeanization, and differentiate between a formal model and 'a socio-political process [...], which relies on deliberation, social networking, and political bargaining at subnational, national, supranational, and transnational levels' (Ayoub and Paternotte, 2014: 5). However, Europeanization is usually thought of as limited to the European Union (EU) and related political frames.[2] Consequently, in the case of many formerly socialist countries of Central Eastern Europe (CEE), it has been commonly conflated with EU accession and envisioned as a 'return to Europe' (Grabbe, 2006: 4–5).

The important part of this project involves the implementation of 'democratic human rights regimes and open political systems' (ibid.: 41). This particular requirement, established as a threshold in a process of becoming 'truly European,' should be situated in the wider context of the post-Cold-War era, which has witnessed the rising global hegemony of law (see Goodale, 2017). Within this framework, human rights protection has turned into 'a full blown moral-theological-political vision of the good life' (Wilson, 2007: 349), and the scope of human rights protection has become a measure of assessing the degree of cultural and political modernity or backwardness (Ammaturo, 2017: 50). Unsurprisingly, LGBT movements were among the very first that turned to the new human rights paradigm to formulate their political claims. This strategy proved successful while cooperating with the EU, because since the early twenty-first century, human rights promotion and protection have been recognized by EU institutions and policies as an essential element of European identity (ibid.: 8).

The idea of European sexual citizenship envisions LGBT persons as model (neo)liberal citizens, 'perfectly integrated into the social and political fabric of each member state' (ibid.: 50). Furthermore, the wider project of the 'Pink Agenda,' understood as 'a conglomerate of juridical and political actions, based on the idea that the LGBT population can be rendered equal thanks to a concession of certain rights already enjoyed by the heterosexual majority' (ibid.: 52), serves to distinguish between nation states that appear to be 'gay-friendly' and those 'lagging behind.' While LGBT rights as a powerful symbol of Europe can be effectively used to advocate LGBT political claims, they also create 'not-European-

[2] In the context of LGBT rights, these non-EU European institutions comprise the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights, which are among the main European actors in the field of human rights protection (see Ammaturo, 2017).

enough' Others. On the other hand, conflating the recognition of legal and cultural LGBT rights with Europeanization understood as a form of modernization creates differently formulated resistance to the EU and/or the idea of European sexual citizenship (see Ayoub and Paternotte, 2014).

When the cultural and legal recognition of LGBT rights is seen as a proof of Europeanness, the New Member States of the EU that have not yet adapted to this allegedly common European standard are declared to be failing in the process of Europeanization (Mole 2016). This failure is, in turn, frequently explained by reference to nationalist tendencies in CEE. Unlike in Western contexts, in CEE ones national identities are considered to be rooted in a 'natural community' and consolidated by 'shared biology, culture and history,' and are believed to resonate better among people than cosmopolitan European ideas (ibid.: 100–101).[3] Such maladjusted nation states thus become targets of 'leveraged pedagogy' (Kulpa, 2014) that takes the form of benchmarking tools (e.g. ILGA-Europe, n.d.), or European Parliament resolutions (see e.g. Kulpa, 2014). Whereas the addressed problems are inevitably real and make the everyday lives of non-heteronormative persons difficult in both symbolic and practical ways, the supposed homo- and transphobia of the CEE is perceived as 'almost an innate, organic feature' (much like the nationalist tendencies) (ibid.: 440).[4]

With the intention of denaturalizing the dominant notions of Europeanization in the field of LGBT rights, critical scholars strive to 'think between the post' (Chari and Verdery, 2009) and combine analytical insights from postcolonial and postsocialist studies. However, when applying a conventional postcolonial framework to postsocialist settings, some of the contributions keep the difference between East and West intact, rather than problematizing this geotemporal binary. The concept of a 'temporal disjunction' proposed by Joanna Mizielińska and Robert Kulpa (2011) is such an example. Conceived of as a tool to unsettle the supposed need of CEE to 'catch up with Europe' (Mizielińska, 2011: 86), it renders the contrast between both geotemporal modalities irreversible. Because of its constitutional alterity, CEE is denied coevalness (in Johannes Fabian's sense – 2002) with its Western counterpart, while the multifaceted, contextual, and relational nature of both categories is lacking (see Navickaite, 2014). Yet, alternative readings of postcolonialism permit grasping 'Europeanization as a global, historical and entangled process of production of Europe' (Keinz and Lewicki, 2019: 5; see also Dzenovska, 2018). This is because 'Europe does not exist in one certain way' (Keinz and Lewicki, 2019: 6), and neither does Europeanization. Consequently, relationships between ideas of Europe, the

[3] Alternative approaches problematize a dichotomy between the modern, cosmopolitan, and gay-friendly West and the backward, nationalist, and homophobic East. Some of them discuss nationalism as a Europe-wide phenomenon (e.g. Verloo and Paternotte, 2018). Others explain the specificity of the East in terms of tensions and frictions related to 'transnational socioeconomic inequalities' (Trofimov, 2019: 46) or to intersections of global, European, national, and local scales (e.g. Renkin, 2015).

[4] However, not only do the formerly socialist CEE countries appear to be lagging behind the 'enlightened' European core of the EU. Italy is also frequently discussed as an example (see Di Feliciantonio, 2015).

EU, modernity, neoliberalism, cultural and legal LGBT rights, right-wing nationalism, and the nation state may materialize in myriad ways that problematize all of the above-mentioned assumptions about Europeanization in the field of sexual citizenship.

Based on examples from recent developments in Poland, I shall explore these issues further below. First, however, I will elaborate on some central historical conditions for sexual rights and freedoms in Poland, understood as manifestations of a specific version of Europeanness. Against this historical backdrop, I move on to analyze grassroots LGBT/Q projects established by activists in Wrocław, a city in southwestern Poland. Following Sylvia Walby (2011: 6, cited in Verloo and Paternotte, 2018: 1–2), I conceive of such activist projects as 'processes and practices in civil society that create new meanings and social goals, drawing on a range of rhetorical and material resources' aimed at social change. Although these LGBT/Q activist projects presumably constitute the main protagonists of Europe as a symbol of cultural and legal LGBT rights, they nevertheless unsettle this expectation in important ways. The related empirical material was gathered in the course of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Wrocław between May 2016 and October 2017.[5] In addition to structured-, semi-structured-, and open interviews, as well as discussions in focus groups, data were obtained during antidiscrimination workshops and training events, thanks to the participation in public events important for activism-oriented LGBT/Q environments, and through an analysis of public discourses, mostly in the form of press publications, websites, social media publications, and other information materials. Whereas this type of research involves interaction with numerous people, the main group of non-heteronormative interviewees (both activists and non-activists) comprised 20 persons, who were differentiated in terms of gender and sexual identities and expressions, as well as age and religion, but not in terms of ethnicity and social status. They were all ethnic Poles who may be classified within the vertically conceived class structure as members of the middle classes. Even though their economic capital and lifestyles varied, they possessed similar social and cultural resources in Pierre Bourdieu's (1996) sense. The LGBT/Q activist projects I discuss are thus rooted in a rather homogenized life experience. Nonetheless, this experience is the only noticeable one of its type in the public space of Wrocław.

## *2. LGBT rights in Poland*

Compared to other European countries, Polish law was relatively progressive in the early twentieth century as homosexual acts were decriminalized in 1932. Since 1969, when homosexual prostitution was decriminalized, Polish law has not directly evoked categories of non-normative genders and sexualities. Despite this legal situation, both homosexual and trans* persons were seen as deviant. Under

[5] The fieldwork formed a part of the action-research project 'Divercity. Preventing and Combating Homo- and Transphobia in Small and Medium Cities across Europe' (EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship Program, JUST/2014/RRAC/AG/BEST/6693). Additional to the author, the research team comprised Katarzyna Majbroda, Janina Radziszewska, Joanna Tomaszewska, and Celina Strzelecka.

socialism, non-heteronormative identities and behaviors remained largely private. However, even though non-normative genders and sexualities were not of particular interest to the ruling party, the Catholic Church, or the media, the more visible homosexuality became, the more it was suppressed by the state (see e.g. Tomasik, 2012; Szulc, 2017). In this context, Operation Hyacinth – when security services arrested and registered homosexual men in Poland in the mid-1980s – is most often recalled. According to Lukasz Szulc (ibid.: 110-111), this actually functioned as 'a catalytic event' that can be compared to the mythicized Stonewall Riots. Whereas 'Operation Hyacinth did not trigger any organized protests […], it did fuel new activist initiatives' (ibid.: 111). However, organizations were able to register formally only in 1990 as part of the postsocialist democratization process.

In the following decade, gay and lesbian movements were mostly formed for the purposes of self-help and consciousness-raising. Their objectives were to build social tolerance of homosexuality, to create positive identities for gay men and lesbians, and to prevent and fight HIV/AIDS. As in other places, the turn towards democracy and neoliberal capitalism gave many people new opportunities in life in terms of material, social, and cultural capital. From the mid-1990s, the internet also contributed to concocting the lesbian- and gay-, and then the LGBT community. But the development of commercialized infrastructure, such as clubs, dating services, publishing houses, and erotic and socio-political magazines, also had a negative impact on activism, as the pressure to materially profit became at times more important than the socio-political gains. Effectively, the 'homosexual question' did not constitute a crucial part of the public debate in the 1990s (Baer, 2009: 133–134 and passim; see also Hall, in this issue).

The above situation began to change only in the early twenty-first century in the context of EU accession. The idea of Europe, with its cultural and legal sexual citizenship, provided an important 'horizon of hope' (Appadurai, 2013: 295) for some non-heteronormative Polish citizens. LGBT rights ceased to be solely 'a site of *social* mobilization' and became 'one of *political* mobilization' (O'Dwyer and Vermeersch, 2016: 124). Despite this, seeing Europe as 'a repository of "best practices" in the domain of gender equality and sexual politics' (Husakouskaya, 2019: 80) served to solidify the idea of Poland as 'not-European-enough' (see Keinz, 2008). This, in turn, located the problem of LGBT rights within wider *longue durée* structures and historical dynamics that have conditioned Polish discourses on Europe and Europeanization for centuries.

Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (2002) convincingly shows that, despite its historically changing forms, Polish political and intellectual debates have always evolved around the country's special mission in and/or for Europe. The desire to be seen as the 'Heart of Europe' actually masked the awareness of the peripheral positioning of Poland on the wider European scene. From the late eighteenth century, when modern Polish national ideas began to mature, this desire found its way into two antagonized approaches toward Europeanization. Whereas adherence to the idea of a cosmopolitan and secular Europe advocated Europeanization as a modernizing project, its opponents emphasized Polish values to which modernization thus understood poses a vital threat. Obviously, both

positions could be seen as attempts to be 'truly European,' and thus reveal the 'paradox of Europeanness' (Dzenovska, 2018). Comprehended as 'a civilizational space' rooted in 'regimes of inclusion and exclusion,' Europeanness may indicate both the need to remain open to variously defined difference and the right 'to lead a life of national self-determination' (ibid.: 2–3).

Until EU accession in 2004, and the increase in actual visibility of the LGBT movements in public spheres, LGBT rights as symbols of EU-related Europeanization were not particularly important to the nationalist and/or anti-EU political stance. The main anxieties expressed in this period involved moral questions about consumerism, abortion, sex education, birth control and euthanasia; the disintegration of national identity; and the loss of national sovereignty embodied by a takeover of land and national enterprises by foreign capital (Leszczyńska, 2017: 61–62; see also Buchowski, 2004). The major proclaimers of the above fears were the hierarchs of the Catholic Church (CC) who saw themselves as representatives of the Polish nation.[6]

After Poland had joined the EU, '[w]hat tended to be framed in moral or religious terms, or as a matter of spontaneous aversion toward "deviance," now became political, an urgent matter of collective identity' (Graff, 2010: 602). But 'collective identity' was also at the heart of the new LGBT political projects aimed at recognition of (neo)liberal cultural and legal citizenship of 'sexual minorities.' Since then, the activities of the mainstream LGBT movements[7] have sought to increase public visibility and introduce legal protective measures for homosexual and trans* persons. The developing LGBT NGOs and other forms of civil society, gay prides, educational campaigns, reports and manuals have arguably unsettled the notion of heteronormative citizenship, and support for LGBT rights has gradually increased. However, attempts to establish civil partnerships or marriage equality, the Gender Accordance Act, or SOGIESC as protected grounds within civil and penal codes, as well as to collect data on anti-LGBT hate crimes have all

[6] Anna Szwed and Katarzyna Zielińska (2017: 116) explain this self-positioning of the CC in Poland as a part of a narrative originating from the nineteenth-century period of partition, when the CC supposedly played a crucial role in sustaining national identity, but even more from the communist era, when the idea of CC as allied with the nation against the imposed political regime and working for human rights and democratization emerged. Having a strong and respected position after the fall of communism, at least among some sections of Polish society, the CC used this to gain political power and to 're-publicize' religion in the country. The conviction of representing the nation served (and still serves) to legitimize the CC's political claims.

[7] Mainstream LGBT movements are exemplified by Warsaw-based organizations such as the Campaign Against Homophobia, the Lambda Warsaw Association, the Love Does Not Exclude Association, and the Trans-Fuzja Foundation, which cooperate extensively with similar organizations both in Poland and abroad.

failed.[8] Nevertheless, these political efforts have turned the LGBT into significant Others of the Nation (Baer et al. 2019: 73–81).[9]

Historically speaking, modern European nationalisms saw the homosexual figure as 'the constitutive internal Other of the normative national subject, associated with its transnational enemies' (Renkin, 2015: 417). But since the early twenty-first century, in countries like France and the Netherlands, the EU has been increasingly 'presented as the best guarantee for the protection of national identities' (Fassin, 2010: 515). Consequently, EU-modelled gender equality and sexual politics have been adapted by right-wing nationalist discourses and instrumentalized for xenophobic use. To this effect, the figure of the non-reproductive homosexual has been replaced by the figure of the homophobic racialized Other who poses a threat to Europeanness (see e.g. ibid.). However, in contemporary Poland, the proponents of EU-related gender and sexual rights have not been considered as allies, but as the main antagonists of the right-wing nationalist projects. In both state-linked and popular discourses, gender equality, women's sexual rights, and LGBT rights – gathered under the umbrella term 'gender ideology' – have been cast as an 'Ebola from Brussels' (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018) that compromises national sovereignty, cultural values, religion, and the traditional family. Because the Polish model of anti-genderism 'enabled a political alliance between nationalism and religious fundamentalism,' it has 'proved remarkably effective in political terms' (Graff and Korolczuk, 2017: 175–176).

Agnieszka Graff (2010) observes that the politicization of homophobia in contemporary Poland does not primarily concern actual LGBT rights, but is an expression of cultural identity and national pride. When the EU was identified as a foreign colonizer that had replaced the USSR in this role, this allowed right-wing nationalist narratives to become organized within an anticolonial frame. The term 'gender ideology,' alongside 'LGBT ideology,' constitutes a 'powerful signifier for humiliation that needs to be resisted' (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018: 810). Moreover, the rhetoric of victimhood is combined with the rhetoric of superiority. Polish right-wing nationalists declare themselves to be 'the last frontier of what they see as undamaged Christianity and true moral values in Europe' (ibid.: 811; see also Graff and Korolczuk, 2017). In other words, the politicization of homophobia can be viewed as a response to the instrumentalization of LGBT rights as a marker of such forms of Europeanization, which contemporary Poland is not willing to adjust to (see also Rawłuszko, 2019).

[8] Until now, sexual orientation (but not gender identity and expression or sex characteristics) has been listed as a protected ground solely in the field of employment and the broadcasting of commercials. Both sexual orientation and gender identity are listed in legal acts pertaining to the protection of foreigners. All these regulations result from EU requirements.

[9] Other examples evoked in right-wing nationalist narratives comprise 'feminists,' 'refugees,' 'Muslims,' 'Ukrainians,' 'Jews,' or 'the lefties.' Since the Law and Justice political party took over the government from the more moderate, centrist predecessors in 2015, the political, legal, and financial measures aimed at preventing and combating social exclusion, inequality and discrimination in view of gender, sexuality, race, nationality/ethnicity, religious beliefs, and disability, have been steadily diminished.

The above situation, combined with the actual lack of cultural and legal protection of non-heteronormative residents of contemporary Poland, has resulted in a certain resignification of the interrelated phenomena labelled 'homonormativity' (Duggan, 2002) and 'homonationalism' (Puar, 2007). Based on critiques of neoliberal sexual politics, both concepts have been extensively used to discuss new trends within 'national neoliberal citizenship projects' which privilege affluent, white, 'pink' consumers (Di Feliciantonio, 2015: 1009). However, their application as critical tools may be broader than that. Jasbir Puar (2013: 337) defines homonationalism as 'a facet of modernity,' comprising 'an assemblage of geopolitical and historical forces, neoliberal interests in capitalist accumulation both cultural and material, biopolitical state practices of population control, and affective investments in discourses of freedom, liberation, and rights.'[10] While it definitely produces 'narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship – cultural and legal – at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations' (ibid.), such aspects of modernity may still have somewhat subversive potential (see e.g. Di Feliciantonio, 2015; Kulpa, 2011). In contemporary Poland, the actual workings of ideas related to European sexual citizenship are perhaps most conspicuously revealed when community belonging is negotiated at the grassroots level. Yet, even though such processes involve tensions and frictions between the transnational and the national, the global and the local, 'Europe' does not necessarily surface there 'as an aspirational entity' (Ammaturo, 2017: 2). Some light on these issues is shed by the LGBT/Q activist projects and other developments in the city of Wrocław.

## *3. Non-heteronormative residents of Wrocław*

Wrocław is the capital of the Lower Silesia province and the fourth-largest city in Poland, with over 640 thousand inhabitants. Since the early 1990s, the municipality – rooted in centrist and (neo)liberal political camps – has actively created an image of the city as a 'truly European' metropolis. Because of its ethnic/national and religious homogeneity, which has changed significantly only recently due to economic migration from Ukraine, the cosmopolitan image has been built around the city's multicultural past. This strategy has proved successful and allowed for bringing both transnational capital and international events to the city. The Wrocław agglomeration is one of the fastest developing ones in the country and has been ranked several times as being among the best cities in the world in which to live. But, at the time of research, this image was in many ways problematized by the actual practices of the municipality.[11] Its approach toward LGBT issues is an

[10] It is important to note that Puar (2013: 336–337) distinguishes between the wider phenomenon of homonationalism, which 'can be resisted and re-signified, but not opted out of,' and 'pinkwashing,' understood as state-related manifestations and practices which are possible because of homonationalist conditions.

[11] The last municipal elections in November 2018, although won by the same political camp, brought a new mayor to office who seems to be advocating more 'progressive' antidiscrimination policies.

example. While representatives of various municipal institutions declared that non-heteronormative residents were included in general, antidiscrimination frames, according to LGBT/Q activists the municipality did not actually intend to cooperate with activist groups. Consequently, infrastructure and initiatives, such as medical and psychological consultation, legal aid, support for 'rainbow families,' socio-cultural events and entertainment, are basically provided by NGOs and the private sector (see Baer et al. 2019: 81–86). Despite this, Wrocław is still seen by some non-heteronormative persons as a 'gay-friendly salvation place.'[12]

Although all non-heteronormative residents in one way or another 'try to have normal lives' in the city, their strategies for achieving this goal vary according to disparities in the perception of gender and sexuality. Whereas some believe that gender and sexuality are political categories, others stress their private nature, which should not determine performance in public. Different ways of organizing non-heteronormative lives in Wrocław privilege either social and political engagement, or privatized daily routines, thus giving rise to two factions, both among the interviewed group and beyond. For the purposes of analysis, I shall label these groups 'activists' and 'ordinary people' respectively. While their discourses and practices involve global, European, national and local strands, Europe and the EU are rarely evoked as an explicit point of reference, even though implicitly they are at times present.

The same holds true for LGBT rights – the alleged symbol of Europeanization. For instance, the notion of an LGBT community, which constitutes a benchmark not only for European but also for Polish mainstream LGBT movements, is in fact a highly contested topic, mostly because shared attributes that would define 'a community which is real, strong, and so on' are problematic. Even though both 'activists' and 'ordinary people' agree that a limited acceptance of non-heteronormative life-styles characterizes Polish society, many would oppose being recognized as a part of a social group defined by LGBT identity: 'I don't categorize myself, I belong to [...] general society, and being a fag just happened. [...] I don't need to belong to any "LGBT" or to parade.' Relatively few non-heteronormative persons seem to identify with a broader 'LGBT milieu,' and many resent all forms of political engagement. An activist reports that 'in our milieu, activists are seen as freaks.' Still, even the most 'closeted' people participate in small-scale networks, specifically situated and/or temporary communities. But only 'activists' declare their belonging to a wider political entity. The different ideas about the borders, aims, and strategies of such groups give rise to various activist projects, which for analytical purposes are identified here as 'LGBT' and 'queer and feminist anarchist.' They should be seen, however, not as entirely disjunctive categories, but as a continuum comprising the discussed political space.

Developments in this respect are, however, beyond the scope of this paper, which focuses on the situation in 2016 and 2017.

[12] Unacknowledged quotations originate from fieldwork material and have been translated into English by the author.

## *4. Activism in Wrocław*

In examining transnational dimensions of Polish grassroots LGBT/Q activism, Jon Binnie and Christian Klesse (2014) note that, unlike at the national level, ideas of Europe and Europeanization do not provide particularly important points of reference at a local level. While they mainly discuss the situation in Poznań and Cracow in 2008 and 2009, the situation in Wrocław in 2016 and 2017 does not seem to be much different. Even though activist initiatives in the city have to a certain degree always been transnationally connected, their European nature is not usually emphasized. In fact, whereas Polish LGBT/Q activist ideas were for a long time based on Western (American rather than European) models, their actual origins ceased to matter when activists gained a sense of their own history (Baer, 2019). Wrocław LGBT/Q activist projects do indeed emerge at the intersections of global and local, transnational and national processes, but are rarely comprehended as an expression of Europeanization in the above-mentioned sense. And, because the city's LGBT/Q activist networks are neither large nor professionalized, they rarely cooperate directly with organizations or groups outside Poland. Their actual access to EU infrastructures and funding is mainly mediated by larger, more professionalized organizations in the Polish LGBT NGO sector.

### *4.1 The LGBT projects*

However, a significant proportion of the activist projects in Wrocław are built on the same ideas of European sexual citizenship as in mainstream LGBT movements, considered as an expression of modernity. In line with Puar's (2013) argument, it seems that being progressive can only be achieved in contrast to so-called backward Others. Because the market-based (neo)liberal model of social justice demands recognition of diversity, it accommodates, at least to some extent, race, nationality/ethnicity, age, religion, gender, sexuality, and disability, but not class-related characteristics. Moreover, the universalized nature of LGBT rights embodied by the legal concept of SOGIESC erases all other attributes of non-heteronormative persons as less important features. Consequently, not 'properly queer subjects' (Puar, 2007: xiii), a description more or less explicitly constitutive of at least some LGBT activist projects in Wrocław, are those unwilling (or unable) to practice the homonormativity emerging from the aforementioned 'Pink Agenda' of the EU (Ammaturo, 2017).

