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

Intersections.EEJSP
6(3): 74–96.
DOI: 10.17356/ieejsp.v6i3.634
<http://intersections.tk.mta.hu>

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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.*

¹ We owe a note of gratitude to the two anonymous referees for their helpful comments. Husakouskaya's research project, on which this paper is based, was funded by Centre for Women's and Gender Research (SKOK), University of Bergen.

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 Zelenskyy, 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 Europeaness 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 Șandru (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 Europeaness. 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 Europeaness 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 Europeaness 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 Europeaness’ (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 Europeaness 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; Sloomaeckers 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 authorities 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 Mizieleńska, 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's 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 of 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 grassroots 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 unintended 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 Europeaness, 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 ‘hostile 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; Sloomaeckers 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 involvement 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/stylar/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 unproblematic 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 Russo-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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