

GAY PRIDE AS VIOLENT CONTAINMENT IN ROMANIA: A BRAVE NEW EUROPE

Abstract

Violence against Gay Pride parades in post-socialist Europe is the spectacle that puts 'the East' on the Western gaydar. Regular incident reports on violence tell simple stories of victimisation, homogenising the dynamic contestations of sexual, national, ideological and ethnic identities that are fought in the streets of radically different societies every year. This article is a record of related moments in time on the cusp of Romanian accession to the European Union, as the scepticism earned by activists over almost two decades of 'civil society development' meets the new European model, the rhetorical claim to gay rights as human rights. Despite Romania's political commitment to citizen 'rights' as a member of the European Union since January 2007, basic rights to freedom of movement and physical safety are being policed and contained by hegemonic Romanian discourses of who has the 'right' to visibility in the national community. This paper analyses the first three Gay Pride marches ('GayFest') in Romania, in 2005, 2006 and 2007, and charts state sanctioned neo-fascist resistance to this representation in public space. This study traces how the Romanian state utilises the language and resources of European non-violent 'tolerance' to police and contain 'diversity.'

Keywords: social movements, post-socialism, Romania, LGBT, European Union

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The NGO-ization of rights in Romania

Gay Pride Romania did not begin from a local groundswell of proud gay Romanians. 'Gay rights,' rather, were a relative latecomer to the civil society sector that developed after the fall of communism in 1989, funded by international (Western) donor organizations such as Open Society Institute, United Nations Development Project (UNDP) and PHARE.² Western politicians, donors and activists considered 'civil society' to be the way to fight for legislative and social protection for vulnerable groups in newly democratic societies, and the usual subjects of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were women, children in orphanages, ethnic minorities, and after 2001, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) communities.³ Laura Grünberg (2008), the founder of *AnA* (Society of Feminist Analysis), has expressed her frustration with the civil society model that in effect redirected women outside the sphere of government decision making 'power.'⁴

Donor organisations set the agendas on short term high rotation projects, without time for local staff development amidst hectic implementation. NGOs are thus economically dependent on grants from donors who set the agendas to which they ostensibly function. While donors articulated this giddy cycle as developing local knowledge and strengths, in fact the result is the overworking of a small number of committed activists in each field. Activists find themselves stretched too thin by structural requirements that do not support time for personal development, let alone the development of inter-group networks. As Grünberg (2008) has noted, the lack of clear long term objectives has marginalised the women's movement inside the Romanian civil society movement, and exacerbated 'tensions between the activist and academic sides or between generations.'

Donor agendas, and thus NGO projects, are pinned to quantifiable identity groups and social changes, hence the formation of the first gay NGO, *Accept* (formed from the Bucharest Acceptance Group) in 1996. In 2001, *Accept* was primarily funded by the United Nations Development Program to run anti-HIV health projects and later by the Open Society Foundation and Western European Government Ministries to lobby for legislative change in line with pan-European LGBT movements. Still, it was at *Accept* that a young Romanian lesbian offered to develop women's discussion groups (under the rubric of health policy) in 2000, rather than at *AnA* or any other feminist or human rights organizations. There was no LGBT project run by feminist or women's NGOs before *Accept*, and there has been no 'ethnic minorities' or feminist project run at *Accept* since its formation. *Accept*, staffed by a tiny group of LGBT identified activists, and took up the battle for decriminalisation of homosexuality (Article 200) in 2000. These activists have since followed through with demands for legislative changes concerning child adoption, civil union and other gay rights. Prior to 2007, donors primarily supported civil society projects for legislative change, based

on the assumption that Romania would standardise its legislation with the European Union in order to sign the *Acquis Comunitar*, taking 'the East' as a blank slate for 'human rights' legislation. This approach reflects the blindness of Western Europe to the reality of decades of homophobic, racist and sexist legislation in Romania.⁵ New laws have been implemented in Romania despite strong local 'values' that are socially policed today, whether the European Union flag flies or not.

The NGO-ization of human rights requires that individuals claim these rights as recognisable and politically active groups. As activists and academics have realised, 'civil society' (in Eastern Europe at least) is a structure that can only lobby rather than engage with the power players, while applying to international donors for funding to support actions. Funding relies on being able to identify a subject group and claim it, paradoxically, as simultaneously homogenous and fixed, and 'diverse' and dynamic. NGO narratives walk the fine line between highlighting the vulnerability of the groups they claim rights for and promising a future, post-project, possible independence of these groups as the fixed identity they are funded to have.