For instance, activists from the early gay movements, who are now in their sixties and seventies, use their particular experiences to legitimize their identities as modern, (neo)liberal gay citizens. They are particularly critical of 'bent queens' (*ciotki-idiotki*[13]), who are seen as a folkloristic relict of the socialist past, living in

[13] *Ciotka-idiotka* literally means an idiot auntie. Under socialism and afterwards, the label *ciotka* (auntie), a bit less offensive than 'fag,' was commonly used to describe an effeminate homosexual man.

accordance with the pre-emancipation 'don't ask, don't tell' policy. Instead of coming out as homosexual men, 'bent queens' cover their formal identities with female nicknames and move around only in the 'milieu'; are not interested in political activity; and attempt to be both gay and Catholic. Younger gay men in their thirties do not refer to socialism as a symbol of backwardness, yet they still think that being a stereotypically effeminate homosexual man should not be a part of their public identity, even though this may be allowed in private. Conversely, lesbian activists in their thirties who do not themselves comply with dominant ideas about femininity and seem to be generally more inclined toward various social transgressions stress that the movement should not 'hide persons, who, in a sense, stand out,' because 'this differentiation is our power.' However, the existence of a domineering gender normativity is confirmed by a trans* person (MtF), who complains about the lack of trans* visibility and generally hostile attitudes toward 'rainbow people' on the part of 'normal' gay men and lesbians in Wrocław.

Despite this differentiation, all refer to a (neo)liberal 'notion of citizens as the rights-bearing agents who are equal before the law' (Dybska, 2016: 21), embodied by a concept of European sexual citizenship. They therefore resent being treated as 'citizens with special needs,' emphasizing that their access to services or places in the city is not in fact limited. However, they agree that economic and social resources matter when access to services is concerned, and they all complain about the situation for LGBT people in Wrocław. In particular, they stress the lack of a friendly and encouraging atmosphere in the city; widely accessible psychological help for younger people and trans* persons; funding for the March of Equality;[14] a post of LGBT spokesperson at the Municipal Office for informing this particular group about matters of interest; and facilities for senior citizens (such as cafes or a nursing home). Knowing that their social needs and political demands will not be met any time soon, the activists turn to symbolic resources to mark their public presence in the city and to NGOs and the private sector for actual support.

The major event aimed at increasing LGBT visibility in Wrocław is the Festival of Equal Rights, with the March of Equality organized yearly in October by the main LGBT organization in the city. Initially conceived of as a tool for raising acceptance of and a sense of community among LGBT people, in the following years the festival increasingly became an arena for political mobilization. The organizers emphasize that its purpose is to manifest the demand for equal rights of LGBT people, including marriage equality, civil partnerships, the Gender Accordance Act, full reproductive rights, and better sexual education. In recent

[14] The term 'equality' has been chosen by Polish LGBT movements as a conscious strategy 'to deflect public attention from the sole issue of homosexuality' and as a means of raising EU-related questions pertaining to human rights and antidiscrimination measures (Binnie and Klesse, 2014: 200). Hadley Renkin (2015) discusses similar developments in Hungary, where LGBT movements have decided to use the concept of 'dignity.' In both cases, the labels have been perceived by right-wing nationalists as a threat to 'national "cultural rights",' and as 'foreign interference' (ibid.: 422).

years, delegates of the transnational banking sector have participated in the march, declaring that they want to promote multiculturalism and diversity.

The presence of the private sector is related to the most current political strategy of Polish LGBT movements, exemplified also by a Wrocław case. When the municipality maintained its refusal to cooperate, LGBT activists approached institutions of neoliberal capitalism. The banking sector thus now funds the March of Equality, and a 'Rainbow Corpo Meeting' is part of the festival, aimed at discussing LGBT workplace inclusion with major corporations in Wrocław. Whereas this particular initiative resulted from the personal connections of the organizers with transnational conglomerates based in the city, it is often explicitly described as a 'transplant' from Western Europe, where companies are simply more accustomed to 'gay-friendly' policies. In contemporary Poland, neoliberal capitalism is undoubtedly an important ally of the relatively weak LGBT groups and organizations in their attempts to challenge the nation state and an unconcerned or overtly hostile mainstream society. However, when combined with the supposed universality of LGBT rights, the LGBT-corporate nexus somehow prevents otherwise politically sensitive activists from recognizing class-related exclusions (see also Bilić 2016). The issue of 'pink capitalism' is in fact almost absent from the LGBT activist discourses of Wrocław, even as some claim to be leftists or anarchists. It seems that the primacy of the struggle for LGBT rights has liberated phenomena criticized elsewhere as 'homonormative' and 'homonationalist' from their negative connotations, and turned them into symbols of an EU-related equality, which Poland is still lacking.[15]

### *4.2 Queer and feminist anarchist projects*

In contrast, class-related exclusions are at the center of queer and feminist anarchist projects. In Wrocław, they take the form of informal collectives rooted in direct democracy approaches. These groups are deeply critical of the 'Pink Agenda' of the EU with its idea of cultural and legal sexual citizenship and alignment with neoliberal capitalist institutions. In their opinion, as homonormative and coopted, the LGBT movements are unable to see that the 'citizens' in whose name they speak are privileged both socially and economically. The queer and feminist anarchist agenda seeks to 'smash' rather than 'reform the system.' Accordingly, unlike the LGBT activists, the queer and feminist anarchists of Wrocław are not keen to cooperate with the municipality and, for that matter, with any other state or European formal structure. Discussing the situation in the city, they stress that authorities are profit-oriented and do not care about inhabitants, except for the richest groups: 'The economically unprivileged are simply left over, […] and it's worse still when it comes to the LGBT.' At the same

[15] Such a stance is not at all limited to the LGBT grassroots activism of Wroclaw. Kulpa (2011) for Poland and Kevin Moss (2014) for Croatia defend the right of CEE to be 'homonormative' and 'homonationalist' as a strategy '[of] demand[ing] tolerance *á l'européenne*' (ibid.: 216). They argue that Western-centrist critics who focus on (post)colonial Others tend to ignore CEE in their analyses, and to deny local activists the 'identities and freedoms' (ibid.: 217) that they themselves enjoy.

time, they emphasize that LGBT needs are the same as other residents' needs, including decent housing, well-paid jobs, kindergartens, and public transportation. Because the lack of social and economic resources, in their view, raises more social barriers than the lack of gender and sexual rights and freedoms, they point out that despite the supposed universality of LGBT rights, the non-heteronormative experience is a highly differentiated phenomenon. This is exemplified by the situation in Wrocław: 'The city may appear to be "gay-friendly" for an upper-class man living in a gated community who goes to [safe] jet-set clubs, but not for a person from the outskirts who comes back from a disco on Saturday night on the bus.'

Perceiving identities as unstable and permanently constructed, queer and feminist anarchists suggest that all types of exclusion and oppression are interconnected. Focusing on SOGIESC as distinct discriminatory grounds is thus politically unviable. They therefore aim to combat racist, sexist, homophobic, and other kinds of violence caused by a non-normative appearance. However, because of the anti-systemic nature of their stance, they are neither interested in collaboration with law enforcement, nor in formalizing or professionalizing their activities. In their opinion, every form of institutionalization requires abiding with restrictions imposed by funding institutions and selecting specific problems to deal with, while they rather 'want to stand up for social justice for different groups.'

For this purpose, they make critical interventions and spread alternative cultural expressions in public spaces. Such strategies are viewed as 'a way of shouting out what we find the most annoying about the city.' This, in turn, should incite inhabitants to rebel. In addition to more conventional street demonstrations, they stage social protests at city council meetings or put on spontaneous performances, such as loud discussions of their sex lives in bars. But the queer and feminist anarchists explicitly link their activities to transnational alter-globalization movements, as well as to anarcho-syndicalist workers' initiatives, tenant movements, and 'no border' networks. Consequently, in spite of their seemingly local dimensions, the initiatives of these groups address issues of national, European, and global scales. Some of them are funded by sororal collectives based in the EU Old Member States. In this sense, queer and feminist anarchists also adopt a version of 'progressive' Europeanness, even though this varies from the one linked to European sexual citizenship and its 'Pink Agenda.'

### *4.3 Cooperation*

Despite the difference in opinion with regard to ideas and strategies inherent to the EU-related concepts of gender and sexual rights, queer and feminist anarchists cooperate closely with local LGBT networks: 'We exchange "human resources" all the time. We know each other and like each other.' Considering the actual social and legal situation of non-heteronormative persons in Poland, the disparity in perspectives is obviously not a profound one. It rather pertains to 'two modalities of one movement which raise disagreements, but not serious divergence' (Basiuk, 2012: 76). Whereas queer and feminist anarchists generally close off any ties with

the European 'Pink Agenda,' they declare their appreciation for the political efforts of the mainstream LGBT movements in a specific Polish context. Thus, they do participate in Wrocław LGBT events, including the March of Equality: 'Perhaps we are not thrilled that their main postulate is civil partnership, but on the other hand, if some people cannot register their relationship while others can, it's discriminatory.'

This situation reflects a wider phenomenon of 'networked solidarity' typical of contemporary Poland, whereby 'different groups that are marginalized by the conservative political mainstream' make conscious efforts 'to build bridges and coalitions' (Binnie and Klesse, 2014: 201, 203). Understandably though, Polish LGBT movements do not try to politically capitalize on xenophobia. Regardless of discrepancies in their views about community building, political goals and strategies, the LGBT activists and queer and feminist anarchists, as well as all other anti-discriminatory groups of Wrocław, create shared political space in the city. They are equally critical of 'ordinary' non-heteronormative persons who limit their LGBT activities to clubbing or just 'sitting at home.'

## *5. The Others on the outside*

The most conspicuous Others that emerge in the discourses of both 'activists' and 'ordinary people' are the far-right nationalists (including local football hooligans) with links to the Catholic Church. These groups allegedly 'love to harass and mock LGBT persons.' Whereas such ideas harmonize well with a secular model of European sexual citizenship, they should not be taken at face value. For some non-heteronormative persons, religiosity (mainly Catholicism) is a crucial part of their personal identity and life view, including some of our study's interlocutors. Indeed, some factions of the Polish LGBT/Q movements, together with various Christian groups, have launched several initiatives aimed at limiting the instrumentalization of religion by right-wing nationalists (see Hall, in this issue).[16]

Even though not all interviewees take the ties between Catholicism and right-wing nationalism to be inevitable, they nevertheless see connections between the latter and the level of safety in the city. 'Activists' in their mid-thirties and older who have been living in Wrocław for most of their adult lives concede that rising xenophobia has impinged on the freedom and safety of LGBT persons in the city. Despite – or maybe partly because of – EU membership and its municipality-based cosmopolitan image, Wrocław has become 'a bulwark of Brownshirts parties.' Still, younger 'activists' as well as 'ordinary people' perceive Wrocław to be a 'truly European,' safe and gay-friendly city due to its multicultural history, university character, and numerous tourists.

[16] These are exemplified by a social campaign 'Let Us Offer Each Other the Sign of Peace' (http://www.znakpokoju.com/, accessed 30-12-2019), but also by more subversive art projects, such as Rainbow Madonna, whereby an image of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, one of the most significant national and religious symbols, was equipped with rainbow halos. In the latter case, the artist, Elżbieta Podleśna, was prosecuted for profanation of the image of the Virgin Mary.

## *6. Conclusions: Is Europeanization really on the move?*

The Wrocław case could be seen as a microcosm, demonstrating how broader entanglements of Europe, the EU, modernity, neoliberalism, cultural and legal LGBT rights, right-wing nationalism, and the nation state define Europeanization in the field of sexual citizenship in Poland. The emphasis on various forms of community belonging among grassroots groups testifies to the view that there are alternatives to EU-related ideas of human rights and (neo)liberal civil rights. The analysis suggests that most non-heteronormative persons, just as other marginalized groups, cope with social discrimination and exclusion not in the realm of political activism, but by the use of privatized networks of cooperation, support, and solidarity (Goodale, 2017: 221). Moreover, even for 'activists,' who in one way or another adopt versions of 'progressive' Europeanness, the notion of Europe 'remains a very vague imaginary' (Husakouskaya, 2019: 81–82). While interviewees at times indicate other European locations to express their dissatisfaction with the Polish nation state and society, they rarely refer to Europe as an abstract symbol of openness toward gender and sexual diversity, pointing instead to personal experiences they have had abroad. Hence, envisioning Europeanization as an EU-related 'knowledge project that continues to operate after […] destroying socialism' (Wolfe, 2000: 211) is too simple in this context. Such a unilinear route of 'returning to Europe,' and for that matter, the need to 'return' at all, does not attend to historical and contemporary specificities that make every case particular. The proposed alternative envisages Europeanization as a relational and multifaceted phenomenon that has emerged from tensions and frictions of global, European, national, and local scales (cf. Tsing, 2005).

The largest and most professionalized LGBT NGOs are still crucial 'knowledge brokers' that 'turn local grievances into funding proposals for international donors' (Wilson, 2007: 357), and the EU remains an important source of funding, the last instance in legal battles, and a symbol in political protests. However, the rhetoric of 'lagging behind Europe' does not seem to be particularly common in the grassroots settings. This is partly due to the aforementioned sense of gaining one's own history on the part of Polish LGBT/Q movements (Baer, 2019), which may diminish the EU's importance as the primary point of reference. To discuss the state of LGBT rights in Poland, LGBT/Q activists in Wrocław refer rather to their own, thus far failed, struggle. But the politics of emotions appears to count as well. Because the long-cherished hopes that EU accession would bring an end to discrimination and secure equal rights have not been fulfilled, the subsequent disappointment seems to have led some 'activists' and 'ordinary people' in Wrocław (and beyond) to acknowledge that Poland indeed is in a state of 'disjunctive geotemporality' (Mizielińska and Kulpa, 2011), simply immune to EU equality policies. Such pessimism has intensified recently due to rising right-wing nationalism.

On the other hand, the specific positioning of neoliberalism, the EU, and European sexual citizenship in the Polish right-wing nationalist imaginary, which

turns them into antagonists of the national project,[17] may lead in a Polish context to a certain resignification of the 'homonormative' and 'homonationalist' facets of these entities. Regardless of neoliberal tendencies that involve turning 'every sphere of economic, social, cultural, and biological life [into] […] a potential commodity […] open to privatization' (Lipman, 2005: 316), neoliberalism is of course not monolithic, but should instead be seen as complex, fragmented, under permanent negotiation, and remaining in multiple relations with practices of citizenship (see Ong, 2006; see also Di Feliciantonio, 2015). Actual workings of a European 'Pink Agenda' and neoliberal capitalism in the ongoing struggles for LGBT rights in Poland surely embrace only particular non-heteronormative experiences, which can be interpreted as 'homonormative' and 'homonationalist' in nature. Yet they still have subversive potential, because of the underprivileged position of LGBT organizations vis-à-vis the Polish nation state and society. Consequently, the presence of delegates from transnational conglomerates at the March of Equality in Wrocław may have somewhat different meanings than their same presence at a gay pride event in London.[18] In this sense, the paradox of neoliberalism parallels the one of Europeanness, which despite inherent inclusions and exclusions, may still work to 'widen the field of informed, creative and critical citizenship' (Appadurai, 2013: 295).

In any event, these contingencies serve to problematize popular notions of Europeanization as the vertical and horizontal diffusion of specific institutions, practices, or ideas, and therefore appearing as constantly on the move. With regard to European sexual citizenship in Poland, such mobilities have been continuously blocked, slowed down, or contested. But in complementing modernity, Europeanization can also be seen as images 'moving through the recent past and near future in a space that gauges […] [it] as an ethos already becoming historical' (Rabinow et al., 2007: 58). In this sense, Europeanization in the realm of non-heteronormativity turns into a repository of diversified concepts, values, and beliefs that may certainly inspire social and political moves, including those that avoid 'the teleological overtones of [conventional] activism' (Fortun, 2012: 450).

[17] While some proponents of the nationalist agenda are critical of market-oriented policies and advocate a kind of state-controlled economy, others support extreme forms of conservative liberalism. These disparities do not prevent them, however, from cooperating in a wider frame of anti-genderism rooted in their shared aversion to both global neoliberal capitalism and EU-related models of cultural and legal modernity (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018).

[18] Błażej Warkocki (2018), a Polish literary critic, offered once meaningful insight into this issue: 'Marching in Eastern European marches of equality is about political views. People outside the march are unconcerned or hostile and, in a sense, the outside is also a scene watched from the inside of the march. On parades, such as in London, it is the other way round – participants stay outside and watch the parade as a moving scene. And there – excepting a couple of politically engaged groups – it is a permanent ad break. Representatives of another company, mobile operators, banks, public services, the military, they are all parading. All professionally queered, happy as on permanent Prozac and promoting diversity (but not necessarily labor rights […]). Everything is supercool and fabulous, but without Eastern European spleen, it does not feel right.'

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**NADZEYA HUSAKOUSKAYA AND RANDI GRESSGÅRD***

# Europeanization as Civilizational Transition from East to West: Racial Displacement and Sexual Modernity in Ukraine

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## Abstract

Drawing on an empirical study of LGBT politics in Ukraine, this article foregrounds the civilizational and yet unspoken racialization characterizing Europeanization projects in the context of EU enlargement. Our starting point is that the boundaries of Europeanness coincide with civilizational boundaries of whiteness. We make the case that Europeanization is a profoundly racialized project, where racial whiteness is unmarked as a 'natural' adjacency of the West. We treat this dual mechanism of marking and unmarking as an instance of racial displacement, arguing that the predicaments of this dual mechanism are particularly forceful in the context of EU enlargement. More specifically, the article interrogates the ways in which subtle racialized power mechanisms intersect with – while at the same time being obscured by – political instrumentalization of LGBT (lesbian–gay–bi–trans) rights and freedoms in 'transitioning' processes involving Ukraine.[1]

***Keywords:*** *Europeanization, civilizational whiteness, racial displacement, sexual modernity, Ukraine.*

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## *1. Introduction*

In the context of European Union (EU) enlargement, linked to the vocabulary of 'transition', Ukraine has routinely been designated an East European or post-Soviet state with a 'European perspective'. The so-called transition towards democracy, or rather 'transitional diffusion of democracy' (D'Anieri, 2015: 235), is often associated with 'democratic revolutions', such as the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in 2004 and the EuroMaidan (or Revolution of Dignity) ten years later. In connection with the latter event in 2014, the newly elected president, Petro Poroshenko, proclaimed that Ukraine intends to move towards Europe, describing it as 'a civilizational choice': crossing the Rubicon to Europe, while leaving the Soviet past behind.[2] The then interim president, Oleksandr Turchynov, similarly stressed that one of the priorities of Ukraine is to return to the course of European integration, 'return to the family of European countries'.[3] In a meeting in May 2019 with the Commissioner for the European Neighborhood Policy and Extension, the newly elected president, Volodymyr Zelenkyy, reasserted that 'Ukraine's European choice is uncontested' and that he will 'defend the path chosen by the citizens of Ukraine'.[4]

Long before Ukrainian state leaders declared that Ukraine belongs to Europe, Anikó Imre (2005: 84) established that the 'return to Europe' has become an indispensable slogan for East European political campaigns: the idea and desire to return home to Europe which was once theirs and they rightfully belong. In the present article, we are concerned with what Imre describes as East European nations' unspoken insistence of their whiteness, which she sees as 'one of the most effective and least recognized means of asserting their Europeanness and rationalizing the desire to "return home"' (Imre, 2005: 82). When analytically linked to affirmation of civilizational whiteness, the 'return to Europe' trope gestures towards a typical postcolonial mimicry mechanism: a desire to imitate, a compensatory behavior resulting from extended Western hegemony, here taken as an act of historical reparation (see Boatcă, 2006: 98). As Christina Şandru (2012: 25) reminds us, in the case of East Central Europe, the desire to imitate does not involve the former Soviet centre but the Western-European hegemon; at stake is inclusion into the European civilization – implicitly defined by racial whiteness or white progress – to which one naturally belongs.

To address the racial dynamics of Europeanization, we shall deploy the supplementary concept of secondary Eurocentrism, which refers to a derivative discourse that appropriates Western modernity's discourses (Tlostanova, 2010) or, more accurately, reproduces civilizational, racialized ideas of Europeanness. Drawing on an empirical study of gender and sexuality politics in Ukraine,

[2] CNN interview with Petro Poroshenko, 27 June 2014, available at https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2014/06/27/intv-amanpour.cnn Accessed 25-09-2016.
[3] Charter 97, 23 February 2014, available at https://charter97.org/ru/news/2014/2/23/87890/ (in Russian). Accessed 03-07-2016.
[4] See https://interfax.com.ua/news/political/585931.html (in Russian). Accessed 25-07-2020.

conducted by Nadzeya Husakouskaya,[5] we will examine the unspoken racialized grammar embedded in Europeanization through the lens of 'sexual modernization'. We take as our starting point that boundary marking of Europeanness coincides with boundaries of racial whiteness in a civilizational frame, and that professionalized LGBT (lesbian–gay–bi–trans) activism is instrumental to the project of Europeanization (Aoub, 2013; Auob and Paternotte, 2014; Kulpa, 2014). We assume that the lines of civilizational demarcation are semi-permeable for groups construed as 'just outside' of them (see Böröcz and Sakar, 2017: 312), which is why the so-called EU expansion towards the East can be mapped as a 'return to Europe'. We shall argue that the injunction to 'return to Europe' by way of Europeanization is enabled and conditioned on the mythologies of Western civilization, and that Europeanization at once marks (promulgates) and unmarks (naturalizes) racial whiteness. Put differently, we take Europeanness to be profoundly – although contingently – racialized process, where racial whiteness is unmarked as a 'natural'[6] adjacency of the West.[7]

In accord with critical analyses thematizing racialization in conjunction with occlusions of race in dominant understandings of Europe, we treat this dual mechanism as an instance of racial displacement (see e.g. Böröcz, 2001; Boatcă, 2006; Goldberg, 2006; El-Tayeb, 2008; Lentin, 2008; 2014; De Genova, 2016; Picker, 2017; cf. Gressgård, 2019). As worded by Alena Lentin (2014: 78), 'race is *already and always* displaced in dominant understandings of Europeanness' (emphasis original), or as David T. Goldberg (2006: 334) puts it, race – and racist implications – are silenced but assumed. In this framing, any claim to Europeanness involves racial displacement, but as our paper attempts to show, this dual mechanism is particularly forceful – and yet subtle – in the context of EU enlargement.

