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

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Abstract¹

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 Feliciano, 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 Europeaness. 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 ‘Diversity. 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 movements⁷ 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 Feliciano, 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 Feliciano, 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 Wrocław. 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 *à l'euro péenne*' (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’ (Mizelińska 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 Feliciano, 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 Europeaness, 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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