Gay Pride Romania, therefore, needed to be able to mobilise enough gay and lesbian individuals prepared to be visible (and therefore targets of extreme violence) in order to secure funding for the event. For example, Romania's first Festival of Diversity – GayFest, 3-9 May, 2004, was a festival of gay films screened in Bucharest. The funding program supplied by the Romanian Government, the British Council, and the Goethe Institute included a Pride parade as part of the Diversity Week events, but Stefan Iancu, the organiser of the Diversity Festival, was quoted in *Ziarul* newspaper (Anon, 2004) as saying that the parade was cancelled because 'we didn't know if we could convince gay people to come out into the streets...they are too afraid of the repercussions (losing their jobs, shocking their parents etc).' This fear is not surprising considering the personal experiences of severe homophobia in everyday life amongst community members. In fact, one of the films screened as part of the festival was a documentary about the 2001 gay pride parade in Belgrade, Serbia, where protesters were violently attacked by nationalist extremists. Violent reprisals against non-hetero normative appearances are an everyday part of life in post-socialist Eastern Europe.

The Pride parade was not organised in Romania due to what 'gay people' thought. Rather, in 2004, donors assumed that self-identifying members of a united LGBT community would be the participants in a Gay Pride parade. Considering that Romanian extremists publicised their desire to physically attack 'homosexuals,' the larger question is clearly the injustice of 'civil society' expectations that social change is to be implemented by the victims of violence rather than through educating or punishing aggressors. Indeed, the funding and impetus for public events came under the civil society banner of 'diversity,' and it was

primarily NGO employed civil society activists who attended subsequent Gay Pride marches, regardless of their sexual orientation. This gap between the stated aim of the parade as a visibility of LGBT communities and the reality of LGBT supporters, who are in fact straight or without reason to fear repercussions for identifying in support of 'diversity,' highlights the danger that still accompanies being 'out' in Romania. Bloggers after the event, however, were primarily gay and lesbian identified.

GayFest Romania hits the streets

The mayor of Bucharest, Adriean Videanu, also understood the Diversity Parade to be a parade for LGBT individuals rather than 'civil society' when he refused the 2005 application for a public march. The Romanian Orthodox Church and affiliated neo-fascist student organisations such as *Noua Dreaptă* ("The New Right"), modelled on the fascist Iron Guard movement of the 1930s, also understood GayFest to be a parade of 'homosexuals,' and named their counter-parade 'Against Homosexuality – For Normality.'⁶ Following an international campaign by *Accept*, the intervention of Romanian President Traian Basescu and the Minister of Justice Monica Macovei enabled the 2005 parade to go ahead.⁷

Despite the massive social protest of Orthodox clergy and public scare campaigns with threats of violence from *Noua Dreaptă*, the state failed to provide adequate security or public order measures for the march. On May 29, 2005 approximately 300 people, predominantly civil society activists and groups of LGBT supporting individuals marched under the slogan 'I love who I want to love.' The genre – a peaceful march on an organised route that was a celebration rather than a protest - was new to all involved. Marchers were nervous and excited about what would happen, and the police, unprepared for the job of protecting the marchers from their attackers, displayed hostility to the marchers. The media circus intensified the confusion of the day, especially as many individuals who carried cameras were in fact sympathetic members or friends of the gay community who chose to keep a wary distance from the parade. Romanian Orthodox students of the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest and *Noua Dreaptă* physically intervened to stop the march as they had announced they would, and there were over 1000 violent protesters along the route throwing eggs, rocks and home made bombs at marchers from the sidelines.⁸

For members of the Lesbian and Gay community who chose to participate, it was an exciting and important event. The very fact that the parade took place was a significant creation of a new space for public protest, discussion and performance of identity in Romanian society, in the context of an international LGBT narrative of community. The march itself lasted half an hour, there were no public speeches, there was not an abundance of rainbow flags, costumes and masks, or any loud music or organised chanting.

Participants later recalled that they began to shout slogans in response to abusive taunts from spectators, such as 'No, shame on YOU!' to the common jeer of 'Shame!' (Miruna and Elena 2005). In addition, the fact that most marchers knew other people from the networked NGO scene reassured lesbian and gay identified participants. Despite the violence, gay participants such as artist and activist Vasile Muresan Murivale (in *Rumanien* 2005) believed that the event 'celebrated something extraordinary: being open and sincere in asking for our rights as homosexuals.' Miruna and Elena (2005) noted in their narrative of events that when they realised that 'a large number of the participants were there simply to show their solidarity, to support the idea of tolerance and the free expression of sexuality... this simple fact made us a little more relaxed.' The visibility of heterosexual couples with children and well known straight activists meant that individuals could march without being 'outed' simply by being there. Some marchers still covered their faces with masks and rainbow flags in order to prevent identification.