In addition to the above-mentioned literature, we engage with researchers examining the construction of 'Central and Eastern European' (CEE) and/or 'post-socialist' spaces, as well as scholars investigating sexual politics in processes of Europeanization. There is an expanding body of literature on how Europeanization processes have affected LGBT activism and policies related to 'sexual orientation and gender identity' (SOGI) in post-communist-cum-post-socialist countries (see e.g. Kulpa and Mizielińska, 2011a; Buyantueva and Shevtsova, 2019). While the bulk of this academic commentary focuses on CEE countries in EU negotiating processes (see e.g. Ayoub, 2013; Ayoub and Paternotte, 2014; Bilić, 2016b), or on

[5] The empirical study includes interviews, participant observations and various documents, mainly transgender archive material from the Ukrainian LGBT organization *Insight*. The fieldwork was conducted between January 2014 and October 2015 in Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. In Ukraine, the fieldwork was carried out in close collaboration with the LGBT NGO *Insight*, which at the time was the only organization in Ukraine, among some 40 officially registered LGBT organizations, with a trans-inclusive profile.

[6] 'Natural' in the sense of being taken for granted, internalized and uncontested.

[7] The association between being white and being European suggests that racial whiteness is historically embedded in the idea of Europe itself or the West more generally. What we refer to as 'civilizational whiteness' concerns the development of a 'historicist' racism within systems of colonialism and slavery (see e.g. Hall, 2002; Goldberg, 2008; Lentin, 2008). Alternative, non-European white identities are not included in this framing (see Bonnett, 1998).

'new' member states (see e.g. O'Dwyer, 2010; Ayoub, 2016; Slootmaeckers et al., 2016a), gender and sexuality politics in/of the post-Soviet region has received much less attention. To yield new knowledge in this empirical field and deepen our appreciation of racial displacement in relations to Europeanization, we shall highlight how racialized power relations intersect with – while at the same time being obscured by – political instrumentalization of LGBT rights and freedoms in post-socialist Ukraine.

## *2. Processes of Europeanization in 'Eastern Europe'*

Larry Wolff (1994) famously describes the creation of 'Eastern Europe' in relation to the 'civilized Europe' and the 'barbarian Asia' as an imaginary 'in-between' place. This imaginary position is augmented in perceptions of contemporary Ukraine as facing a choice between a civilized Europe/desirable future and a backward Russia/Soviet past. Western media and politicians have customarily portrayed Russia as still 'Soviet', invasive and authoritarian in comparison with Ukraine, which – despite its significant lag – moves forward and aspires to a European future. In declaring their European orientation, the Ukrainian autorities appropriate this civilizational imaginary, thus reaffirming the boundaries of Europe and civilization at once (cf. Brown, 2006).

Several studies suggest that EU enlargement processes reinforce already entrenched colonial imaginaries, symbolically placing 'Eastern Europe' at the cusp between the Orient and the Occident in a permanently transitional position (see e.g. Böröcz, 2001; Kuus, 2004; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005; Checkel, 2005; O'Dwyer, 2010; Kulpa and Mizielińska, 2011b: 3; Kulpa, 2014). Its prolonged interim status fixes the 'East' as inherently inferior to the 'West', even as the egalitarian discourses of enlargement and transition disavow such civilizational asymmetry; the enduring civilizing project that Europeanization implies is obfuscated by a liberal-progressive policy edifice (cf. Kołodziejczyk, and Şandru, 2012; Lazarus, 2012). It seems fair to suggest, as do Magdalena Zaborowska and colleagues (2004: 10), that 'Eastern Europe' has supplied the 'West' with an 'orientalizable' and yet racially unmarked 'other' (cf. Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Buchowski, 2006). Acceptance versus postponement of accession to the EU is read, József Böröcz (2001: 32, emphasis original) notes, 'as reinforcement or rejection of *Europeanness* (i.e., *non-Orientalness*) and, […] ultimately, of "whiteness"'. Manuela Boatcă (2006: 103, emphasis original) asserts that this race for a more European identity bears '*the race marker* of "lesser whiteness"'.

However, since the Europeanization of CEE states is a rather bureaucratized operation, evolving through a set of seemingly benign governmental practices and legislations, the civilizational subjugation of peripheral 'others' is a rather elusive and insidious process (with no overt markers of racial difference), and yet, cognitive schemas of condescension are noticeable in the conditionality imposed on would-be accession countries. For instance, the resolution of the European Parliament adopted in 2014 states that Ukraine has a prospective interest in joining the EU but that this future possibility is provisional and conditional: provided it

adheres to the principles of democracy, respects fundamental freedoms and human and minority rights, and ensures the rule of law, Ukraine may apply (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005; cf. Ayoub, 2013).[8] If the symbolic granting of a provisional, second-class European status to countries in transition reinstalls civilizational whiteness as basic principle for understanding Europeanness, the conceptual work of democracy, (liberal) freedoms and human rights effectively edifices this (post)colonial dynamic.

More recent political developments, especially the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine which by many Ukrainians are taken as a fight against colonial Russia, have reinvigorated debates about postcolonial dynamics pertinent to the post-Soviet/post-socialist region (see e.g. Sakwa, 2015), though few debates concern EU enlargement politics and human rights discourse. Nevertheless, in a manner similar to Stuart Hall's (2002) deconstruction of 'the Europa myth',[9] Stijn Smismans (2010: 45) maintains that Europeanization processes are grounded in a myth locating human rights at the core of the European project, as though human rights were 'inherent to the EU and based on a common European heritage'.[10] Contrary to what the myth will have us believe, the adherence to democracy and human rights is a relatively recent condition for joining the EU, inextricably linked to the eastward enlargement processes. Heather Grabbe (2003: 316) describes the decisive and divisive moment of its inauguration in the 1990s as 'an innovative move for the European Union, in making an explicit linkage between benefit and specific tasks for applicants', adding that it may herald the start of more targeted use of conditionality (cf. Grabbe, 2006). This is precisely what we witness in attempts to use LGBT rights and freedoms as governmental instruments for demarcating European democracy-cum-civilization – eloquently termed 'gay conditionality' by Jennifer Suchland (2018: 1084).

[8] See the resolution of EP, 17 April 2014, available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=PV&reference=20140417&format=PDF&language=EN&secondRef=SIT Accessed 03-07-2016.

[9] In reference to Roland Barthes's (1972) *Mythologies*, Hall (2002: 63) asserts that the politics of myths is to depoliticize speech – a process of naturalization. He points out that '"[o]ur common European home" is still more of a "home" to some Europeans than it is to others, as the Poles, Bulgarians, Kosovans, Albanians and others from the former Soviet republics, clamouring for entry at the gates of "Europe", testify' (67). See also Bonnett (1998).

[10] This was in response to the fall of the so-called Iron Curtain, which 'opened the perspective of enlargement to a high number of new countries with a contestable human rights record' (Smismans, 2010: 53).

## *3. Invoking and concealing the civilizational idea of Europe*

We could trace back the advancement of LGBT rights into the EU's external relations to the Treaty of Amsterdam from 1997, culminating in the *Guidelines to promote and protect the enjoyment of all human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons* six year later. In providing a detailed checklist for those wishing to grasp the European understanding of LGBT rights, the latter document placed LGBT human rights issues at the core of what EU represents (Kristoffersson et al., 2016: 45). Sexual rights have since figured as the litmus test of a country's broader human rights record, increasingly so during the fifth and sixth enlargement processes (Slootmaeckers and Touquet, 2016).[11] Adherence to LGBT rights and tolerance, manifested in successful Pride events, has over time become an index of civilizational maturity (see e.g. Kulpa, 2014; Ayoub and Paternotte, 2014; cf. El-Tayeb, 2011; Ammaturo, 2015; Gressgård, 2015).

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that negotiations over SOGI inclusion into the Ukrainian anti-discrimination legislation were particularly important when Ukraine started enlargement negotiations with the EU. European governmental actors, alongside non-governmental organizations (NGOs) home and abroad, saw the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity into the country's anti-discrimination legislation as the next logical step after EuroMaidan. However, Ukraine's Parliament struggled to pass the anti-discrimination bill owing to widespread fears amongst MPs that it would pave the way for same-sex marriage, undermining what they saw as core national family values. In 2014, the director of the LGBT organization *Insight*, Olena Shevchenko, expressed disappointment in the condonation from the EU following the defeat for sexual and human rights in the Parliament. It is worth quoting Shevchenko at length describing this situation, as her account ties together several aspects of the conditionality concerning LGBT issues:

> Now we see a backlash against human rights, not only in Ukraine but globally. What happened in Ukraine with LGBT, it is the same situation in Moldova: the same opposition to LGBT rights, 'EuroSodom' [they call it], debates and protests. But unlike us [the LGBT movement], the anti-LGBT movement is consolidated. In Moldova, where LGBT people were attacked massively, the [anti-discrimination] law was [nevertheless] passed. In Georgia, last year was horrific, with more than 10,000 people taking to the streets to kill gays, lesbians and transgender people during Pride, but also in Georgia, the bill was passed. In Ukraine, by contrast, the bill did not pass. Why? … 'Because it's a difficult time … Now we have a war [armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine] … it is not the time for LGBT and human rights; that will have to wait.' No, I don't understand why it has to wait. I want to know

[11] The fifth enlargement refers to the accession of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta in 2004, and Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. The sixth enlargement started with the accession of Croatia in 2013 (Slootmaeckers and Touquet, 2016: 35, n. 4).

> exactly what it takes to pass the law. It was possible at a certain moment, but Europe, I would say Europe betrayed LGBTs in Ukraine (Interview with Olena Shevchenko, July 2014).

For one, Shevchenko highlights the universal problem of LGBT rights and, simultaneously, positions *Insight*'s activism within a wider human rights framework (cf. Thoreson, 2014: 6). She portrays Ukraine as a local actor in relation to a global (European/universal) standard, alluding to the EU's commitment to promote human rights globally. Shevchenko's reflections signal an almost total reliance of local LGBT activism on external incentives and support of local initiatives. Secondly, Shevchenko juxtaposes Ukraine with its post-Soviet neighbors, Moldova and Georgia, which both managed to pass the anti-discrimination bill and hence 'score high on the hegemonic western scale' (Bakić-Hayden, 1995: 924). Harking back to our argument about racial displacement, we see how universalized LGBT claims simultaneously invoke and conceal the civilizational idea of Europe (cf. Kulpa, 2014: 443; Ammaturo, 2015: 1162). Finally, Shevchenko' comment conveys the sense of urgency and appropriateness shared by many LGBT activists in Ukraine. Her account of the 'bad timing' script from central politicians is reminiscent of LGBT pushbacks elsewhere, as it is often the case that LGBT people are told to 'wait for all of the "more important stuff" to be successfully resolved first' (Bilić, 2016a: 3), thus relegating LGBT issues to the sphere of the 'merely cultural' (Butler, 1997). Overall, Shevchenko's reflections dovetail with main activist concerns articulated by supranational funding bodies, notably advocacy work.

## *4. The professionalized NGO sector and LGBT advocacy*

Developments of and within the professionalized LGBT activism in Ukraine – the professionalized NGO sector – have by and large mirrored transnational activist politics. Important here is the emergence of the so-called third sector (*tretii sektor*) in the early 1990s as the 'realm of citizens' initiatives', financially supported by supranational development agencies (Hemment, 2004). From its inception, the third sector promoted civil society development and LGBT rights cohering around 'Western' ideas of identity and visibility. Although some Ukrainian NGOs have contested the unidirectional policy mobility or 'the transfer or ideas', few have taken an explicit stance against the conditionality imposed by the EU, transnational NGOs and donor agencies. Local organizations have emulated both their organizational style (professionalization) and substance (knowledge/ vocabulary), if only for strategic reasons.

The emergence of a transgender movement in post-Soviet space is a case in point. Anna Kirey, who at the time of the interview was a senior program officer (at a Public Health program) at the Open Society Foundation and a long-time LGBT activist in Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine, attributes its emergence to exposure to Western activist networks and ideas. As she recalls, 'everything started in Ukraine because Anna [Dovgopol] came with her knowledge on trans issues, and Ceo

[Olena Shevchenko] had knowledge about trans issues from various events' (Interview with Anna Kirey, October 2015). Anna Dovgopol, who is mentioned in the quote – and is among the founding directors of *Insight* and coordinator at the Heinrich Böll Foundation's 'Gender Democracy' program in Ukraine – recalls her own acquisition of new knowledge in the LGBT field: 'gender education [MA degree at the Central European University in Budapest] provided me with a new vision, understanding of how everything works. […] It has formed this ideal worldview that we strive to achieve on the practical level' (Interview with Anna Dovgopol, October 2015).

Although these stories suggest that learning-based norm adaptation is a pivotal dimension of Europeanization (cf. Schimmelfennig and Sedermeier 2005; O'Dwyer, 2010) – 'new' knowledge being imparted by local actors in a process of translation (Butler, 2019) – the almost total dependence on the EU and other foreign organizations for funding, and the corollary conditionality to bear on the substance and style of LGBT activism, should not be underestimated. These material and non-material infrastructures constitute the frames for what kind of activism is worthy of support, and what kind of issues are possible to raise as intelligible political claims (Butler, 2004). In this respect, the impact of donor funding on the Ukrainian NGO sector resembles postcolonial power asymmetries elsewhere. Observing that professionalization has emerged as part and parcel of Europeanization, Nicole Butterfield (2016: 55) argues that the funding and donor expectations have 'shaped many LGBTQ NGOs' structures and strategies in a way that has impeded grassroots initiatives'. Accordingly, Anna Kirey laments that the size and level of professionalization as criteria for selecting reliable NGOs for support severely restricts the development of transgender and intersex activism (less so gay activism), not only in the post-Soviet region but globally:

> I believe that there is a tendency to fund big cool organizations, whereas small ones do not grow, and transgender and intersex organizations are all small […]. If an organization started just a year ago, there might be two people involved. What kind of financial stability do they have? Who would constitute their 'board of directors'? (Interview with Anna Kirey, October 2015).

To counter the impact of LGBT NGO professionalization, Kirey's preferred strategy is to challenge rigid institutional approaches and reconstruct the system of institutionalized donorship from within. Anna Dovgopol, by contrast, speaks in favor of further professionalization:

> I don't believe in horizontal [structures], since I know from my experience that they don't work. Someone's got to be responsible in the end. Another problem with the LGBT movement is that it is not professional. […] We need a different approach. We need to treat NGOs as businesses […]. (Interview with Anna Dovgopol, October 2015).

The two diverging views on professionalization of NGOs testify to the occasional contestation of external pressure on local activism and the simultaneous limitations of this contestation. Obviously, when external funding is vital to LGBT activism, local organizations are compelled to focus on 'upwards accountability toward the donors', often at the cost of 'downward accountability to beneficiaries of organizations' outputs and internal accountability that relates to responsibility to the staff and the mission' (Chahim and Prakash, 2014: 491). Although some Ukrainian grassroot activism – scattered across LGBT communities – manage to withstand professionalization and mainstreamed LGBT politics (Husakouskaya, 2019; Plakhotnik, 2019), it is immensely difficult and economically risky to contest dominant discourses and government structures (cf. Bilić, 2016a), let alone criticize colonizing aspects of Europeanization (see Choudry and Shragge, 2011; Butterfield, 2016).

## *5. Geo-temporal effects of sexual modernization*

To be true, changes prompted by external pressure have been beneficial to many LGBT groups in Ukraine; external influence eventually resulted in the introduction of SOGI into the Labor Code (the anti-discrimination law), as well as a more inclusive trans legislation.[12] But EU-imposed symbolic politics often stands in stark contrast to actual transformative powers (Slootmaeckers et al., 2016b: 4), and most importantly for our purposes here, NGO professionalization has limited the possibilities of local activism, as the above-cited comments by Shevchenko and Kirey indicate, as well as having other unintented effects. We have already mentioned that professionalized advocacy work has been largely oblivious to grassroots groups' concerns, sidelining alternative gender/sexual experiences and activism. We have also called attention to the reproduction of East European/post-Soviet territories as permanently transitional. Yet another effect is the aggressive far-right response to increased LGBT visibility.[13] Aside from having devastating consequences for the lives of those most in danger, the rise in homophobia and transphobia has further diminished the space for non-nationalist or non-rightwing criticism of Europeanization. We shall elaborate on each of these issues below, as they all concern the predicaments of racial displacement.

### *5.1 Construing Eastern European territories as permanently transitional*

[12] See https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/322-08#Text (in Ukrainian) regarding the Labor Code. Accessed 20-12-2017. As for trans legalization, Decree no. 1041, which came into force in 2017, introduced considerable changes in the gender recognition procedure. The new legislation is far less pathologizing the previous ones. See Decree no.1041 of 10.10.2016: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1589-16#Text (in Ukrainian). Accessed 25-01-2017.

[13] This is not to say that LGBT populations are the only targets of far-right groups. There have been several reported racist attacks on Roma settlements over the past few years. See https://www.rferl.org/a/amnesty-urges-ukraine-authorities-to-protect-roma-minority-provide-justice-to-victims-of-violence/29884275.html For the most part, far-right groups enjoy impunity for such crimes. See Amnesty's report 2019: https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/ukraine/report-ukraine/

Complementing our argument about LGBT rights and freedoms being important markers of Europeanness, we want to highlight that EU-induced LGBT policies work to strengthen 'a model of European citizenship grounded in the liberal concept of "tolerance" as a cultural and political marker of civilization' (Ammaturo, 2015: 1161). In the context of tolerance education in Latvia, Dace Dzenovska (2018b: 11) aptly remarks that 'educating a less-than-European population in public and political conduct appropriate for a liberal democratic European policy […] was a civilizational project'. She moves on to argue that the prevalent political and moral imaginaries posit Eastern Europeans 'as racializing and backward Europeans who could and should benefit from more rather than less Europeanization' (ibid., 18). This, in turn, makes it 'impossible to criticize Western liberalism in the same way as from within postcolonial contexts, or even from within feminist, queer, or racialized margins of the West' (ibid., 16; cf. Kulpa, 2014 on leveraged pedagogy). Another way of putting this would be that the mechanism of racial displacement is particularly forceful and delicate in the context of EU accession, amounting to a double bind. If you *do* comply with the Western-liberal norms and rules, you are unable to articulate a critique of Europeanization as racial-civilizational integration – and tolerance as 'host*ile* generosity' (Goldberg, 2006: 655). If you *do not* comply, on the other hand, you display your backwardness, which excludes you from political processes and public debates, and deem you unworthy of European (first-class) membership (cf. Bonnett, 1998: 1044; El-Tayeb, 2008: 657–658; Lentin, 2008: 489; cf. also Gressgård, 2010: 96).

### *5.2 Anti-Western and anti-gender backlash*

While the link between sexual modernization and 'EU-worthiness' (Böröcz, 2006: 124) has had some desirable outcomes for LGBT populations, the entanglement of LGBT activism with a 'European perspective' (professed and institutionalized through conditionality politics and financial aid from donor agencies) has also triggered violent homophobic and transphobic responses. We saw a rise in far-right nationalist rhetoric and politics in most CEE countries after membership in the EU was obtained (see e.g. O'Dwyer and Schwartz, 2010; O'Dwyer and Vermeersch, 2016; Mole, 2016; Slootmaeckers and Touquet, 2016; Bilić, 2016a; 2016b). Agnieszka Graff (2010: 600–601) notes that since EU resolutions are responses to state-sanctioned discrimination against sexual minorities, so-called homophobes can score political points by non-compliance (cf. Suchland, 2018: 1080). Reporting findings from 14 post-socialist countries, Roman Kuhar and colleagues (2018: 115) similarly comment that trans rights are increasingly targeted by anti-gender mobilisations, 'as trans* people are seen as those who are fundamentally questioning the neatly organised heteronormative binary gender system'.

In Ukraine, too, purported compliance with EU requirements is accompanied by strong nationalist mobilizations opposing the so-called decadent West or 'Gayropa'. In June 2015, Dmyto Yarosh, leader of the far-right group *Right Sector*

and member of the Parliament at the time (he had run for the presidency a year earlier), urged the Kyiv mayor to ban a scheduled Pride event, rhetorically linking it to 'gender ideology', LGBT activism and European integration:

> I will say a few words on 'LGBT' and Euro[pean] integration. Homosexuality propaganda and gender ideology are to a great extent reinforced from the West through governmental and non-governmental channels. […] Now let us consider whether Ukraine needs such a Euro[pean] integration when someone is imposing their will on us. We are fighting Moscow imperialism not so that others can have the opportunity to govern us – we are fighting for our freedom![14]

Ukrainian mainstream politicians are no less eager, if only for political gain, to defend so-called family values. When the Ukrainian parliament finally passed the bill banning workplace discrimination (including discrimination based on sexual orientation) in 2015, Petro Poroshenko tweeted: 'Ukraine is breaking free from the shackles of discrimination from the Soviet past. Meanwhile, family values remain inviolable.' The speaker of parliament likewise assured his fellow deputies that family values would stay intact: 'I hear some fake information which says that there may be same-sex marriages in Ukraine. God forbid, this is never going to happen. We will never support this.'[15] Recalling Shevchenko's reflections, it bears mentioning that Ukrainian politicians have increasingly problematized gender- and sexuality-related issues in terms of *ne na chasi*, meaning 'badly timed' (cf. Interview with Olga Plakhotnik, July 2014).[16] The Kyiv mayor, Vitaly Klitschko, apparently took notice of the above-cited far-right leader when encouraging the Kyiv Pride organizers to cancel the event in 2015 for safety reasons and to keep Ukraine united:

> Today, when the war continues in the East of the country, it is bad timing to organize public events, especially those ambiguously perceived by the society. Now we have only one enemy – the military aggression in the East. Therefore, I call on everyone not to play into the hands of the enemy; do not

[14] See https://www.facebook.com/dyastrub/posts/839707806106105?pnref=story (in Ukrainian), FB public entry by Yarosh on 4 June 2015. Accessed 11-07-2016.

[15] See https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34796835 Accessed 11-06-2016.

[16] On this point, see also Mark Gevisser's (2020) conversations with Olena Shevchenko in *The Pink Line,* where she is quoted saying 'Ukrainian society is *not* ready for LGBT rights. I agree. But Ukrainian LGBTs, themselves, they cannot be restrained anymore. They go online. […] They see how things can be. Why should they not have similar freedoms? […] The world is moving so fast, and events are overtaking us in Ukraine. We have no choice but to try and catch up' (Gevisser 2020: 23). As for the 'catching-up' framing of this argument, that speaks to the temporality of transition and secondary Eurocentrism. An extract of the book is available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/16/how-globalisation-has-transformed-the-fight-for-lgbtq-rights

> incite hostility and do not create further confrontation in the center of the capital.[17]

More recently, in June 2020, the Law Enforcement committee of the Ukrainian parliament voted down a proposed law against anti-LGBT motivated hate crimes and hate speech, and the following month, a bill proposing a ban on so-called pro-homosexual and transgender propaganda was put forward in parliament.[18] Like the infamous Russian law, its purpose is to protect 'traditional values', but unlike its Russian counterpart, the Ukrainian legislation explicitly names 'transgender' in the title, which is testament to the visibility backlash.

If these nationalist mobilizations endanger the lives of LGBT people and foreclose possibilities for LGBT activism, they also further limit the space for non-rightwing, non-nationalist opposition to Europeanization in Ukraine (cf. Husakouskaya, 2019). Anti-LGBT mobilizations are not confined to CEE countries, however, and neither are they solely reactions to local LGBT visibility. Far-right groups operate transnationally, and political homophobia and transphobia are often enacted regardless of local visibility and political demands (Bosia and Weiss, 2013; Langlois, 2016; Suchland, 2018). For instance, several international watchdogs, notably 'Bellingcat Anti-Equality Monitoring', have drawn attention to the extensive involement of conservative religious groups from the US in Ukrainian anti-LGBT campaigns, including the recent anti-LGBT propaganda bill.[19] This anti-LGBT global flow surely blurs the East/West and North/South civilizational boundaries, thereby also challenging the 'European exceptionalism on human rights as a distinguishing cultural, political and legal feature of the whole continent' (Böröcz, 2006: 124). Yet, the civilizational practice of designating some places or cultures as inherently racist, homophobic, transphobic and commonly illiberal – to which liberal rights and freedoms then become the remedy – is sustained through the Europeanization process and secondary Eurocentrism (see Kulpa, 2014: 440, 443; Suchland, 2018: 1075; cf. El-Tayeb, 2011: 120).

[17] The original message is available here: https://gordonua.com/news/kiev/klichko-prizval-organizatorov-otkazatsya-ot-provedeniya-marsha-ravenstva-83737.html (emphasis added). Accessed 25-07-2020.

[18] See https://www.rbc.ua/rus/styler/zakon-zaprete-propagandy-gomoseksualizma-1595490505.html (in Ukrainian). Accessed 27-07-2020. This is the second time an anti-LGBT propaganda bill is proposed. In 2012, the Ukrainian parliament passed a bill banning 'propaganda of homosexuality' in the first reading, but – partly due to EU pressure – it did not go through to the second reading.

[19] See https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2020/10/16/how-american-religious-conservatives-fought-lgbt-rights-in-ukraine/ Accessed 24-10-2020. See also https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19881905

### *5.3 Invoking a developmental temporality*

In their intro to the edited volume on de-centering Western sexualities, Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska (2011b: 14) highlight the Western style of political and social engagement adopted by CEE countries, stressing that these countries were thrown 'in the protuberance of clutching ideas […] far from a linear and progressively accumulative vision of time' (ibid., 16). Zaborowska and colleagues (2004: 22) point to a paradox in this respect: while having too little queer history, former 'communist countries' in Eastern Europe appear to suffer from an excess of history, that is, from 'too much past' with reference to the alleged backwardness of the communist heritage. In the post-Soviet/East-European region, the rise of organized LGBT movements was construed as simultaneously a desired step forward (towards democracy) and an inevitable step back, compared to a Western timeline of the LGBT development (cf. Buelow, 2012).

This narrative is reiterated by Anna Dovgopol, when likening the politics of women's organizations in contemporary Ukraine to 'what was in America in the 1960s', thus deducing: 'there is nothing unique here [in Ukraine]' (Interview with Anna Dovgopol, October 2015).[20] In a similar fashion, Elena Gapova (founding director of Centre for Gender Studies at the European Humanities University in Belarus and later professor of sociology in the US) talks about a new generation of women's movement in Russia and Ukraine 'voicing something that the West said in 1970s'. At the same time, she is cautious about the silencing effects of one-trajectory feminist and LGBT narratives, asserting that Soviet or communist feminism was in some respects ahead of its time:

> Now we are revising our Soviet and communist [heritage]. Now I understand that those issues Western feminist theory started raising in the beginning of 1970s, they were voiced [in the Soviet Union] in the 1920s through these women's councils (*zhenotdel*). In 1918, Bolsheviks founded a whole department dedicated to women's issue. It [the department] was closed in 1929, as it was decided that the women's issue had been resolved. But they introduced free childcare, kindergartens and health care in rural areas and all these women's magazines like *Rabotnica i krest'anka*[21] (Interview with Elena Gapova, July 2014).

Bini Adamczak (2018: 14), a political scholar, similarly contends that '[t]he Russian Revolution created the most progressive, wholly gender-neutral marriage and

[20] Considering the above-quoted comment by Anna Kirey that 'everything started in Ukraine because Anna [Dovgopol] came with her knowledge on trans issues', it would be possible to question Dovgopol's claim that 'there is nothing unique here'. Arguably, starting out with trans issues amounts to a reversal of the Western temporal trajectory in which 'trans' came last in the LGBT line and have had an uneasy position in the LGBT movement. Correcting ethnographic narratives by pointing to matters of fact is a risky enterprise, though, as calling for representational accuracy risks re-inscribing essentialism (see Imre, 2005: 93). We would argue instead that the apparent contradiction speaks to the geo-political power of temporal constructions (cf. Bevernage, 2016).

[21] *Rabotnitsa i krest'anka* translates as 'Worker and peasant', with both nouns being of feminine gender.

family rights that the modern world has ever seen'. She continues that homosexuality was legalized in Russia in 1918 and that a Soviet court four years later declared the marriage between a trans-man/a butch and a ciswoman legal (on the grounds that the marriage was contracted mutually), emphasizing:

> The beginnings of the Russian Revolution were not only ahead of their time, but also of ours. Its dreams as well as its practices are not only *yet again actual* [*gegenwärtig*], rather they *are also still prospective* [*zukünftig*] (Adamczak, 2018: 15, emphasis original).

In this spin on secondary Eurocentrism, the Russian Revolution serves as a firm reminder that 'our' modern world is not as modern as it used to be; it needs to catch up with itself, as it were. While such 'back to the future' or 'ahead of its time' narratives do not invoke a unifying developmental temporality, the basic reference category is still the idea of civilizational Europe (cf. Baer, 2014). Not only does this temporality, which is the temporality of transition, render 'other' places and cultures inferior, it also discounts experiences and forms of activism exceeding this comparative framework (cf. Husakouskaya, 2019; see also e.g. Dahl, 2012; Gabowska, 2012; Koobak and Marling, 2014; Bilić, 2016a; 2016b; Butterfield, 2016), ultimately entrenching the mechanism of racial displacement.[22]

## *6. A Global Postcolonial Critique*

In his seminal article, 'Is the post- in postcolonial the post- in post-Soviet?', David C. Moore (2001) ponders the possibility of a *global* postcolonial critique. In declaring that 'we are all postcolonial', he suggests that the concept of postcolonialism should not be reserved for the so-called global South (South Asia post-1947 and Africa post-1958), but should equally be applied to the former Russo- and Soviet-controlled regions post-1989 and -1991 (ibid., 115). In a global perspective, postcolonial critique would encompass 'the never-colonial, yet always imperial, histories of various, clearly recognizable localities *within* Europe' (Böröcz, 2006: 134). Conversely, Richard Sakwa (1999) suggests that we are all post-communist and post-socialist now (cf. Atanasoski and Vora, 2018). But despite obvious overlaps, there has been limited 'traffic in ideas' between the two bodies of literature (Chari and Verdery, 2009: 10, 11), which can partly be explained by the hierarchical organization of global knowledge production (see e.g. Robinson, 2003; Suchland, 2011: 845; Kołodziejczyk, and Şandru, 2012; Bartha and Eröss, 2015).[23]

[22] The erasure of local 'queer' histories and imposition of a colonial-racial historicity cannot be attributed solely to 'the West', however, given the fact that Soviet historicists attempted to eradicate the national histories that would otherwise destroy the monolithic Soviet multicultural narrative.

[23] As post-socialist scholars have repeatedly pointed out, postcolonial studies was from its inception acknowledged in 'Western' academia for its theory production, whereas post-socialist contributions were, for the most part, 'incorporated as add-on "case studies" which confirm and/or interpret existing frameworks' (Robinson, 2003: 278).

The global knowledge hierarchy cannot, however, adequately explain why important post-socialist interventions retain some unproblematized Eurocentric presumptions. Our analysis has indicated that this is due to a reification of civilizational whiteness by way of secondary Eurocentrism. That might even be true of Moore's own proposition about a global conception of postcolonialism. As Veronika Sušová-Salminen (2011: 16) compellingly argues, by confining his analysis to Russio-Soviet dominance, Moore (2001) seems to overlook the complex relationship of imperial Russia and the Soviet Union to the Western metropolises, above all ignoring the imitative secondary Eurocentrism characteristic of post-socialist states. Likewise, Larry Wolff's (1994) influential *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization in the Mind of Enlightenment* does not reflect much on the colonial episteme of Enlightenment thinking and the construction of geopolitical categories: 'His Eastern Europe is positioned in the matrix of intra-European cultural and political relations which prevents him from underlining the global view' (Sušová-Salminen, 2011: 15).

Norbert Petrovici (2015) makes a similar point when probing how CEE scholarly interventions frame their criticism of the Western hegemon. Taking up Berber Bevernage's (2016) critique of the West as presumed or naturalized 'referential contemporaneity' in general, and Monika Baer's (2014) critique of the West as 'basic category of reference' in debates about CEE anthropology in particular, Petrovici (2015: 97) takes issue with comparisons and knowledge alliances by which the future is imagined as the convergence point between the West and the East (cf. Kołodziejczyk and Şandru, 2012). His call for an ontology where the global power games and local forces are interconnected seems particularly pertinent in the implicitly racialized processes of Europeanization. But so long as whiteness remains a naturalized feature of Europeanness – 'unspoken' in Imre's (2005) wordings – secondary Eurocentrism has inadvertently become part of post-socialist critique, deflating the call of a global approach to politics of time and space.

Paraphrasing Suchland (2018: 1085), we hold that making connections between Eurocentrism (including far-right claims to whiteness) and instrumentalization of gender and sexuality (including political homo/transphobia) is not so much a stretch, but have been largely avoided in dominant academic and popular debates concerning East–West dynamics. The anti-Soviet drive behind many post-socialist interventions might go some way to explaining the lack of a global postcolonial critique of Europeanization's colonial entanglements and iterations of European superiority. As we have also highlighted, however, advancing such critique from a post-socialist position would most certainly prove difficult owing to the impasse of racial displacement. Whereas postcolonial studies and critical race theory and activism (in both the global South and North) can raise intelligible claims and occasion debate on civilizational classifications embedded in prevalent ideas of Europeanness, post-socialist scholars and activists are readily caught in a double bind when contesting those very same social forces.

## *7. Concluding remarks*

We have highlighted that LGBT activism is not merely professed as an adequate solution to problems sexual and gender non-conforming minorities face, but more generally figures as the key to successful 'transition towards democracy' in a civilizational frame. Moreover, we have noted that there is often a misregistration between stated LGBT politics and actual activity, and we have pointed out that imposition of sexual rights and freedoms tends to backfire. Our chief argument here is that hostility towards LGBT and other minority rights and populations are not separable from the long-established idea of a civilized, white Europe.

Even so, sexual modernity's civilizational workings are for the most part encoded and naturalized. When rightwing nationalists across Europe (and elsewhere) claim entitlement to white privilege, these struggles over whiteness or civilization are rarely problematized as eminently European or intrinsic to the project of Europeanization. They are instead pathologized as attitudes of loony extremists or toughs (Lentin, 2008: 493; Goldberg, 2008: 353), entirely distanced from the 'core' of Europe (Imre, 2005). In the words of Dzenovska (2018b: 12), we see a dislocation of Europe's vices to marginal people and places, such as Eastern Europe. Any failure is ascribed to their 'oriental nature', to cite from Buchowski (2006: 475). Like racism, homophobia and transphobia are displaced as 'cultural attributes' deemed incompatible with the European ethos (Ahmed, 2011: 126; Kulpa, 2014). But as Suchland (2018: 1075, 1077) emphasizes, political homophobia is entangled with the racialized episteme of Eurocentrism (as 'white' and Christian), even as it undermines LGBT rights and freedoms so central to contemporary Europeanization.

Our discussion has suggested that it is a particularly delicate task to criticize Europeanization in a post-socialist context. This is not to say, however, that one should abstain from doing so. On the contrary, the post-socialist racial displacement quandary foregrounded in our analysis shows the need for a global postcolonial critique – including cross-fertilization of ideas between postcolonial theory production and politics – without imagining the future as the convergence point between the West and the Rest (to recall Petrovici's intervention).[24] The note we want to end on by way of conclusion is that when Europeanization is considered in isolation from global postcolonial dynamics, the 'transition towards democracy' and instrumentalization of LGBT rights and freedoms are distanced from any meaningful consideration of its Eurocentric presuppositions. Hence, we risk losing sight of the elusive shaping of racist configurations cloaked in the language of democracy, tolerance and human rights. If racism – both its overt and covert manifestations – is an outcome of Eurocentrism, then it is best understood as a byproduct of Europeanization, not its antidote.

[24] It should be emphasized that theory production is in this context not limited to questions of epistemology and representation (postcolonial theory in the narrow sense), but includes problematizations of global power dynamics in terms of geopolitics, imperialism and systems of governance, as well as processes of subject formation in relation to practices of colonial/postcolonial power.

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**LINDA LAPIŅA** *

# Sexual Harassment or Volunteer Work? Affordances of Differentiated Whiteness

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## Abstract

This article applies the notion of affordance to analyse affective, intersectional emergence of differentiated whiteness in the context of East to West migration after the enlargement of the European Union in 2004. I draw on autoethnography and memory work, juxtaposing encounters with two elderly, white, single and physically impaired Danish men in their homes in 2004 and 2014. Cleaning Ole's apartment in 2004, I was invited to provide sexual services, passing as a sexualized, too young, unemployable female Eastern European love migrant of limited social value. In contrast, interviewing Carsten for my PhD in 2014, I came across as able-bodied, middle-class researcher, progressively feminine and fluent in, perhaps even, Danish. I heard no sexual undertones in Carsten's invitation to 'visit again', instead perceiving it as a suggestion to become a voluntary visitor. Analyzing the affective flows in these encounters, I trace how markers of difference intersect to afford different whitenesses. I discuss how whiteness functions as an affordance, accumulated over time, emerging in situated, affective encounters and constraining bodies' possibilities for interactions, movement and becoming. The article contributes to research on whiteness and intersectionality and to scholarship that explores emergence of 'Europe' by examining relations between centre/periphery and racial formations.[1]

***Keywords:*** *whiteness, intersectionality, Europe, affect, autoethnography, affordance.*

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## *1. Introduction*

This article traces the shaping forces of particular bodies in order to expand theoretical frameworks for understanding intersectional emergence of whiteness (Dyer, 1997; Hage, 1998; Ahmed, 2007; Meer, 2018). I juxtapose the subject positions that emerged in my encounters with two white, elderly and single Danish men in 2004 and 2014 in order to analyse emergence of differentiated whiteness. I argue that differentiated whiteness functions as an affordance: an accumulation of affective and embodied experiences of intersecting markers of difference that enables and constrains interactions in specific spatial and temporal mo(ve)ments.

The gradations of whiteness discussed in this article emerge in the context of intra-European East-West migration. Since 2004, the European Union has expanded from 15 to 28 member states. The largest increase occurred in 2004, when eight Eastern and Central European countries joined the EU: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, as well as two Mediterranean countries, Malta and Cyprus. Some narratives and practices emphasize the unity in this enlarged European body, such as free movement for its citizens. On the other hand, a number of crises, most recently, the 'refugee crisis' of 2015–2016 and the ongoing Brexit negotiations (Loftsdóttir, Smith and Hipfl, 2018) expose how 'Europe', even internally, is contested and unequal.

'Western' versus 'Eastern' Europe is an important marker in this context. Eastern European, post-Soviet countries and their inhabitants are often seen as not quite European: illiberal, haunted by a Soviet past, at best in the process of becoming European, civilized societies and subjects (Buchowski, 2006; Dzenovska, 2013; 2018b; Böröcz and Sarkar, 2017). These tropes rely upon Cold war delineations between capitalism and communism, freedom and authoritarianism, democracy and oppression, but also evoke earlier historical events where political formations in Europe's present core set about to civilize, and dominate, its present peripheries – through medieval Crusades, serfdom and other colonial practices (Kalnačs, 2016). In Western European media, the newer European countries are routinely portrayed as nationalistic, homophobic, racist, corrupt and conservative, some excessively religious. The trending measures of Europeanness shift along with political events, including treatment of ethnic and sexual minorities, reception of refugees and rise of nationalist populist parties (Dzenovska, 2018b). These discourses signify how 'Europe' continues to be enacted as a silent reference point (Chakrabarty, 2000: 28), as progressive, tolerant, enlightened; a destination that 'not quite' European societies might someday be able to reach.

Historical processes of colonization, occupations and foreign settlement situate the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) in the crossroads between East and West, as Europe's 'internal others' (Kalnačs, 2016). Trying to overcome the legacies of the Soviet era and claim a position within a European social body, the Baltic countries and societies comprise boundary spaces and figures between East and West. Examining which positions become available for not-quite European subjects as they are evaluated on their (sometimes presumably

impossible) progress towards becoming European can illuminate conceptions and contestations of Europe, Europeanness and European whiteness (Dzenovska, 2018b). In addition to this boundary location of Baltic experience between East and West, this article departs from the author's experiences as a Latvian migrant in Denmark since 2004.

Using memory work and autoethnography, I explore how affective experiences of intersecting markers of difference accumulate into affordances of differentiated whiteness. I draw on insights from critical whiteness studies, challenging binaries of white and non-white and conceptualising whiteness as fluid, relational and performative (Dyer, 1997; Meer, 2018), as operating through potentialities, rather than shades or hierarchies (Lapiņa, 2018; Lapiņa and Vertelytė, 2020). This article contributes to earlier research by proposing to examine how whiteness works as an affordance. I combine perspectives from ecological psychology with analyses of how racialization and other intersecting processes of difference come to matter through affect.

I adopt the notion of affordance from ecological psychology (Gibson, 1986), where it captures how possibilities for action emerge in interaction with our environments, constrained by embodied knowledge and experience. For instance, a chair might afford sitting on, depending on the shape of particular bodies and their experience with chair-like objects as inviting this type of interaction. I analyse my empirical material to show how racialized embodiment materializes as an affordance, enabling particular interactions and movements. A body learns and performs its changing whiteness through embodied, affective encounters. This enables accounting for the role of accumulated experiences as differentiated whiteness emerges in particular contexts. While affordance points to sedimentation of experience, it simultaneously operates in a serendipitous fashion where particular memories, affects and embodied markers of difference come to matter in different ways.

I conceive intersecting markers of difference, and the positionalities they condition, as what Neimanis (2017: 31), revisiting Adrienne Rich's (1984) work on politics of location through a feminist new-materialist lens, calls 'metastable becomings'. Echoing the work of Annemarie Mol (2002), Neimanis (2017: 31–32) observes: 'while these subject-forming lineaments materialize […] very concretely, they also index […] multiple belongings, and anchor […] subjectivity in multiple places. […] the body is always multiple.' This resonates with other feminist writings on subjectivation, for instance, Mohanty's (1988) emphasis on the subject as a 'potential collection of noncorrelating positions'. These positions are constrained by global flows of power, where embodied markers, such as gender, operate as fields of 'structured and structuring difference, in which the tones of extreme localization, of the intimately personal and individualized body, vibrate in the same field with global high-tension emissions' (Haraway, 1988: 588). The analytical challenge becomes to unpack how bodies inhabit time: how, on one hand, 'the body' is always in the making, and how, on the other hand, its potentialities to become materialize in specific contexts. The notion of affordance captures how whiteness emerges as a relational doing and becoming, enabling and

constraining interactions in and across specific social, spatial and temporal locations.

This article explores how differentiated whiteness is affectively made and experienced in my encounters with two aging white Danish men in their apartments in 2004 and 2014 in Copenhagen. A cleaning encounter, which developed into invitation to provide sexual services in 2004, with the author positioned as a young, female, sexualized, relatively precarious Eastern European migrant of limited social value, is juxtaposed with a research interview in 2014, where the author came to inhabit a majoritized whiteness.

I analyse how whiteness emerges as an affordance, intersectionally constituted, affectively experienced and laboured, unfolding through mattering of intersecting markers of difference in situated, spatialized encounters. I draw on the emerging field of research that explores the interplay of affect and intersecting markers of difference, with a particular focus on whiteness (Ahlstedt, 2015; Myong and Bissenbakker, 2016; Loftsdóttir, 2017) and its role in delineating Europe and European bodies (Keinz and Lewicki, 2019). While I could have foregrounded other markers, such as femininity, in my analysis of the two encounters, it is whiteness, modulated by other intersecting markers of difference, including gender, class, language and sexuality, that affords my passing as Danish (Lapiņa, 2018). Earlier research discusses the pivotal role of whiteness for how bodies come to occupy majoritized positions as Danish (Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen, 2014), Swedish (Koobak and Thapar-Björkert, 2012) or belonging in Europe (Kennedy-Macfoy and Lewis, 2014). By examining how whiteness as an affordance shapes possibilities for movement and belonging in Denmark, the analysis contributes to understanding how 'Europe' continues to be fuelled by racializing processes (Ponzanesi and Blaagaard, 2011; Böröcz and Sarkar, 2017). Consequently, this study addresses the need to nuance whiteness in the European context (Loftsdóttir, Smith and Hipfl, 2018).

## *2. Methodology: Affective, situated approach to memory work and autoethnography*

Following a feminist methodology, I approach knowledge production as situated and embodied, emerging from lived experience (Rich, 1984). I follow Haraway's (1988) emphasis on situated knowledge, where 'partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims', originating from and shaping 'a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body' (ibid., 589). Researcher positionality matters for which spaces, informants and perspectives are accessible and accessed, and which information becomes empirical data. Situated knowledges emerge from places and/as bodies (Lapiņa, 2018). Consequently, this article traces whiteness by examining embodied, emplaced encounters in two apartments in Copenhagen, discussing my trajectory between them to address the accumulation of whiteness as affordance.

I use memory work and autoethnography. Memory work involves writing down personal experiences that are related to the research topic (Berg, 2008). In

the past decade, memory work has been used to examine how racialisation matters in research encounters and knowledge production, and how particular encounters testify to politics of race (Berg, 2008; Kennedy-Macfoy and Nielsen, 2012; Andreassen and Myong, 2017). Prior to writing this article, I have used memory work to revisit and write down episodes and feelings that denoted my position as a migrant in my first years in Denmark, including my meeting with Ole in 2004. Thus the main difference between my memory work fieldnotes and the fieldnotes from the meeting with Carsten in 2014 is the time elapsed between the events and the time of writing.

The encounter with Carsten in 2014 occurred when I was conducting fieldwork and interviews for my doctoral research. My PhD (2014–2017) explored social inclusion, exclusion and intersecting markers of difference in everyday encounters in Nordvest, a gentrifying district of Copenhagen. During fieldwork, I became increasingly aware that my positionings as a migrant researcher could provide valuable perspectives on which differences mattered in Nordvest. This motivated me to adopt an autoethnographic lens. Like memory work, autoethnography is increasingly used to examine intersecting markers of difference, in particular, racialisation and whiteness (Ahlstedt, 2015; Mainsah and Prøitz, 2015; Lapiņa, 2018; Liinason, 2018; Lapiņa and Vertelytė, 2020). Drawing on autoethnography and memory work enables exploring how race is negotiated and experienced in everyday life (Kennedy-Macfoy and Nielsen, 2012; Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen, 2014; Andreassen and Myong, 2017), focusing on affective, embodied labour in specific social and spatial locations in order to address the broader political configurations (Hinton, 2014) of differentiated whiteness and Europeanness.

Memory work and autoethnography are limited to the experiences of the researcher and can consequently be dismissed as insignificant data without broader relevance. However, everyday lived experience holds knowledge not only about the situations of individuals and communities that carry these experiences, but also about sociopolitical processes and structuring of social inequality. The subject is 'always in a process of becoming (within) a web of political productions' (Hinton, 2014: 109) and 'tied into political commitments and ethical positions by nature of being tied into particular material spaces, like bodies or countries, ghettos or suburbs, kitchens or boardrooms' (Kirby, 1993: 175). My material enables analysing how, on one hand, notions of Europeanness and whiteness are already in place, for instance, when a script of Eastern European love migration is inscribed on my body in 2004. On the other hand, I discuss how these encounters and the trajectory of becoming between them also comprise a terrain for re-negotiating affordances of whiteness.

The encounters I analyse in this article are quite different. I met Ole to clean his apartment in an upper middle-class neighbourhood, as opposed to interviewing Carsten a decade later for research in a gentrifying district often linked to notions of racialized diversity and social disadvantage. Juxtaposing them, I show how these differences outline whiteness as an affordance, accumulating over time. It would

not have been possible for me to meet someone the way I met Carsten in 2004, just after I had arrived in Denmark.

In order to explain how I met Ole, I need to locate myself in Copenhagen in the summer of 2004. After situating myself I give an account of the two meetings. The ensuing analysis traces how differentiated whiteness accumulates through situated, affective interplay of markers of difference in these encounters, and the time elapsed between them. The analysis concludes by discussing whiteness as affordance, experienced and laboured over time.

## *3. A too young, female, uneducated, unemployable Eastern European love migrant*

I moved to Denmark at 18 with my Danish partner Jesper,[2] in July 2004. I had just graduated from high school in Rīga, Latvia. I had met Jesper (white, male, young, middle class) in Latvia the year before. He moved to Rīga to live with me while I was finishing my last year of gymnasium. We both wanted to study, and Denmark seemed to offer more opportunities in this regard. Moving to Copenhagen seemed like a logical step.

Latvia had joined the EU in May. Newspapers were writing about an expected influx of 'Eastern workers' and 'Eastern criminal gangs' stealing from elderly Danish people. I was subject to transitional legislation regarding work and residence permits issued to citizens of the new EU countries. I would have to work full time, difficult to combine with the intensive language classes I wanted to attend after obtaining a residence permit. In addition, my prospective employer would have to apply for the permit and wait up to three months until the application was processed. Without Danish skills and education, I was unqualified labour. It seemed unlikely any employer would be willing to undertake the paperwork. So, one day in August 2004 I pinned handwritten notes on notice boards of a couple of supermarkets in a wealthier Copenhagen district, stating in English that I would clean apartments and houses. Such notes were common at the time, many written in English.

### *3.1 Ole, 2004*

Already the same afternoon, I received a call from Ole. We agreed I would clean his apartment the next day. This would take two hours, and Ole would pay me 100 DKK (around 13.5 EUR) an hour. Ole lived in a spacious three- room apartment with wooden floors. He was in late 50ies, short and hunching, of fragile build, with shoulder-long, fine, greasy hair. Ole's movements were shuffling and nervous. He had a slight physical disability. He wore a flannel long-sleeved shirt, jeans and black-rimmed, stained glasses. The thickness and dirt on the glasses made his eyes look small and far away.

[2] I have changed the names of the three men that figure in the article (Jesper, Ole and Carsten).

The apartment looked orderly and clean. Ole told me the kitchen needed cleaning. I managed to find some old grease and chalk stains on the stove and the shower cabin, located in the kitchen. Ole stayed in the kitchen the whole time. This made me feel uncomfortable. I would much rather have cleaned on my own. But perhaps he was just being polite. Perhaps he did not trust me to leave me alone in the room.

I had noticed several guitars standing in the apartment. Ole told me he was passionate about music and played himself. We talked about music. I told him about my plans of studying psychology or anthropology at the university, the process of acquiring a residence permit and how I was soon hoping to start attending Danish classes. Ole told me about his hobbies. We also talked about social issues, for instance, services to people who were considering committing suicide. I said that suicide could sometimes be a legitimate choice. Ole disagreed. He argued it was always a question of availability of help and support.

Finally, with ten minutes left of my cleaning time, Ole asked me casually if I would take off my sweater for an additional 200 kr. My body went stiff. I avoided looking at him. I kept scrubbing the shower, feeling heat rise to my face. I said no, smiling vaguely, trying to look amused. I managed to stay in the apartment five additional minutes so the two hours would almost have passed, and I would be entitled to receive the cleaning money. I thought Ole said goodbye with a smirk.

After coming home, I started crying. Jesper was there. He got angry and called Ole. They argued in Danish. Jesper hung up after a few minutes, frustrated. He said Ole had just laughed, saying there was nothing we could do.

### *3.2 Carsten, 2014*

I met Carsten almost ten years later, in late spring of 2014, while conducting interviews for my PhD. On a Friday afternoon, I was interviewing Mathias, a freelance web designer around my age. He told me about his neighbour Carsten, the last remaining elderly resident in a staircase now mostly occupied by students. According to Mathias, Carsten had lived there for around 30 years. Mathias told me how Carsten once got arrested after shooting a rifle in the direction of a barbecue party in the backyard on a summer evening. For Mathias, Carsten was a 'character', an authentic remnant from the white, working class past of the neighbourhood. Mathias urged me to talk to Carsten. He also warned me that Carsten could be drunk, foggy or irritable.

Feeling my heartbeat and clutching the keys in my pocket, I knocked on Carsten's door two floors down. Once and then again. Finally, the door opened.

Carsten was skinny, perhaps late 50ies, although he looked older. He was wearing an open black leather vest and jeans. His hair was long and receding, tied in a ponytail. The vest exposed his bare, round stomach and faded tattoos on the thin arms. I could smell stale cigarette smoke and glimpse cream-colored, flower-patterned tapestry; clean and well-kept oak-tiled floors; a square serving window between the kitchen and the living room.

Carsten did seem groggy that Friday afternoon. I had some trouble explaining I was not a journalist. Nonetheless, he was friendly and wanted to help me, and we agreed I would call him to set up an appointment to come by the following week. I took his phone number. I had already forgotten the episode with the rifle.

I visited Carsten two more times. He quickly got exhausted during the interviews and had difficulties remembering and concentrating. The first time he lent me photos he had taken in the neighbourhood just before the building of new condominiums, that I copied and returned on the following visit. The images showed tranquil, almost rural scenes: grass, trees, a bench in the afternoon sun; older buildings in the background; no people at all.

Carsten told me about his life: working as a porter, unemployment, drinking on benches, smoking hash with friends, arthritis, pain, loneliness, friends dead due to drug and alcohol use, estranged and diseased family. He also told me about changes in the district. He recalled how the municipality had moved the benches that he and his friends had sat and drank beers on to the centre of the city – for tourists and young people to drink beers on. This was the only time Carsten raised his voice. He was not able to go for walks anymore, and his friends were gone, but the removal of the benches angered him.

After the second interview, Carsten was hesitant seeing me out the door. He emphasized repeatedly that I was most welcome to contact him again, to visit again. I felt strongly he was recruiting me into a different role than that of an interviewer – perhaps a volunteer-visitor.[3]

## *4. Differentiated whiteness and intersecting markers of difference*

Ole and Carsten both sought to transgress the agreed-upon scripts of our encounters, albeit in different ways. Ole tried to re-negotiate cleaning his kitchen into sexual services. More subtly, Carsten invited me to visit him again. I felt he desired a more personal and lasting relation than that of an interviewer and informant. I proceed to unpack how intersecting markers of difference affectively figured (in) the two meetings, leading to different interactions. I then discuss how the concept of affordance captures the coming-together of accretion and spontaneity, offering a lens for analysing potentialities of whiteness as it comes to matter through affective workings of markers of difference.

Despite their being alike in terms of age, race, gender, nationality, what I perceived as loneliness, being outside the labour market, and different degrees of physical disability, illness and hindered movement, Ole and Carsten are of course different people. However, apart from just hinting at my interlocutors' different personalities, their divergent understandings of which proposals could be made

[3] In Denmark, a 'volunteer visitor' (*besøgsven*) is someone who visits (elderly, lonely, ill, disadvantaged) people in one's spare time, with the intention to improve their quality of life. These relationships are usually institutionalized.

and how point to how I passed as a different subject. I was ten years older – but events during these ten years had also shaped my movements in Denmark.

Encounters, and the subject positions they enable, are simultaneously spontaneously occurring and constrained by individual and collective histories (Ahmed, 2000; 2007). Similarly, while the malleability of race and whiteness is contingent on political and biographical events whose effects accumulate in and on the body (Slocum, 2008; Ohito, 2019), it is also a manifestation of specific mo(ve)ments in time and space. Histories accumulate and inscribe themselves on the body, making the performativity and relationality of how a body passes in a given encounter both contingent and layered (Butler, 1988; Lapiņa, 2018). They pave paths for where bodies can go and how they move through space. Consequently, tracing what unfolds in the two meetings necessitates attending to what transpired between them: how I arrived at a position where my job entailed knocking on Carsten's door to interview him for research.

In 2004, I often passed as a too young, uneducated, Eastern European female love migrant of limited social value in the eyes of white Danes. I did not speak Danish. I did not have the papers, and did not feel I had the skills, to seek legal employment. Instead of passing as Eastern European cheap disposable workforce (van Riemsdijk, 2010; Loftsdóttir, 2017), I was feminized and sexualized due to 'where I came from', the intimate reasons for my migration and markers of gender and age. I was not in Denmark for work or education. In many of my meetings with white native Danish people in 2004, my life story instantly clicked into a pre-available mould with accompanying circumstances and biographical details. They presumed my Danish partner was male and significantly older. They presumed I was from an underprivileged background, with limited options to lead a fulfilled life in Latvia.

This 'knowing' of my circumstances was accompanied by compassion, pity and even sympathy. My white Danish interlocutors did not contest my presumed claim for a better life in Denmark. On the contrary, they could 'understand' and even sympathize with it, acting as charitable, generous and tolerant hosts. This charitable treatment of me as 'not-quite-but-still-white' took on a particular nuance in the encounter with Ole. It struck me that Ole did not express any presumptions about my family or life in Latvia. While it was additional work to manage his presence while cleaning, I felt surprised and relieved to have a 'normal' conversation. I felt able to be 'myself', someone whose future plans and possibilities did not seem interpreted through the frames of love migration or Eastern Europeanness. He seemed interested in my plans to study Danish and attend the university, but without overt encouragement or endorsement. The offer to undress for money came unexpectedly. I remember questioning my reaction. Perhaps I was mistaken in hearing it as a degrading question. Perhaps it was a 'normal' question in Denmark. This sense of uncertainty further underscored my migrant positionality as someone unsure about boundaries of 'normal' interactions.

However, the affective dimensions of the encounter signify that my circumstances mattered for how our meeting unfolded. Before we met, Ole had

asked about my age and where I was from, establishing my positionality of a young, feminine Eastern European love migrant. Ole's ostensible interest in my plans to study in Denmark re-enforced the present as a space where these opportunities were not available. I was not yet the person I spoke of becoming. Ole's laughter on the phone and the immediacy of his response to Jesper that there was 'nothing we could do' conveyed that the proposition to take off my sweater for money was a question he had asked *me*. His laughter underlined the power relations of the situation, him ridiculing our implied naivety. He had heard what I told him about residence and work permits and limited possibilities to seek employment. My male, Danish partner calling to defend me in Danish and Jesper's anger enforced how intersecting markers of difference – origin, gender, age, and legal status – came together to denote a position of powerlessness. Jesper confronted Ole, calling and arguing in Danish. He spoke for me. There was nothing *I* could do.

The affective circulations that denote relations of power in my encounter with Ole and outlined my body in many other meetings after moving to Denmark, delineate what it might mean to be an 'internal other' (Kalnačs, 2016): 'not-quite-but-still-white' young, feminized love migrant in the Denmark in 2004. I was mobile, free to enter Denmark as a white EU citizen. Most of the time, I was not immediately ejected by the spaces I entered. Yet, in moving across these spaces, I was also vulnerable, exposed to judgments and actions that would detect and establish that I was less worthy. The legal conditions of my presence (transitional Danish legislation for citizens of the new EU member states) were an important underpinning of a 'not-quite' whiteness. In addition, my premise for being in Denmark (love migration) and my age accentuated markers of Eastern-Europeanness, gender, sexuality and class. This positionality also entailed a promise of a certain future in Denmark. Instead of being treated as an undeserving migrant, Danes who I met encouraged me to attend Danish courses and obtain university education. This shows how intersecting markers of difference come together to denote a position of 'not-quite, but integrable' whiteness, as attainable mobility. I might have had less worth, but white majority Danes endorsed my claims for future social mobility. Whiteness, youth, gender, a Danish partner, and lack of previous education and qualifications that fixed my Eastern Europeanness in place also enabled me to travel light.

In the following years, I learnt Danish, a requirement to take the BA and MA degrees in Danish. The university degrees were a requirement for commencing a PhD, which involved conducting fieldwork in Danish. Comments that I did not look or dress Danish, and questions about where I came from, gradually ceded. Instead, white Danes told me that I looked Danish or Scandinavian, that yes, there was a smudge of an accent, but mostly not reason enough to ask the question about being from elsewhere. Maybe Finland, maybe Germany or Iceland. I had become educated, employable, apparently Western-passing.

After divorcing my male Danish partner in 2008, I was in a romantic relationship with a Norwegian woman for several years. Even when asked why I was in Denmark, which happened increasingly seldom, I could provide a host of

other reasons than my relationship status. Apart from being older, I did not look much different in 2004 and 2014: I was tall, wore my hair short in an asymmetrical haircut and did not use make-up apart from multi-coloured nail polish and four small, matching earrings, three of them in one ear. However, I carried myself with increasing confidence throughout the years, partly as a result of seldom being questioned about why I was in Denmark. I believe that a body language communicating less hesitation accentuated markers of gender, sexuality and class, coming together in a different enactment of whiteness. I no longer wanted to pass unnoticed, to disappear – which paradoxically contributed to conditional 'disappearance' into Danishness (Lapiņa, 2018).

In 2004, the trope of love migration from Eastern Europe at a young age seemed to interfere (Staunæs, 2003; Geerts and Tuin, 2013) with embodied markers that might have been, and later were, perceived as signifiers of 'queerness', globalized hipster culture and/or progressive femininity. Interestingly, throughout the years, several white Danes expressed the conviction that I must have cut my hair short only after moving to Denmark – as if women with short hair would be unthinkable in Eastern Europe. In 2004, my Danish interlocutors automatically presumed my Danish partner was male and older. Later, having acquired markers of class and language, markers of gender and sexuality mattered for my passing as Western European, even without explicit disclosures of gender preferences in dating. This reflects how nationalist discourses in Western Europe increasingly embrace sexual minorities, feminist values, and what passes as progressive femininity (Farris, 2017; Sager and Mulinari, 2018). These embraces work as closures, as ways of excluding migrant others seen as threatening these presumably Western European values: patriarchal, homophobic, sexually aggressive/repressive, oppressing and oppressed, Muslims (Puar, 2007).

Entering Carsten's apartment as a researcher, as opposed to an illicit cleaner when meeting Ole in 2004, cannot be disentangled from embodied, affective, timely labour that contributed to different markers inscribed on and read from my body. Having started fieldwork in Nordvest a few months before meeting Carsten, I found myself consistently passing as Danish – even my smudge of an accent went unremarked (Lapiņa, 2018). At times informants called me out for being too privileged (white and middle-class) to study a diverse, deprived district. These readings of intersecting markers of difference accumulate into, and are carried by, embodied knowledge. Knocking on Carsten's door, I had accumulated experiences of passing that enabled me to move with smoothness and entitlement. I carried experiences of being employable in Denmark, of not being called out as an Eastern European migrant, of being recognized as someone who could contribute– and these experiences carried me. My capacity to carry, and be carried by, academic whiteness had accumulated over time and had contributed to my employability.

I felt safe in Carsten's apartment, somehow in control. When knocking on the door, I had been prepared to be received with suspicion, but soon I was no longer apprehensive. Entering as a researcher established my worth for Danish society. I was supported and held by my whiteness, Danish skills, gender expression, employment, relative youth and able-bodiedness. I felt sympathy,

compassion and pity for Carsten, a similar constellation of feelings that white Danes had met me with in 2004. Carsten could answer my questions. He could share his life experiences with me. I could walk in and out of his apartment, up and down the stairs, unhindered. Carsten was the vulnerable, underprivileged one of us.

Carsten's vulnerability attests to negotiations of intimacy and asymmetries of power in fieldwork interactions (Catungal, 2017), modulated by intersecting markers of difference (Faria and Mollett, 2016). The asymmetry of our positionings manifested in my interpretation of Carsten's invitation to a prolonged, more personal relationship, as that of a volunteer visitor, rather than a friend. My compassion and sympathy towards Carsten, feeling in control, and the guilt I felt for most likely never returning, attest to a feeling of superiority, denoting the majoritized whiteness I had come to inhabit. In fact, I cannot know what Carsten had in mind when beckoning me to visit again. The improbability of sexual undertones or even a proposition of friendship attests to how I experienced and enacted the power dynamics of the situation. The only 'transgression' I could hear coming from Carsten suggested an asymmetrical relationship – the role of a volunteer visitor.

The scenario of labour of care I would offer Carsten if our relationship had exceeded the interviews delineates the fusing of social, spatial, and temporal mobility into hierarchies of worth. The affective flows of this hypothetical relationship would amplify markers of able-bodiedness, gender and class, as well as my whiteness, extending my ability to move with and into majoritized whiteness. This shows how whiteness works as an affordance: accumulated experiences of how intersecting markers of difference are read from and imprinted on a body, constraining its movements. In contrast, I had felt compelled to stay for additional slow, painful minutes in Ole's apartment after he had asked me to take off my sweater, in order to feel deserving of the fee we had agreed on for my cleaning services. There, I felt stuck, kept in place by gendered, racialized, classed, sexualized and age positionings. This illustrates how affects assign individuals to social spaces or 'align individuals within communities' (Ahmed, 2004: 119), and how race and racialized communities are made through bodies' movements across space (Slocum, 2008).

## *5. Affordances of whiteness as accumulated bodily capacities*

> *'Begin, though, not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in – the body. […] To write "my body" plunges me into lived experience, particularity'* (Rich, 1984: 212 and 215).

Bodies emerge within the logic of boundaries and the insides and outsides they create (Kirby, 1993: 183), but these boundaries are not fixed. I have proposed thinking of differentiated whiteness as affordance (Gibson, 1986), delineating bodies' capacities for (inter)action as they materialize in embodied encounters. The notion of affordance captures how embodied knowledge of what a body can do,

and what can be done to a body, accumulates over time, constraining possibilities to act and be acted upon in a given setting. Consequently, applying the notion of affordance enables addressing how bodies inhabit, and are shaped by space and time – as 'metastable becomings' (Neimanis, 2017) and 'potential collections of non-correlating positions' (Mohanty, 1988). On the one hand, 'the body' is continuously in the making; on the other hand, its potentialities to become materialize and can seem fixed in specific contexts.

One might ask why I foreground whiteness, instead of gender, sexuality, labour or class, in my analysis of the two encounters. In his seminal work 'White', Richard Dyer (1997: 3) writes: 'Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they do not seem to be represented to themselves as whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualized and abled'. My analyses of intersectional, differentiated and malleable whiteness (see also Lapiņa, 2018; Lapiņa & Vertelytė, 2020) contribute to articulating whiteness in the context of East to West migration in Europe (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy, 2015; Krivonos, 2019). In a recent study of how Russian female migrants in Northern Norway modify their appearance to 'fit in' (Wara and Munkejord, 2018), the authors examine these gendered and sexualized practices as informants' attempts at 'becoming Norwegianized'. In contrast, reading my own gendered, classed, sexualized passing in the encounters with the two men as signifying differentiated whiteness shows how '[...] whiteness operates as a symbolic field of accumulation where many attributes such as looks, accent, "cosmopolitanism" or "Christianity" can be accumulated and converted into Whiteness' (Hage, 2003: 323).

Conceiving whiteness as an affordance shows how this accumulation operates in a serendipitous fashion: imprints left by previous encounters emerge in varying degrees of intensity and (in)activity. This serendipity of how experiences accumulate into affordances offers a possibility for understanding positions like 'Europe's internal others' (Kalnačs, 2016) or 'not quite' European (Dzenovska, 2013) as locations of differentiated whiteness. While one might conceive these positions as shades of hegemonic whiteness (Moore, 2013) or in-between points on a binary scale of 'Europe' and 'not-Europe', my material challenges the stability and solidity that these ways of conceiving whiteness and Europe imply. Instead, my analysis shows how whiteness is heterogeneous, unstable (Böröcz and Sarkar, 2017) and fragmented (Halej, 2015), fluctuating across socio- and spatiotemporal locations. Different constellations of intersecting markers of difference come together in different spatial and temporal moments to afford different whitenesses.

Eastern European whiteness can manifest into position of a racialized, classed outsider, as Loftsdóttir (2017) shows in her analysis of the situation of Lithuanian migrants in Iceland. Journeying towards whiteness might involve a focus on employability, as well as modifying accents, names and appearance, as Krivonos (2019) discusses in her analysis of Russian speaking migrants' strategies in Helsinki. On yet other occasions, claims to Europeanness might involve morally responsible economic conduct and endurance ('tightening the belt') amidst financial crisis, in contrast to less austere (and therefore less proper) Europeans

(Dzenovska, 2018a). Or, as my analysis shows, passing as a 'quite white' subject might entail figurations of employability, progressive femininity, academic position, able-bodiedness and age. These analyses show how measures of Europeanness fluctuate, from emphasis on gender equality and rights of sexual minorities to navigating the labour market and embracing financial capitalism.

What applies across these locations of whiteness is contingency, a potentiality of becoming properly European, of mobility and extended spheres of action. Conceiving whiteness as affordance emphasizes the navigation of past experiences, future (im)possibilities and changing socio-political and affective figurations of Europeanness, as intersecting markers of difference come together in relational constellations over space and time.

## *6. Conclusion*

This article adopts the notion of affordance (Gibson, 1986) to trace how differentiated whiteness emerges through affective flows that delineate intersecting markers of difference. This enables accounting for malleability and multiplicity of racialized embodiment. Furthermore, my analysis shows how whiteness materializes as/in mobility to occupy and move across spaces, unpacking the role of accumulated experiences and sense of (im)possibility related to bodies' past, present and future movements. The article contributes to research on how readings of embodied, intersecting markers that come together to denote racialized subject positions are relational, spatialized and affectively experienced (Berg, 2008; Slocum, 2008; Hvenegård-Lassen and Staunæs, 2015; Lapiņa and Vertelytė, 2020).

Drawing on memory work and autoethnography, my analysis traces the different modes of movement and passing available to my body in encounters with white, aging, physically impaired Danish men in 2004 and 2014. I draw on feminist theorizations of partiality and politics of location (Rich, 1984; Haraway, 1988; Kirby, 1993; Hinton, 2014) to account for how my mobility in these encounters is simultaneously a process of extreme localization and global flows of power; a 'metastable becoming' (Neimanis, 2017) both spontaneously occurring and accumulated over time. The differentiated whiteness and Europeanness enacted in the two meetings emerges both through large-scale political events, such as the expansion of EU in 2004 and its legal, discursive and affective aftermath, and local circumstances, such as Ole's listening to my future plans to study Danish and enter university reinforcing the present as a space of limited movement and opportunity.

My analysis of emergence of differentiated whiteness in embodied encounters shows how lived experience constitutes a '[…] political terrain [as a] process of differentiation, through which identities and subjectivities are continually emerging in relational configurations' (Hinton, 2014: 108). The experiences and dimensions of intersecting markers of difference that are read from and inscribed on bodies cannot be drawn into a consistent content (Kirby, 1993: 182). However, applying the prism of affordance offers a way of analysing how intersectional, differentiated whiteness materializes through an interplay of

accumulated experiences and specific encounters, constraining bodies' capabilities to act and be acted upon.

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**DARIA KRIVONOS**
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# What to Wear for Whiteness? 'Whore' Stigma and the East/West Politics of Race, Sexuality and Gender

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## Abstract

Drawing on two ethnographic projects, one among Russian-speaking women engaged in commercial sex, the other among young Russian-speaking migrants in Finland, we interrogate how the construct of Eastern European female body is positioned in relation to the norm of (Western) Europeanness and white femininity. We show how Russian-speaking migrant women in Finland learn of their 'Russianness' and 'Easternness' through the circulation of the 'whore' stigma. We analyse these processes of racialisation and sexualisation in the context of the Finnish national project based on gender equality and women's liberation norms. While normative Western Europeanness has recently been constructed through emancipated sexuality and the exclusion of non-Western Others as sexually repressed, the bodies of Russian-speaking women are perceived as sexually excessive and in need of toning down. Focusing on the (self-)policing of Russian-speaking migrant women's bodies and the ways they navigate acceptable and unacceptable forms of gendered self-presentation, we demonstrate how these women are construed as not emancipated enough and hence not quite white. The article thereby contributes to understanding hierarchies of whiteness within the East/West dynamics of race as they pertain to gender and sexuality.

***Keywords:*** *Europe, whiteness, racialisation, sexuality, gender, Russian-speaking women.*

## *1. Introduction*

Racialised markers of Europeanness have been intimately connected with the politics of sexuality and gender (Fanon, 1965; Stoler, 2002; Fassin, 2010). Shifting understandings of normative femininity, masculinity and sexuality have historically been used to define colonial distinctions between Europeanness and othered non-Europeanness. These distinctions are profoundly gendered, as they rely on stereotypes of non-white men and women who are simultaneously sexualised, as racist imageries operate through sexual metaphors and desires (Farris, 2017: 74; Stoler, 2002). Existing literature focuses particularly on the construction of Muslim men as sexual threats and Muslim women as victims (Scott, 2007; Fassin, 2010; Abu-Lughod, 2014). While sexuality has long featured in debates on Europe and coloniality, the position of ostensibly white yet overly sexualised Eastern European women rarely features in these conceptual discussions (see, however, Parvulescu, 2014; Kulawik and Kravchenko, 2019).

Using ethnographic and interview data collected between 2014 and 2016 among Russian-speaking women in Finland, we analyse how they live the violence of racialisation through the 'whore' stigma (Pheterson, 1993), and how racialisation and sexualisation form part of the same process in their lives. Existing research analyses the representation of Eastern European women as excessive, overly sexualised subjects (see e.g. Sverdljuk, 2009; Cvajner, 2011), and often portrays them as victims of trafficking and a patriarchal culture (Farris, 2017: 189; Suchland, 2011; 2018). This article, by contrast, locates their racialisation and sexualisation within a debate on colonial formations of Europeanness, where the 'inferior' position of Eastern Europe in an internal East/West hierarchy exacerbates their sexualisation.

We analyse these processes in the Finnish context, which is characterised by exceptional achievements in gender equality and the ideology of the (in)visible norm of whiteness (Keskinen, 2013). Nordic postcolonial feminists argue that gender equality is central to nation-building in Nordic countries (Bredström, 2005; Keskinen, 2013), and produces ideas of what normative, emancipated femininity is and looks like. The dominant national narrative portrays Finland as innocent of racism and colonialism; yet historical claims to whiteness and belonging to Western civilisation have been substantiated by distancing not only from the indigenous Sámi but also from the 'East' and 'Russianness' (Puuronen, 2011).

We demonstrate that despite their phenotypical 'whiteness', whiteness as a hegemonic structural position is neither invisible nor habitual to Russian-speaking women living in Finland (cf. Ahmed, 2007). The question of gender and sexuality remains relatively under-theorised in research on whiteness and migration (see, however, Lönn, 2018; Leonard, 2008; Lundström and Twine, 2011; Wara and Munkejord, 2018). We contribute to this discussion by showing that unlike the intersections of hegemonic whiteness, migration and gender among Western European women (Leonard, 2008; Lundström and Twine, 2011), Russian-speaking migrant women are denied their place in whiteness as a structure of privilege following migration, and must put effort into converting their ostensible whiteness

into white capital (see also Krivonos, 2018). Clearly, whiteness is not simply a matter of skin pigmentation but a structural position of advantage and privilege intimately tied to the idea of (Western) Europeanness (Bonnett, 1998). Unlike the invisible and ordinary whiteness of the Finnish majority population, Russian women's whiteness is 'degenerate' (Anderson, 2013), as they are racialised as sexually available, less respectable, and not fitting the norm of white femininity. For inclusion in the European project, rather than needing to become available to the male gaze by unveiling, as argued in the literature on Muslim women (Fanon, 1965; Scott, 2007; Farris, 2017), the bodies of Eastern European women must be 'liberated' by toning down their excessive sexuality and femininity in accordance with Nordic norms of gender equality (see also Diatlova, 2019). We argue that these relational processes show how the elusive norm of white femininity is policed by designating racialised, sexualised and gendered Others at different points on a continuum, where a woman's body must be available but not too available for public consumption and the male gaze.

We proceed with an outline of the context of Russian-speaking people's migration to Finland, followed by a conceptual discussion of the colonial formation of Europeanness, whiteness, East/West hierarchies, and how these women reflect on the politics of gender and sexuality. Based on our empirical material, we then move on to discuss how Russian-speaking women learn about their racialisation and try to adopt the norm of white Western femininity. We conclude by outlining our contribution to the discussion on sexuality, gender, whiteness and racialisation.

## *2. Russian speakers in Finland*

Russian speakers account for a quarter of all foreign-language speakers in Finland, and are the largest migrant group (Statistics Finland, 2017). They include people from former Soviet Union republics, mainly Russia and Estonia.[1] Travelling to Finland from Russia and Estonia is relatively easy. Since Estonia is part of the Schengen area and tourist visas for Russians are not difficult to acquire, short trips to Finland are possible (Vuolajärvi, 2018), although stricter requirements for Finnish visas were introduced in 2019. However, for non-EU citizens, residency in Finland is conditional on obtaining and renewing residence permits, often leading to precarious employment relations and dependence on employers (Krivonos, 2015). Marriage migration, a rather common migration route for Russian women (Säävälä, 2010), makes them dependent on their partners for regular residency.

[1] Attitudes toward Russian speakers in Finland are shaped by a shared but turbulent history. Finland was part of the Russian Empire until 1917, followed by a civil war after independence, and in World War II the two countries fought against each other and Finland lost some of its territories. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought a rapid increase in migration from Russia and other post-Soviet countries, and attitudes toward the Russian-speaking population became dominated by contempt. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland initiated a repatriation project for so-called ethnic Finns from the region (Davydova-Minguet, 2015). However, the returnees were perceived by the general public as 'Russians', and often faced high levels of discrimination and exclusion (Mannila and Reuter, 2009).

The appearance of Russian-speaking migrants in Finland after the collapse of the Soviet Union, especially Russian-speaking women, is interlinked with fears of criminality and commercial sexuality (Skilbrei and Holmström, 2013; Diatlova, 2016; 2019). Stereotypes of Russian speakers in Finland are inherently gendered: while Russian-speaking men are associated with criminal activity, Russian-speaking women are stereotyped as 'prostitutes' and 'gold-diggers' (Leinonen, 2012), and most Russian-speaking women seek to distance themselves from these stereotypes (Säävälä, 2010). Scholarly work on marriage migration also demonstrates that class plays a role in migration, and that well-educated Russian–Finnish couples are less likely to face negative stereotypes (Reuter and Kyntäjä, 2006). At the same time, Russian speakers find it difficult to have their skills and education recognised after migration (Krivonos, 2019).

## *3. Gender, sexuality and coloniality in Europe*

Previous research argues that the politics of gender and sexuality have been used as a vantage point to frame 'modernity' against 'tradition' (Abu-Lughod, 2014; Jacobsen and Skilbrei, 2010; Fassin, 2010; Lönn, 2018). Shifting definitions of gender and sexual norms have been crucial in framing the project of Europeanness, defining variously positioned sexually oppressive or overly sexualised non-white bodies as constitutive Others to Europe and whiteness (Fanon, 1965; Fassin, 2010; Billaud and Castro, 2013).

Postcolonial feminist scholars have demonstrated the entanglement of desire in the colonial conquest with sexual fantasies about non-white Others, as in efforts to unveil Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2014; Farris, 2017; see also Fanon, 1965). Scholarly work argues that racist ideologies rely on powerful sexual metaphors and desires, such as dominating the endlessly available bodies of non-white women, while portraying non-white men as dangerous (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1990; Stoler, 2002; Farris, 2017). Black feminist critique extensively explores the portrayal of black women's bodies as always accessible to white men's desire, while black men's sexuality is depicted as uncontrollable and threatening (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1990). Sexuality continues to feature in contemporary European debates on migration (Mepschen et al., 2010); sexual and gender politics are mobilised to restrict migration and regulate borders, constructing non-white Others as a threat to the supposedly achieved gender equality and acceptance of sexual diversity in Europe (Fassin, 2010; Keskinen, 2013). However, critical studies demonstrate that while European sexual democracy narratives serve to mark who is included or excluded from modernity, accepted forms of sexual practices remain limited (Hubbard, 2001).

What is the position of Eastern Europe and the ostensibly white Eastern European women who are constructed as overly sexualised subjects and victims of patriarchal culture in debates on sexual democracy? While there is an extensive body of literature on the construction of Europe's sexual Others, sexualisation of Eastern European women rarely features in these debates (see, however, Blagojević, 2009; Parvulescu, 2014; Kulawik and Kravchenko, 2019). Yet, as Sara

Farris (2017) reminds us, while current political discourse focuses on male Muslims as oppressors, in the 1990s the figure of the bad immigrant was embodied by the Eastern European man, whereas women from this region were depicted as victims of a backward culture and the sex industry. These representations have hardly changed, as research on the representation of Eastern European women as overly sexualised, traditional and eroticised subjects demonstrates (Stenvoll, 2002; Andrijasevic, 2007; Sverdljuk, 2009; Diatlova, 2016).

We argue that these depictions should be located within a colonially graded understanding of the European space (Boatcă, 2006; Wolff, 1994; Tlostanova, 2012; 2015), which maps onto the politics of gender and sexuality. Discussion of coloniality in the European continent reveals its internal hierarchies, highlighting that the East–West dynamics follow a similar logic to the processes of colonial domination outside Europe (Wolff, 1994). As Manuela Boatcă (2006) argues, East–West distinctions within Europe are embedded in the colonial designs shaping modern world systems. Recent scholarly discussions suggest that Europeanisation in the context of EU enlargement has taken place alongside racialisation and the portrayal of new or potential EU member states as needing assistance to become fully fledged Europeans, including sexual modernisation (Husakouskaya and Gressgård, in this issue; Kulawik and Kravchenko, 2019; see also Suchland, 2018). As Teresa Kulawik (2019: 16) observes, 'the postsocialist space was turned into a feminist frontier: the Western view posited that "We already have what they are missing"'. Others have pointed out that in the context of EU enlargement, women's bodies are sites where anxieties about changing symbolic geographies in Europe are played out (Andrijasevic, 2007). At the same time, it is through the symbolic exchange of women and their reproductive labour between East and West that Europe comes into being (Parvulescu, 2014).

Associating Eastern European women with patriarchal oppression and traditional gender norms (Andrijasevic, 2007; Suchland, 2018) has a twofold effect. On the one hand, various commentators and pundits associate sex work with Russian-speaking women in Finland, while assuming that Finnish women are unlikely to be engaged in it (Diatlova, 2016). On the other hand, while Eastern European women are often represented as lagging behind in feminist values, domestic and care work is frequently outsourced precisely to Eastern European migrant women, allowing West European women to participate to a greater extent in non-domestic labour (Rohde-Abuba and Tkach, 2016; Näre, 2012). Russian-speaking women are racialised as a good fit for the gendered economy of care work, and are channelled through employment programmes predominantly into social reproductive sectors (Krivonos, 2019).

To understand the racialisation and sexualisation of Russian-speaking women, we need to problematise their 'whiteness' and show how racialisation of whiteness intersects with sexuality and gender. Post-Soviet migrants and migrants from EU accession states must claim whiteness, often unsuccessfully (Krivonos, 2018; Rzepnikowska, 2019; Fox et al., 2012). When examining processes of racialisation by which the 'whore' stigma is used against Eastern European female bodies, we take racialisation to mean processes that differentiate people, stabilise

these differences and legitimate power over them (Molina, 2005), based on alleged biological or cultural differences. While Pheterson (1993) suggests that the 'whore stigma' is cast on women as individuals and as a category, and distributed along racial lines, Jacobsen and Skilbrei (2010: 197) add that it is also cast along the lines of national identity.

These processes around whiteness and gender are particularly visible in Finland, characterised by notions of an allegedly homogeneous white nation and exceptional achievements in gender equality that structure its nationhood and discourses around migration (Keskinen, 2013). With the longest non-EU border, Finland can be conceived as a space marking the boundaries of 'civilisation' and Europe. While Finland has defined itself as innocent of racism and colonialism, references to whiteness and Europeanness have been used to claim its belonging to Western civilisation (Vuorela, 2009). Indeed, demarcation from the East and Russia has been integral to the process of constituting it as a Western nation (Puuronen, 2011). And like other Nordic countries, its more recent nation-building project has been based on the values of gender equality. In this context, young migrant women are represented as symbols of the violence and oppression that supposedly characterise families from ethnic-minority backgrounds (Keskinen, 2009; Honkatukia and Keskinen, 2018). Russian-speaking women are also particularly visible as gendered and sexualised subjects in migration debates (Diatlova, 2019).

## *4. Ethnographic research among Russian-speaking people in Finland*

The cases we examine were collected within the framework of two different research projects conducted in Finland between 2014 and 2016. The research participants in both projects came from post-Soviet countries, predominantly from Russia and Estonia. All came from white backgrounds in their home countries. Their experiences varied: some had insecure residency status, such as tourist visas or one-year student residence permits, while others were 'naturalised' Finnish citizens.

Daria Krivonos' case covers young Russian-speaking migrants' experiences of racialisation and negotiations of whiteness following migration to Finland. Her research draws on ethnographic fieldwork among Russian-speaking migrants in Helsinki, and included observations in career counselling, integration and language courses, as well as 54 interviews with young Russian speakers between 20 and 32 years old, of which 20 were male and 34 female. All interviews were conducted in Russian. Although their economic situations might have changed, many participants had experienced downward social mobility due to misrecognition of qualifications and work experience.

Anastasia Diatlova's research focuses on the daily lives of Russian-speaking women engaged in commercial sex in Finland. Her study included 41 semi-structured interviews, as well as participant observation in commercial sex venues and in an NGO offering services to people engaging in commercial sex. 31 initial interviews were conducted, followed by 10 follow-up interviews approximately a

year later to identify any changes in circumstances or opinions. The interviewees were primarily aged 30 to 60, with none younger than 20. They were all Russian speaking, although not all considered Russian to be their mother tongue. They were diverse in terms of ethnic identity and citizenship, coming from Moldova, the Baltic states and Russia. Two interviews were conducted in English, and the rest in Russian. Our interview and observations were analysed using thematic analysis, examining key themes in dialogue with theoretical discussions. We refer to our participants by pseudonyms.

Although the scope and aims of the two projects varied and the studies were conducted independently, we see several overlaps in how the women, regardless of their sources of income, negotiated their femininity and whiteness following migration. While Diatlova's material only included women involved in commercial sex, Krivonos' female participants were often employed in the gendered economy as well, such as care work, cleaning, the service sector and domestic work. Their university education notwithstanding, in Finland they had had few possibilities to valorise themselves as highly educated professionals. As indicated above, Russian speakers tend to lose their social status after migration because of their racialised position as 'migrants', and they often struggle to regularise their migrant status (Krivonos, 2019). In this regard, 'class' and 'racialisation' are co-constitutive categories (see Bhattarchayya, 2018).

## *5. Racialisation as discovery of one's own 'difference'*

In this section, we demonstrate how Russian-speaking women learn about their own position in Finland as racialised and sexualised subjects. 'Russianness' is projected onto certain people, and they start to learn the totality of signs that constitute 'Russianness', specifically in relation to femininity. The interview excerpt below exemplifies discovery of one's own racialised, gendered and sexualised position in social space:

> When my mom and nephew came for a visit, we went for a walk in the forest with a male friend, we looked like a perfect family. We were passing this all-male group of about 15 people. [...] And from this group, people start shouting 'Hello!' And from 'Hello' they immediately switch to Russian 'Privet!' It was daytime, we're all wearing casual sporty clothes. [...] And then suddenly one of them starts shouting in Russian very loudly, and it echoes through the forest, obviously a Finn in his broken Russian. He shouts, 'How much?' I mean [...] if I were alone, all made up, high heels and a mini skirt. But a family. It's daytime. And he says something like that. Can you imagine?

This episode says a lot about the workings of racialisation as a relational process and external categorisation. In his famous text *The Fact of Blackness*, Franz Fanon (2008: 91) evokes the experience of learning and discovering his own raciality when a white child on public transport shouted: 'Look! An N!' He conceptualises

racialisation as a violent and relational way to construct bodies: 'the Other fixes me with his gaze' (ibid., 89). Our case can be interpreted as a somewhat similar process, as the cited research participant came to be defined through violent external categorisations. There is nothing essential or uniform about what Russian women look like, but it is the unity of the gaze that defines and constitutes the embodiment of 'Russian femininity'. In the quoted passage, there is an immediate move from the interviewee's identified Russianness and femininity to the 'How much?' question. Her Russianness is instantly tied to commercial sexuality, whereas the interviewee herself emphasises her respectability: she is out for a walk in a forest wearing sporty clothes and is surrounded by what appears to be a nuclear heteronormative family. She is identified as 'Russian' in the public, immediately conjuring up notions of commercial sexuality.

Similarly, acquiring knowledge considered 'essential' for living in a foreign country, such as language skills, leads to further realisation of one's own racialised position. While language skills are expected to strengthen one's belonging to the Finnish nation, they are also a way of learning how the majority population talks about others:

> I went away [to Finland], became pregnant. [My new Finnish husband] kept mumbling something at me. I didn't even understand most of what he was saying to me. […] Then the child was born. And that's how I learnt Finnish, unfortunately. [...] Unfortunately, because then I began to understand what he was mumbling. And as I began to understand, that led to a divorce. […] [His child from a previous marriage] kept calling me a 'whore' all the time. And I decided, if they call me a whore, then let it at least be true.

This example can be used to problematise the 'integration' paradigm suggesting that members of established ethnic communities are expected to become gradually incorporated into the dominant majority's values and habits. As the interview quote demonstrates, increased participation in the 'mainstream culture' by acquiring language skills actually strengthens attachment to identities of racialised difference. As argued by Valluvan (2018), racism should not be considered as a process that impedes integration, but as a phenomenon enfolded in integration itself. We may add that racialisation, gendering and sexualisation form part of the same process in Russian-speaking women's lives.

Similar to those describing experiences of being defined through the 'How much?' question and 'whore' references, Anna described her experience of being looked at relating to sexualisation of her body:

> Even though I wear comfortable shoes with heels, here people still look at me. [...] Once I was wearing black tights, black boots and a short dress, it was of a school style, I think I looked quite modest. But people looked at me in a strange way. But I thought it was fine as only my legs were naked in this look.

Anna emphasised the modesty of her appearance and her awareness of how much of the body she could and should be revealing. Although policing of the female body across this continuum can be regarded as a general female experience, classed and racialised distinctions make certain female bodies overly sexualised, too available and 'out of place' (Puwar, 2004; Skeggs, 2004). The signs of Anna's femininity and sexuality made her visible in public space, even as she tried not to make her body look too available. According to Tani (2002), in a historically working-class neighbourhood, local residents may juxtapose their own self-presentation as 'ordinary' or even 'unattractive' Finnish housewives against the racialised and classed femininity of 'Russian women' who are associated with commercial sex. Anna's experience suggests that her phenotypical whiteness was insufficient to pass as a respectable female subject, her femininity and sexuality being cast as too remarkable or excessive.

However, it is not the clothing per se that make women sexually remarkable, but rather the body wearing it. While attending an event for women engaged in commercial sex organised by an NGO, Diatlova asked one woman about her experience of getting access to social services:

> 'I've never had any problems with that', [the woman, in her 50s] said. 'It's all about how you present yourself. If you look like a prostitute…' She pointed out a young black woman standing by the stage door, talking to a man. 'See, if I dressed like her, it would be very different. I'm not the same age.' I looked over at the young woman. She was wearing a short white lace dress and high-heeled shoes. The dress, from what I could judge, was from [mainstream fast-fashion retailer]. The woman was rather tall, and the heels made her look even taller. But other than that, she looked like any other Finnish girl out on a Friday night.

This interaction in the field highlights the importance of self-presentation for Russian-speaking women and their concerns about external judgement. Like Krivonos' research participants who take care to look 'modest', Russian-speaking women who engage in commercial sex curate their appearance to avoid looking like and being perceived as 'prostitutes'. According to Diatlova's interlocutors, a short lace dress on the body of a young black woman would not necessarily be contextualised as a marker of commercial sex, but the same dress on the body of an older Russian woman would.

These narratives demonstrate that racialisation is a process of discovering and learning about one's racialised difference. Our observations suggest that Russian speaking women's knowledge of what constitutes respectable attire comes from their encounters with the white gaze, through which their bodies are judged and policed. Racialisation also involves the process of coerced learning about one's own position. The ostensible whiteness of Russian-speaking women is not unmarked and invisible, but requires constant effort to curate their attire, and these efforts may not gain approval from others. We shall discuss the idea of 'looking Russian' in more detail in the next section.

## *6. Looking Russian?*

Existing research addressing notions of 'looking Russian' among Russian-speaking migrant women (Kopnina, 2005; Gurova, 2015; Wara and Munkejord, 2018; Lönn, 2018) often discusses dressing styles in terms of *difference* from the majority population. While the 'European' style is described as 'modern and edgy', the Russian style is associated with glittery fabrics, high heels and excessive make-up (Gurova, 2015: 102). We argue that there is a need to consider *why* this difference is perceived as significant, and why clothing and appearance are discussed so much among Russian-speaking women themselves. Our analysis aims to reorient inquiry into racialised hierarchies of judgement that conceive Russian femininity as less valuable.

Alena gave a detailed account of what it means to look like a Russian girl:

> I can always distinguish a Russian girl in a crowd. There is something particular in their way of dressing up, which is not so nice. These tights of a beige colour, black ankle-high boots with a worn-out heel – it is clear that this is a Russian girl. For instance, some haircuts or a hair-do like choppy bangs – this is a Russian girl. At first, I did not know about that, but now I have learnt to define them.

What is striking about Alena's account is her detailed knowledge of what it means, in her opinion, to look like a Russian girl. She has *learned* what it means to 'look Russian', and this gained knowledge of her own cultural 'difference' has been interiorised. Alena was clearly dis-identifying herself from the description of other women: 'Russian girls do not wear parka jackets [pointing to her own parka], they wear fur coats or leather jackets with elastic.'

Alena's knowledge of what it means to look Russian is not simply aesthetic but is juxtaposed against the norm of Europeanness that Finnish girls are thought to embody: 'Finnish girls sometimes look really bad, but they look more European. They wear a scarf, UGGs or Converse shoes, jeans and a parka.' Knowledge is always implicated in power relations, and the respectable aesthetic is closely connected with notions of Europeanness (Skeggs, 2004; Keinz and Lewicki, 2019). Alena describes a 'European girl's look' as less feminine and having greater symbolic value owing to its Europeanness, although, in her opinion, it may look 'really bad' from a purely aesthetic point of view. Although femininity is not explicitly pronounced in these accounts, the 'Russian look', in its perceived excessiveness, is excluded from the Western circulation of familiar symbols and brands.

When Krivonos asked Alina if she had experienced negative treatment because of her background, she responded: 'It is not that I have ever felt discriminated against, but the main thing I have decided is not to dress up in vulgar ways and in no case mess with men at workplaces.' Here again, Russianness is associated with a particular kind of femininity, which for Alina involves flirty behaviour with men. What is prominent in Alina's account is that she shifted the

focus from the question about discrimination and the majority population's ideas on minoritised populations towards her own responsibility for conducting herself in a way that would not be associated with stereotypes of Russian femininity and female sexuality. The practice of self-distancing from certain behaviours is common among Russian-speaking women attempting to claim more acceptable social identities following migration (Sverdljuk, 2009).

Our research participants frequently and routinely referred to vulgarity when describing their lives in Finland and when thinking of their looks in relation to 'looking Russian'. Clothing was a site of racialised differentiation commonly judged and commented on by others. For instance, Karina told Krivonos about how she planned her outfits:

> Once we went out to a restaurant. I did not want to wear a T-shirt and jeans, so I wore a classic black dress, nothing vulgar, everything covered. So when we came to a restaurant, one Finnish girl asked me why on earth I decked up like that. Another time, I went out to the cinema with my [Finnish] boyfriend. I wore a nice dress, not vulgar, but then he said, mocking me: 'Are we going to a wedding or what?' We had a fight after that.

While repeatedly referring to vulgarity and distancing herself from images of excessive femininity, Karina's looks were always commented on by other people as being too feminine and festive. Her navigation of space was, in this regard, interrupted by other people's comments on her body expression. The relationship between particular bodies and clothes becomes particularly clear to Russian-speaking women at border crossings:

> Every time [I cross the border], I'm afraid. Obviously, I don't bring anything illegal with me. They could check my bags. But all my clothes are going-out clothes, beautiful, with a *décolleté*. Obviously not for Finland, if I'm going to visit a boy. If they start questioning me about that. There are high-heeled shoes. So very much not Finnish. Not for living with one man. That's why it's always unpleasant to cross the border.

A Russian-speaking woman crossing the border from 'East' to 'West' is interpreted as somehow suspicious; if her bags are checked and certain items of clothing are found, she may be deemed sexually unfit to enter Finland. Although sex work is not illegal in Finland, entry may be denied. The same clothing in the bag of a Finnish woman crossing in the opposite direction would probably not be interpreted in the same way. The interviewee characterised her clothing as non-Finnish, but more tellingly she added that this was clothing deemed inappropriate for monogamy. Previous research also documents how Eastern European women's migration and border crossings have been represented as an inevitable path to commercial sex (Andrijasevic, 2007).

## *7. Conclusions*

Previous discussion has focused on the role of sexuality in constructing the European self and the non-white Other, and the colonial formation of these depictions (Fanon, 1965; Scott, 2007; Fassin, 2010). In this article, we have attended to the position of ostensibly white yet overly sexualised bodies of Russian-speaking women living in Finland. Although sexualisation is an experience shared by the majority of women, we have demonstrated that racialisation goes hand in hand with portraying migrant Russian-speaking women as sexually available and less respectable than white majority women. We have shown how Russian-speaking women seek to validate their bodies following migration, particularly by distancing themselves from what they call 'vulgarity', mercantility and excessive sexuality. Even when they adopt aesthetic markers of acceptable forms of Western femininity, they struggle to distance themselves from the 'whore' stigma, because the stigma is attached to the racialised body. We have demonstrated that Russian-speaking women acquire knowledge of their own racialised position and carefully navigate acceptable and unacceptable forms of gendered self-presentation. These findings suggest that Western/Nordic national gender and sexual norms may exacerbate marginalisation of non-Western Others.

We have argued that the efforts to navigate acceptable forms of gendered self-presentation is part of a process in which gendered and sexualised bodies reflect colonially produced white Europeanness and 'othered' Eastern Europeanness. Constructions of gendered, racialised and sexualised bodies rely not only on the white/Other binary, but on a graded (post)colonial formation of the European space itself. Drawing on discussions of postcoloniality in Eastern Europe, we have suggested that discussion of postcoloniality in Europe should examine how the politics of gender and sexuality mediate hierarchies within Europe: how racialised hierarchies within Europe are cast into hierarchies of femininity.

If normative (Western) Europeanness has recently been constructed through somewhat emancipated sexuality, the bodies of Russian-speaking women are not fitting the norms owing to their perceived sexualised body expression. This, we have argued, points to the policing of white femininity, which is sexually 'liberated' but respectable. This is not to suggest, however, that white femininity is a stable norm, or that white women are unaffected by sexism. Rather, we have argued that sexualisation acts as a disciplining tool when applied through racialised distinctions; racialised Eastern European femininity serves to reaffirm the norm of white Western – and Nordic – femininity. Semi-peripheries play an important role in maintaining the core, as Eastern Europe is a buffer mediating the distinction between the (Western) European self and its radical non-white Other (Blagojević, 2009; Wolff, 1994). Ostensibly white (yet overly sexualised) Eastern European femininity maintains the elusive boundary of white, Western femininity, which must be available to the male gaze but only to a certain degree. In this regard, respectable availability is a marker of Western civilisation.

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## Book Review

# Philo-Germanism without Germans

## Cristian Cercel (2019) *Romania and the Quest for European Identity: Philo-Germanism without Germans.* London, New York: Routledge. 208 pages.

In May 2019, on Europe Day, two groups of protesters clashed at Iași. One group, members of a pro-governmental rally announced in advance, was organized by the Social Democratic Party. The other, a smaller but apparently spontaneous counter-demonstration, was comprised of people protesting the corruption of the governing party and calling for a 'normal' Romania. The acme of the moment, which went viral on social media, was when participants of the latter event started throwing money at the former, alluding to the fact that they had been paid by the governing party to vote for them, and to participate at the meeting.

The event encapsulates two important political processes. On the one hand, in the past decade the Romanian middle class has organized itself and become a stronger and politically more active group. The main ideological underpinning of this political mobilization juxtaposes the positive expectation horizon created by the dream of becoming a 'normal country' and part of Europe, and the current 'oriental' Romanian political realities. According to the former, any position can be obtained through meritocratic processes, and there is no corruption, while in the latter case corruption and patronage is quotidian. Klaus Iohannis, the current President of Romania, is the leader and main promoter of this ideological cleavage. On the other hand, these expectations have created a clear class-type detachment of the middle class from other strata (people living in rural areas, the less educated, members of the working class, etc.), who are pinpointed as those supporting the current state of affairs, thereby blocking Romania's development and stopping the country from reaching its desired place in Europe.

Cristian Cercel's book, *Romania and the Quest for European Identity: Philo-Germanism without Germans* offers deeper explanations of these processes, presenting a unique take on Romanian identity construction. It is a fresh contribution that goes against the mainstream current in Romanian political and social sciences that is captured almost entirely in the modernist, developmental idealist paradigm the book tries to deconstruct. In the following paragraphs, I first present the main argument of the book, its structure, and chapter-by-chapter content. Second, I make a few comments on its main strengths and weaknesses, as well as its style.

*Romania and the Quest for European Identity* deconstructs the main elements behind Romanian identity discourses, arguing that, throughout history, Romanian elites have constructed a 'self-colonizing self-image' of Romanians, which locates

Romania at the crossroads of the East and the West. A key element of this image is the interiorization of an utterly positive and uncritical image of Romanian Germans, which is contrasted with an Orientalizing self-presentation. In these discourses, 'Germans' are presented as the civilizing factor in Romania – as those who have brought and still bring the spirit of enterprise, work ethics, seriousness, and competence to the country. Interestingly, as Cercel argues, these discursive elements can be found in the narrative of German colonists in Eastern Europe and have been interiorized by modernist Romanian elites as early as since the eighteenth century. In their conception, the internal German other, and the positive Romanian-German relationship built on it, contribute to the construction of the positive auto-identification of Romanians, making it the most important legitimizing factor that proves that Romania is worthy of truly becoming part of 'Europe' and a civilized European culture. Before proceeding, an important comment needs to be made. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the terms 'Romanian Germans,' 'Germans,' 'Hungarians,' and 'Romanians,' as these dominate the discursive realm and topoi Cercel presents and deconstructs. However, the book is careful with these labels, and pays great attention to the meanings of the different terms.

The structure of the book reflects the main argument, with each chapter adding new layers to the deconstruction of the 'philo-German' discourse. After a brief introduction, Chapter 2 ('Between the West and East in Europe') functions as a critical literature review, laying down the framework of analysis. It introduces and analyzes critically terms like Ezequiel Adamovsky's 'Euro-Orientalism,' Maria Todorova's 'liminality,' and the construction of the East–West dichotomy through the centuries. Furthermore, it argues that the Eastern part of Europe has a very similar role in German identity construction to that which the Orient and Orientalism have to the French or the British: the 'Eastern other' is foreign and barbaric, yet familiar at the same time. In this context, 'German-speaking groups in the East (Transylvanian Saxons, Baltic Germans, etc.) [are interpreted] as agents of German colonization, endowed with a specific German cultural mission' (p. 15).

In Chapter 3 ('Germans in Romania: A brief historical background'), the author presents the history of the German presence in Romania, explaining in detail how the German community was constructed from 14 different locally relevant groups into one imagined and minoritized national group. It also emphasizes the meanings and connotations behind each label. From the rich historical analysis, two important ideas can be emphasized. First, it is argued that in the dominant discursive framework, Transylvanian Saxons (and occasionally Banat Swabians) are labeled as Romanian Germans – a picture which is too simplistic, as several other smaller German ethnic groups lived in Romania; and second, that the concept of Romanian Germans 'as a meaningful political category' (p. 28) became crystalized only in the aftermath of World War I, when the various German groups found themselves in a minoritized position.

Chapter 4 ('The self and the other'), focuses on the epistemology of the 'philo-German' discourses. It links their appearance to the Saxon narrative of superiority, promoted and constructed by Saxon authors, and interiorized by

Romanian political, cultural, and social actors, which thus became a constituting element of Romanian identity from the eighteenth century to the present day. As Cercel puts it, '[the] self-identification discourses [of Romanians] have constantly been interwoven with internal representations of otherness and with external representations of Romanianness' (p. 38). As early as the eighteenth century, in these representations Transylvanian Saxons always occupied the highest position of an imagined cultural hierarchy, and 'discursive distinction between things Romanian and things European start[ed] gaining momentum' (p. 40). The emergence of this dichotomy foreshadows the self-colonizing self-image of Romanians. In addition to the meticulous analysis of Romanian self-image, Cercel traces back how the self-identification of Romanian Germans was historically constructed, linking the positive self-image promoted by Saxons rather clearly to the legitimation of their economic colonization of the region.

Chapter 5 ('A valuable and unmistakable contribution to the life of Romanian society'), focuses on the post-communist period, presenting how the image of the German minority in Romania has been linked to EU accession or the Europeanization project of Romanian elites, which can be considered a contemporary reinterpretation of the 'Return to Europe' topoi of Romanian identity. As a result of this entanglement, Romanian Germans have received a special place in Romanian public discourse compared to other minorities: they have represented both a symbolic and geopolitical link to Germany. A further consequence of this tie is the emergence of the image of the 'Germans' as embodiments of expertise, technocracy, entrepreneurial spirit, and management. This image feeds on the self-image promoted by Romanian German actors (such as the German Democratic Forum or different local German business clubs), which link their liaisons to Germany and German capital to the entrepreneurial spirit and competence of Germans. These discursive elements, however, have important consequences for current political and economic processes and Romanian identity construction as well. First, an underdeveloped argument lurks within the text – namely, that this link between the economic interests and the positive self-image promoted by German actors has not changed in substance since the eighteenth century: the accentuation of the entrepreneurial spirit, German work ethics, seriousness, and competence is used to overshadow the rather strong neo-liberal ideology promoted by the very same actors. While presented as an example of entrepreneurial spirit, many of these actors are ruthlessly surpassing trade unions and exploiting their workforce. Second, references to competence, technocracy, and the German work ethic have become a constitutive element of the identity of the Romanian middle class. In other words, although not said explicitly in the book, such cultural and symbolic self-colonization reinforces a more palpable structural and economic one.

One of the most interesting chapters in the book is Chapter 6 ('They who have no Germans, should buy some'). The chapter analyzes in detail the memory politics associated with the German minority in Romania and how this is interiorized and amplified by Romanian remembrance politics. By embracing and accepting the narrative of German minorities, Romanian elites strengthen the

special discursive position and special status of Germans in the country. Cercel argues that the main narrative of Romanian Germans is victimhood. Mainstream Romanian historiography, and many authors of Romanian German origin, emphasize in great detail the deportation of Romanian Germans to the Soviet Union and the 'human trade' conducted between Romania and Germany in the 1980s, thereby instrumentalizing the exodus of Romanian Germans, but failing to confront the role of Romanian Germans (Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians in particular) in WWII, and their relationship with the SS and the Wehrmacht. Most historical narratives start with the 1945 deportations, without touching on sensitive issues that occurred beforehand, or if the 1940s are to be discussed, Romanian Germans are represented as victims of both Hitler and Stalin. This identity and remembrance politics is interesting from two perspectives. First, as Cercel convincingly displays, 'the integration of German suffering within Romanian memory discourses is possible and this integration can be construed as very much compatible with anti-communist and especially anti-Soviet discourses' (p. 104). Thus, it can be used to legitimate and strengthen a Western-oriented identity politics, and, not surprisingly, it is used by Romanian political actors instrumentally in their quest to build closer ties with Germany. As Cercel argues, these political acts are conceived by Romanian political elites as symbolic and political steps toward Europeanization (p. 108). Second, it clearly takes a different arc than politics-of-remembrance debates in Germany. While Romanian German narratives are in a phase of denial and forgetfulness, in Germany most discourses have revolved around accepting blame for the role played by the German nation as a community in WWII, and the Holocaust has been recognized and interiorized (Romsics, 2019).

The seventh and last chapter ('The rich villages around Sibiu and Braşov have been invaded by the Gypsy migration') focuses on comparing the 'image of Germans' with the image of other minority groups in Romania – most importantly, the Roma, and Hungarians. Cercel argues that in Romanian identity discourses Germans generally appear in a positive context as the European better 'internal other,' while the Roma are represented as the 'Orientalized, negative other' of Romanians. These contrasts clearly emphasize the perceived liminal character of Romania, with the Western European civilizing influence symbolized by Romanian Germans on the one hand, and, on the other, the Roma, who symbolize an Eastern influence and disintegration, weakening the possibility of belonging to Europe. One of the most eloquent examples of this, which is presented by Cercel in detail to portray this dichotomy in Romanian identity discourses, is the case of depopulated Saxon (a German group mostly living in South-Transylvania) villages, a recurrent topic in the Romanian media. After the mass emigration of the Saxons, many of their villages were re-populated by Roma. Many authors label these processes forms of 'unwanted population exchange,' describing them as 'an anarchic apocalypse': in the 'long alleys of the beautiful villages of yore' there are now 'gadders-about' who 'devastate, destroy, steal gates, windows, doors, walls even.' Alas, some of them, 'dirty and filthy'… 'even took refuge there' (see the analysis of the work of Sorina Coroamă Stanca in the book,

p. 143). Cercel argues that by juxtaposing the glorious past and the apocalyptic present of these villages, these authors emphasize the liminality of Romania and the two possible roads it can take.

In contrast to the Roma, Hungarians are constructed using a mixed image. In Cercel's analysis, they are not perceived as either negative or positive on a civilizational dimension, but are juxtaposed with Germans on a moral one. Usually, Romanian Germans are represented as examples of peaceful cohabitation in Romania, while Hungarians are represented as the 'hostile' form. The example delivered by Cercel is meant to show that '[t]he reference to the flawless knowledge and use of Romanian – that one sometimes comes across in discourses on Romanian Germans – reinforces the representation of a particular German-Romanian compatibility. It can also function as an implicit allusion to other ethnic groups in Romania, particularly Hungarians' (p. 143). It is important to mention that Cercel does not oversimplify these relationships for the sake of his argument, even though the presented image of the 'Hungarian other' is not analyzed in similar detail to the 'German' one. A comparative analysis that focuses on how the 'Hungarian other' is related to the self-image of Hungarians and the hetero-identification of Romanians by Hungarians would be welcome in the near future, as this could contribute to a deeper understanding of Romanian-Hungarian relations in general, and the perceived rejection of minority rights in particular. Cercel cannot be blamed for not pursuing this track, though, it being far from the subject of his book.

A further layer to the book is added in its 'Conclusions.' While most of the chapters focus on the representation of the 'German other,' and how this is a core element of Romanian identity construction, in this final chapter the author provides an opportunity for contextualization. This specific case study on Romanian philo-Germanism is linked to the broader social realities of Romania, presented briefly in the introductory notes of this review. Cercel recognizes that these representations promote a liberal entrepreneurship that the middle class is trying to expropriate, and, as the author puts it, '[t]he implicit and explicit class dimension of the philo-German easternist representations in Romania is also telling of processes of social exclusion, intertwined with exclusion on ethnic grounds, as the case of the Roma suggests. Philo-Germanism and the nostalgia for a German past in Transylvania and Banat act as discursive legitimation mechanisms apt to make acceptable such positions and stances that ought to be regarded critically' (p. 167). In other words, the book can be read as an inquiry that deconstructs the modernist, developmental idealist paradigm in Romania. These discourses have dominated the public discourse of the past few years, having thus become the most important sources of political cleavage in the country. It is important to emphasize, and this is perhaps the most important shortcoming of the study, that the book was not written with this purpose. While all the pieces for such a frame are present, and even explicitly formulated by the author, unfortunately it does not go as far as to emphasize and further elaborate on such a contextualization.

This being a critical analysis, two notes on methodology need to be made. One of the main strengths of the book (beyond the well-written argumentation) is its rich empirical data. The author analyzes discursively a very large corpus of original texts, interviews, and newspaper articles to underpin his argument, giving the reader the feeling that he has looked up every document in which reference to Germans by Romanian authors has been made. This notwithstanding, the reader may have doubts about the social embeddedness of these narratives, as the book does not provide any macro-sociological empirical evidence of this philo-German attitude. A reader who is not familiar with Romanian social realities or the topic might rightly wonder whether these conceptions and identity constructions are shared by the public, or if they remain only at an elite level. The case studies that are used – the election of Klaus Iohannis as president of Romania, and a wide variety of articles in mainstream media – are good examples, but they do not prove how dominant the discourse in the Romanian public sphere is. The introduction of a short chapter or sub-chapter on empirical research related to the developmental idealism literature (e.g. Melegh et al., 2016; Kiss, 2017) could have resolved these shortcomings. In these studies, developmental hierarchies and attitudes toward modernism and perceptions about civilization are analyzed with the help of survey data, thereby making representative claims on the researched topic.

A last comment on style. *Romania and the Quest for European Identity* is not easy to read. Its essayistic tone, philological approach, and multitude of historical material are sometimes challenging, but on several accounts also give intellectual satisfaction to the reader. Witty remarks are scattered throughout the text, not as art for art's sake, but to help emphasize arguments.

All in all, *Romania and the Quest for European Identity: Philo-Germanism without Germans* is one of the most important scholarly contributions to the investigation of Romanian identity in the last couple of decades, and will hopefully spur scientific debate and a more reflexive approach to the processes, inter-ethnic- and class relations, and democracy and politics whose main driving forces it tries to deconstruct.

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## Book Review

# Decentering (Western) Europe: Rethinking Global Entanglements from the Eastern Semi-Periphery

## Adam, Jens et al. (eds) (2019) *Europa dezentrieren: Globale Verflechtungen neu denken.* Frankfurt and New York: Campus. 341 pages.

The timely volume proposes a new theoretical framework for ethnographic Europeanization research informed by postcolonial theory, from the vantage point of German anthropology. The reviewer argues that this innovative program of 'decentering Europe' can and should be productively extended to ethnographic research in the ECE region, in dialogue with critical ECE social sciences perspectives.[1]

Following Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to provincialize Europe (Chakrabarty, 2000), the anthology edited by a team of scholars currently or formerly affiliated to the Institute for European Ethnology of Humboldt University, Berlin, proposes 'a fresh view on the fragile presence of the European project in time of multiple crises, from the perspective of its currently less considered global entanglements and dependencies, linking (German) social and cultural scientific Europeanization research with postcolonial perspectives for the first time' (cover text).

The volume introduces the project of Critical Europeanization Studies (CES), as a 'program and perspectives of an Anthropology of reflexive Europeanization,' 'decentering the perspective on Europe from the perspective of its margins, its global entanglements and internal omissions. This focus expands the temporal and spatial scope of the investigation far beyond the current political project of European integration: towards a long-term, relational embedding of the continent in the production of "World," as a general context of unequal and shifting trans-regional relations' (p. 8).

It is the volume's declared objective to encourage and expedite such a linking of postcolonial and anthropological approaches to the investigation of current processes of Europeanization and the production of Europe in the context of global conditions.

The editing team's co-authored introduction 'Decentering Europe: Program and Perspectives of an Anthropology of Reflexive Europeanization,' (pp. 7–33) presents CES as a theoretical concept and proposes analytical perspectives for

[1] The reviewer is a PhD candidate at the Institute of European Ethnology at Humboldt University Berlin. One of the editors/authors of the reviewed book, Prof. Regina Römhild, is her German PhD supervisor. Her Hungarian second supervisor is the editor-in-chief of this journal, Prof. Margit Feischmidt. This review was independent work, in terms of both the decision to write it and the content.

ethnographic research, illustrated by selected articles from various disciplines, perspectives, and geographic locations.

As the authors state, the Eurocentric power structure that is shifting towards a multipolar world requires a re-measurement of Europe's global position, as well as a critical focus on topographies of inequality within Europe, which can be observed in various regional and local contexts across the continent. For such a project of provincializing and decentering Europe, a postcolonial perspective is necessary, but with a more decisive focus and recalibration on the continent's globally entangled present than before. Global interdependences and entanglements need to be studied not only in terms of their effects on the 'Global South' or the 'non-Western World,' but also in their retroactive effect on the space of 'Europe.' Globally distributed regional anthropological expertises need to be brought together to open up the view of the movements and relations between the regions of research as elements of 'process geographies' (Appadurai, 2001), reaching beyond a 'static map of ethnographic Area Studies as seemingly fixed geopolitical units' (p. 9). From this vantage point, Europe's position appears not defined by borders, but by its dynamic spaces of transnational relations, mobilities, and migrations in the world. This way, formerly hidden everyday practices of 'other Europes' can be ethnographically unearthed and brought into view.

Due to the specific history of the discipline, German anthropology is institutionally divided into two branches that have developed from a split into 'native' anthropology/ethnography, German folklore studies (*Volkskunde*) and non-European Ethnology (*Völkerkunde*). The volume's project of CES is proposed from within the 'native' branch of German anthropology as a cultural/social sciences discipline. The postcolonial perspective the authors propose is based on theoretical and analytical concepts by postcolonial scholars mostly from India (Dipesh Chakrabarty, Shalini Randeria, Arjun Appadurai, Gayatri C. Spivak), and Western anthropologists working on non-Western/European contexts (Laura Ann Stoler, Marilyn Strathern, and Michael Herzfeld).

A central concept here is 'worlding,' adapted from Gayatri C. Spivak, as complex relational forms of colonial World-making, and being made through the World. Informed by Marilyn Strathern's concept of 'auto-anthropology' (Strathern, 1987), the project of 'decentering Europe' is understood here as a reflexive analytical movement of 'Re-Worlding' (p. 27).

Translated into *decolonial* terms, CES could thus be described as an academic effort at Western intellectual self-decolonization in a specific German cultural sciences context, in a'theoretical shakedown' (Moosavi, 2020: 2).

The first three articles, co-authored by the German editing team, introduce and discuss CES as concept. The introduction is followed by a conversation between Jens Adam and Regina Römhild with social anthropologist Shalini Randeria, whose concept of *entanglements* is central to CES, its inception in 1998, and its methodology (pp. 35–65). Römhild and Knecht then reflect on the theoretical implications of the institutional split within German anthropology ('double gap'), which they claim is leading to a 'regionalization of thought,' reproducing an 'imperial separation' of anthropological knowledge that represents

Europe as subject and the colonized world as object (p. 19). According to the authors, a postcolonially informed Ethnology of Europe needs to fight for other institutional conditions of knowledge production; they argue for a re-focusing of the discipline towards a process geography and anthropology of entangled spaces and mobilities, using the example of migration- and border regimes research (pp. 67–79).

The authors propose six analytical perspectives regarding how this theoretical program could be applied to empirical ethnographic research settings, to be pursued singularly or in a flexibly combined way, and adapted to a wide range of research contexts. At the same time, they define the volume's structural setup: The ten articles from social and cultural anthropology, sociology, political science, decolonial theory, and geography, both original contributions and translations,[2] are selected to illustrate each analytical perspective.

The proposed analytical perspectives are the following:

(1) 'Reconstructing global entangled histories, to highlight the constitution of Europe, the project of "European Modernity" and its political basic tenets as products of colonial and post-colonial relations, surpassing the perspectives of methodological nationalism and Eurocentrism' (p. 18).

Examples are the conversation with Randeria, and Römhild/Knecht's contribution on the institutional split of German anthropology into 'native' and non-European Ethnology.

(2) 'Rendering visible the internal "Others" and omissions/blind spots in the past and present of Europe, at the same time highlighting and decentering European Modernity's inner heterogeneities, established cultural hegemonies and asymmetries' (p. 19).

This point is illustrated by Nilüfer Göle (2012) on Islam as the excluded constitutive Other of Western modernity and European chronotopes; while in *Postcolonialism: Living with the Specter of Europe* (pp. 101–118), Vassos Argyrou reflects on Cyprus' ambivalent relation to Western modernity.

(3) 'An analytic perspective on Europe from its geopolitical, postcolonial and epistemological margins, from where its inner ruptures and ambivalences, racisms and demarcations in dealing with the world and its inhabitants can be brought into view' (p. 20).

In *Towards decolonial Futures: From Western Universalism to Decolonial Pluriversalisms*, Ramón Grosfoguel searches for an epistemic space on the margins of European-Western thought to further the project of decolonization (pp. 119–142); Henk Driessen is rethinking cosmopolitanism based on a study of Mediterranean port cities (cf. Driessen, 2005), and Tanıl Bora introduces *the debate of the White Turks as a class- and culture war* in Turkey (pp. 165–193).

(4) 'An analytic re-contextualization of different world regions in the course of a comparative research of (crypto-)colonial constellations in countries within and outside of Europe' (p. 22).

[2] Driessen (2005), Göle (2012) and Herzfeld (2016).

Michael Herzfeld develops his concept of 'Crypto-colonialism' (see Herzfeld, 2016, and more below) further for this volume.

5. 'A critical analysis of past and present politics of Europeanization as projects of power, deconstructing the teleological character of European integration and enabl[ing] a perspective on alternative developments of Europe.' (p. 23)

In *The Crisis of Europe in the Context of Cosmopolitization* (pp. 223–238), sociologist Ulrich Beck (1944-2015, original 2015 article) calls for a 'cosmopolitan turn' in social sciences: Europeans must 'deprovincialize' themselves by 'learning to see themselves sociologically-methodologically with the eyes of the Other.' Keith Hart addresses *The Euro Crisis: An Episode on the World History of Money*, also in an original article for the volume (pp. 239–273).[3]

6. 'A cosmopolitan, no longer exclusively anthropocentric perspective on global entanglements of Europe, including also non-human beings and heterogeneous networks and constellations of human and non-human actors' (p. 25).

The last two articles focus on climate change: Silja Klepp and Johannes Herbeck: *Decentering Climate Change: Negotiations on Climate Change and Migration in Europe and Oceania* (pp. 275–314), and Kirsten Hastrup: *On the Way to a Global Social Imaginary? Climate Change and the End of an Era in Social Sciences* (pp. 315–338).

In their concluding outlook ('Re-Worlding Europe,' pp. 27–30) the authors see concepts like 'shared histories,' 'interpenetration,' 'crypto-colony,' 'trans-modernity,' and 'global imaginaries' as valuable contributions to the project of an anthropology of reflexive Europeanization, to be pursued beyond this volume. Furthermore, they include 'the Imperial' as a powerful category of Worlding, applying Ann Stoler's concepts of 'imperial formations' and 'imperial debris' (Stoler, 2013), considering that Europe, also from a decentering perspective, presents as an intersection of different imperial projects: Not only have Western-European colonial undertakings, but also those of the Ottoman Empire and the 'state-socialist Soviet Empire' left their traces in concrete local contexts as well as geopolitical orders, and Europe's relations to the world. And also, the EU is producing manifold imperial effects in its Member States, 'even more obviously so in its southern or eastern neighboring states, its membership aspirants, [and] in the countries of the Global South' (p. 28).

*

In terms of geographic scope, the European border zones along the Mediterranean are covered in the volume; while mentioning 'postbloc' perspectives (p. 1), ECE

[3] English version: *The euro crisis: an episode in the global history of money.* Available at https://www.academia.edu/25142305/The_euro_crisis_An_episode_in_the_global_history_of_money. Accessed: 05-10-2020.

does not feature. No authors from the region are included, and ECE scholarship is practically absent in the references related to the editors' contributions.[4]

In terms of its position in the geopolitics of knowledge production (see Buden, 2015, Demeter and Goyanes, 2020), and relevant for the vantage point of ECE social sciences, this debate within German anthropology produces knowledge about Europe and the World from the context of a democratic, post-migrant Western-European society as a cultural sciences discipline, with a theoretical agenda of criticism of Eurocentric Western cultural hegemony. Within German anthropology, CES's objective thus can be seen as twofold: Questioning, negotiating, and opening up the 'native' branch of German anthropology's theoretical and methodological approach to 'Europe' and the non-European world; and proposing an updated, non-eurocentric, merged German anthropology from the postcolonially informed 'native' (Volkskunde) tradition; engaging with the marginalized non-European Other within German Western post-migrant society, as well as proposing a relational model for a reflexive, non-eurocentric engagement with other European and non-European contexts, especially in migration- and border studies.

The central idea of CES is clearly overcoming the Eurocentric 'West–rest' binary with the concept of entanglements. But what to do conceptually with the South Eastern European – here represented by Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey – and Eastern European border zones that were not subjected to Western colonialism, but to continental empires and Western cultural hegemony (see Böröcz, 2001: 21–22)? These regions developed *ambivalent* relations to Western modernity as part of their structural position on the semi-periphery, described in numerous publications by scholars of World System Analysis (Wallerstein, Amin, Arrighi). The editors' solution here is to apply Herzfeld's concept of crypto-colonialism – developed for Greece, but, as he shows, applicable to structurally similar configurations in global contexts. Puzzling from the vantage point of ECE social sciences might be how CES's critical agenda of challenging Western cultural hegemony is being translated here: As a response to the thus stated 'crypto-colonial cultural self-subjugation to simplified knowledge of Western modernity in the region' pursued by 'local elites,' the editors' answer is a call for 'an internal revision of such forms of cultural self-subjugation' (p. 23).[5] On which levels and pursued by what sort of actors the authors envision such projects of 'internal revision' to take place in the region is left unclear (intellectual elites?

[4] Paweł Lewicki (Department of Comparative Studies of Central Europe, Frankfurt/Oder) co-authored the introduction. In the introduction's references, Michał Buchowski's (Department of Comparative Studies of Central Europe, Frankfurt/Oder) *Specter of Orientalism* (2006) is the only reference by a ECE-author. Römhild and Knecht refer to a 2007 article by sociologist Manuela Boatcă (2007), which was included in the 2013 German anthology *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus (Beyond Eurocentrism*) (Conrad, Römhild and Randeira, eds. 2013: 322–344).

[5] One is in fact reminded of 'the potential temptation of European scholars to take the lead and to "dewesternize" and "decolonialize." If that happens (and it may happen), it would be indeed rewesternization disguised as dewesternization or decoloniality... European actors and institutions will now take the lead in decolonization because people in the rest of the world are not capable of decolonizing themselves!' (Mignolo, 2014, cf. Moosavi, 2020: 14).

Cultural/social sciences? Cultural policy? Civil society and activism?). Without any grounding in the history of nationalisms in the region, such a call can – not necessarily, but potentially – derail into the hegemonic Western enlightened mode of criticism CES set out decenter: Critical German scholars calling for Eastern self-emancipation from self-imposed immaturity (after all, the region wasn't colonized, 'real' oppression occurring elsewhere), – reproducing the classic Western orientalist tradition in relation to the West-East-axis (quasi in a German version of 'the East–West slope interpreted as a liberal utopia,' Melegh, 2006: 30). The empirical complication that it is mostly nationalist/far-right culturalist projects in the region acting in a 'decolonial' manner against Western cultural hegemony is (briefly) mentioned in the volume with the example of Hungary, discussed as a case of misappropriation of Latin American decolonial concepts of indigeneity (pp. 49–53).

'Crypto-colonialism,' if deployed as a generic analytical shortcut for non-colonized, non-Western regions of Europe, won't address the complex and ambivalent *patterns of entanglement* specific to this region; it clearly needs to be grounded in regional expertise.[6] A range of compatible, postcolonially informed concepts and approaches have been developed in the region since the 1990s to address these very questions (like the *self-colonizing metaphor,* cf. Kiossev, 1995; 2000; 2010; 2018, *Nesting Orientalisms,* cf. Bakić-Hayden, 1995, or *East–West Slope,* cf. Melegh, 2006), while recently, a vibrant field of post-/and decolonially informed ECE scholarship with quite compatible critical approaches has emerged.[7]

But the Europe being decentered here with postcolonial concepts is clearly Western Europe, applying postcolonial concepts from a Western vantage point to non-western European regions. Unless addressed and contextualized, the same approach developed as a self-reflexive critical dialogue on the global North-South-axis is likely to methodologically remain a German monologue on the West-East-axis, producing analytical distortions due to context-blindness.

Structural East-West-asymmetries and the marginalization of ECE scholarship in Western academia is a well-researched topic in ECE, and has also been addressed in Intersections (Bartha and Erőss, 2015). In German academia, there is a division of labor in knowledge production; the ECE region being outsourced to specialist institutions for Eastern European Studies and Eastern European History. And the regional ECE expertise *within* the 'native' branch – for historical reasons institutionally situated mostly in the German Southwest – which is currently discovering postcolonial approaches for their local-regional research contexts (Eisch-Angus, Scholl-Schneider and Spiritova, 2019), is currently not in

[6] Otherwise, it might produce effects such as Böröcz' critique of applying West-centric sociology classics to Hungary in 1997: '"Eastern Europe" is one and indivisible. Its societies are quite simple little societies. They know of no other source of social inequality and conflict, logic of stratification and class formation, than totalitarian oppression (in the past) and gender inequality (today). In the latter, they are world champions. [...] Hence it is utterly unimaginable for things to be one way in one "Eastern European" country and another way in another' (Böröcz, 1997: 123).

[7] For first impressions see the Facebook Group *Decolonizing Eastern Europe*, https://www.facebook.com/groups/257972308642861

active dialogue with CES. Due to this institutional and regional division – de facto producing a structurally similar 'double gap' effect for CES in respect to ECE like the global one described by Römhild and Knecht –, from the CES vantage point (arguing from the meta-space of process geographies, re-worldings and European border zones, critical of Eurocentrism and nationalism, not grounded in ECE regional expertise), ECE social sciences can sometimes be misperceived as 'Area Studies' in the postcolonial critical sense (a 'static map of ethnographic Area Studies as seemingly fixed geopolitical units'; see above).

While the need for a meta-space to synthesize scattered regional expertise indeed makes sense within the German discipline, ECE social sciences, focusing on national or regional contexts 'only,' are sometimes perceived as being conspicuously imbued with methodological nationalism, 'still' operating in fixed national containers, and being 'materialist' rather than 'critical.'[8] In fact, the ECE regional expertise within the German 'native' branch reports of similar misperceptions of their work from the mainstream of the discipline, critical of a West-centrist 'colonizing gaze' on different methodological and theoretical approaches (Scholl-Schneider, Schuchardt and Spiritova, 2019: 25).

In the interest of a more productive dialogue, *the conceptual and methodological differences in researching global entanglements from variously located Western and Non-Western European contexts* need to be addressed.

CES as postcolonially informed debate within the 'native' branch of German anthropology – the mainstream of which is currently not sufficiently responsive to ECE scholarship in general (Scholl-Schneider, Schuchardt and Spiritova, 2019: 22) – currently rather relies on individual scholars' research interests in the region (Adam, Boatcă, Buchowski).

Extending the epistemic space of German anthropology's 'native' branch via postcolonial approaches into a 'Re-Worlding' – an operational discursive epistemic counter strategy against the Eurocentric hegemonic mainstream in the context of German post-migrant society, as Western intellectual self-decolonization from within – effectively turns the Eastern semi-periphery into an epistemic flyover zone, at least at this point.

German scholars with no regional ECE expertise are mostly genuinely surprised to hear that theorizing from within a postcolonially reformed critical version of Western modernity, outside of the German/Western epistemic space, can be translated into another Western claim to universalism, albeit in the postcolonial genre – especially when applying postcolonially informed Western criticism to ECE as a zone of methodological backwardness, 'still' invested in obsolete 'national' framings. In the German/core relation to its Eastern hinterland, this can translate into the classical case of the Western civilizing mission of its 'not-yet European Other' in the Orientalist tradition that authors from the region have now been writing about for over three decades, mostly unacknowledged by German academia. This epistemic divide, when unacknowledged, can produce

[8] On East–West differences in discourses of 'critical thinking,' see Dzenovska (2018: 116–119).

miscommunication on many levels, especially in the power asymmetries of international research and conference settings funded by German institutions.

To ECE audiences, the need for global abstract meta-spaces and re-worldings in an empirical German discipline requires some explanation, which I'll try to sketch in an admittedly brief and cursory way. Historically, postcolonial theory traveled (Said) to West-German cultural sciences informed by Critical Theory (as a combination of ideology critique, a critique of the status quo, and pursuing emancipation). In the process of coming to terms with the German past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), critical self-reflection developed as a thought style and intellectual practice of West-German post-NS generations eager to exorcize Nazi thinking, building an epistemic place of critique from where to speak truth to power, at a time when the Nazi generation was still dominating German institutions. But in this work of the critical reflexive German subject in a post-genocidal nation, the Other was conceptually absent. Up to the 1990s, then in unified Germany, leftist (West)German intellectuals, working on critical discourse as part of Germany's historical responsibility, were able to refine ideology criticism of Othering / Anti-semitism for decades without any need of input from a living, present Other. During the 1990s, German cultural and social sciences adapted to the realities of an increasingly diverse German society, acknowledging that the Non-Western-European migrant and post-migrant Other had not only been here for centuries (e.g. Black Germans), but was here to stay, and adapted concepts of multiculturalism and social anthropology from the anglophone space.[9]

This is the leftist intellectual context postcolonial theory arrived at within European Ethnology, as the by then transnationally extended 'native' branch, during the last two decades. The German postcolonial critique of Othering, the mode of self-reflexivity and support for the emancipation of the marginalized/postcolonial subject in the 'native' branch of German anthropology is grafted onto this older intellectual tradition. The self-reflexive, postcolonially reformed critical German subject (not meant in an essentializing way but as a critical thought style or academic habitus), conscious of Germany's historical past and responsibility, in tune with the realities of a contemporary Western post-migrant society in a globalized world, in solidarity with the struggles of the marginalized, performs itself through hyper-self-reflexivity[10] and voicing critique to power. And leftist-liberal academia, speaking truth to power from places of institutional power, in the case of European Ethnology is a small discipline pitted against the Goliath of German state institutions dominated by the non-European branch in the current debates and activist struggles about colonial legacies.[11]

Critical Theory's ethical imperative being 'always concerned not merely with how things were but how they might be and should be' (Bronner, 2017: 1–2, see also Knauft, 2013), this can produce unfortunate side effects when translated to

[9] In the 1990s adapting i.e. Stuart Hall/British Cultural Studies; groundbreaking also the 2002 volume of Conrad and Randeria (eds.) (2002).
[10] Certain aspects of German 'Critical Whiteness Studies' being another example, see Bee (2013).
[11] See the contributions on Germany in von Oswald and Tinius (eds.) (2020).

other contexts – when German scholars, based on the unique German experience, critically focus on hegemony and power relations *elsewhere,*[12] with a patronizing attitude of moral and epistemic superiority (see also Krasztev and Holmes, 2018: 120–121; 2019). In the structural asymmetries of European core-semi-periphery relations, this can translate to – and in the ECE region is often perceived as – unreflected German West-centrism.[13]

How can CES, this German project of decentering Europe, be productive for the study of the ECE region? What comes into view when this postcolonial project of epistemic re-worlding is extended from a global North-South axis (*detached empires*, Böröcz and Sarkar, 2012) to an angle that also includes the European/Eurasian East-West-axis (*contiguous empires*, ibid.)? ECE scholars working on border zones and migration or decolonizing Eastern Europe in an anglophone academic environment clearly don't depend on German concepts that currently don't acknowledge and include their area of expertise.

As has been noted by Katharina Eisch-Angus – a scholar of the German 'native' branch, working on the multilingual Czech-Polish-German border region – , exploring the potential of theories developed in different contexts of colonialism and imperialism can be productive for ethnographic work on the region when not trying to project postcolonial approaches onto it, but rather, knowing about the historical differences, and translating them into concrete areas of study (Eisch-Angus, 2019: 46). How to bring regional micro-levels together with meta-concepts such as 'Re-Worldings' remains a topic for future debate within the German discipline. As for research in the ECE region, CES can be very productive for critically re-measuring European *center-semi-periphery-relations* – with the necessary conceptual adaptations and grounding in regional expertise and archives, drawing on the innovation potential of the semi-periphery (Ost, 2018). Especially, transnational, *bilingual or multilingual* collaborative research of the genealogies of the region's present, studying the long-term imperial legacies of the ECE region's entanglement with *Imperial Germany* (*contiguous empire*, Böröcz and Sarkar 2012) could be very productive[14] – considering imperial, post-imperial interwar, and NS-Germany's role as the region's crypto-colonizer in Herzfeld's sense, in the areas of culture and academic knowledge production, and also

[12] When German scholars criticize scholars from other national backgrounds for not critically reflecting their own past, or nationalism, as Germans did and continue to do; for a Latvian example see Dzenovska (2018: 123).

[13] On the 'growing West-centrism' of the German 'native' mainstream discipline from an ECE regional research perspective see Scholl-Schneider, Schuchardt and Spiritova (2019: 23, 25) and Eisch-Angus (2019: 51).

[14] Just as Austrian historians have been adapting Randeria's concept of entanglements for the Habsburg empire (Feichtinger et al., 2003), and German ECE historians have been working with compatible concepts for some time (like the *GWZO Leipzig Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe's* research focus on 'Entanglements and Globalization' https://www.leibniz-gwzo.de/de/forschung/verflechtung-und-globalisierung, or the DFG Priority Programme *Transottomanica: Eastern European-Ottoman-Persian Mobility Dynamics*, https://www.transottomanica.de/research/toproposal).

considering Germany's current political and economic role in the region. And finally, CES's analytical perspectives can be adapted to this *historically entangled post-imperial, contiguous, continental European space* in its entangled global relations, mapping out intersections of the North-South- and East-West-axis in complex continental European/Eurasian settings.

Creating discursive spaces for such theoretical and methodological East-West-conversations, both timely and necessary, should be an exciting and rewarding project for the future.

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