Ioana Contu (2005) blogged about the events of the day highlighting that participants in the parade were both afraid and excited.

There was something in the air already from the break of day...enthusiasm, anticipation, agitation, a little fear, some assumptions, questions, expectations, tensions... a little more fear... No one really realized if they were prepared for it, neither us (the participants) nor them (the spectators).

The closer you got to Unity Square, and as soon as a crowd of people gathered around a car covered in a rainbow flag became visible in the distance, you could hear the comments from some people: 'Those are all fags?! Dude, there's so many of them.' It is true, there were many of us there, and we were of all kinds: gay or not, smiling or not, Romanian speakers or not, extravagant or not, some wearing t-shirts with 'no one knows I'm gay,' others with whistles, rainbow flags and stickers with 'GayFest 2005,' some with families, children, dogs, others alone, some afraid ... we were all there and we could each say 'These people are gay and I am with them!' - and this made us all feel free.

Miruna and Elena (2005) blogged about what happened after the police concluded the march by simply announcing via megaphone that 'the march is closed! Please circulate!'

You could see the disorientation of the participants, for whom it was obvious that the march had ended much too soon. We kept filming until a policeman yelled to stop, angry because he thought we had focused in on him. He threatened to confiscate the camera, so we took off in a hurry, along some small side streets, where, surprise! We were approached by a group of locals gathered around a grocery store, who asked: 'Are you lesbians?' We answered defensively: 'No, do we look as if we are?' We told them that we were impartial 'journalists' and asked them what they thought of the march. Their opinion ... you don't want to know! ...

It is thus evident that there were strategically (non)self-identifying lesbians who did not experience the pride event as a safe space for being visible as such – they pretended to be journalists and continued to use developed strategies for avoiding attack – denying their sexuality and referring to their 'normal' female bodies as evidence of heteronormative practice. They described the tension, the unsmiling as well as the smiling faces, of the

participants; but they also celebrated the event as a positive and important step. The ways that participants articulate the reasons for and value of the parade tell us something important about how members of the LGBT community understand the events. Ioana Contu (2005), an LGBT activist, traced the general confusion about the purpose of the march in her blog.

They (*non-marchers*) still did not understand 'why?' The media did not seem to understand much either... even though the media was in the best position to explain a few things to the protestors. The overwhelming numbers of members of the press who photographed us relentlessly, as if we were on some red carpet, were driven by a blind desire for the sensational and did not really comprehend anything about the atmosphere or the motives of the parade, and I don't think they were very interested in understanding 'why?' Maybe it was because they were too preoccupied with documenting the conflict which they anticipated, and which probably left them disappointed because the magnitude was less than what they expected. The articles in the press all highlighted, with some focusing exclusively on, the 'conflict between the homosexuals and 'Noua Dreaptă.' Other articles continued to be baffled by the reasons 'why' - and not because they didn't understand the actual motives of the parade but because they were disgusted by the fact that we dared to bring our homosexuality out of the 'bedroom' and 'parade it in front of their windows.'

And, in fact, that is exactly what we did ... we walked out into the centre of public space, we made our homosexuality visible, we made a public manifestation of our 'right to love' ...WE WERE THERE BECAUSE WE WERE NO LONGER ASHAMED OR AFRAID TO SAY THAT WE ARE GAY...and that made us feel more free, more sure of ourselves, more happy, more loved, and better people. No one can take that back from us.

Marchers were invigorated by making homosexuality visible in public space, regardless of personal choices of participants to be 'out' as LGBT or not. This was an organised performance of courage and freedom to speak back to the people screaming 'shame'. The fact that pride was enacted in an environment where LGBT individuals were still afraid of being identified as such made the performance of retort and united resistance in public space a striking event for participants.

In 2006 the Orthodox Church publicly denounced the Romanian government for permitting GayFest to take place, and *Noua Dreaptă* failed in an attempt to stop the parade in the courts. The Court of Bucharest, however, awarded the anti-homosexuality marchers a permit to hold their own parade through central Bucharest just hours before GayFest. *Noua Dreaptă* protesters carried posters depicting iconic 'homosexual' practices, providing the most graphic sexual imagery of either events.⁹ The media and civil society sector widely considered this a test of political readiness for integration in the European Union, or, more specifically, a test of how European values of 'tolerance' would be enacted in the name of the Romanian state. By allowing *Noua Dreaptă* a protest, and by failing to implement legislation against the public display of fascist symbols, the court and state sanctioned the performance of these symbols on a historically meaningful route through the centre of Bucharest.¹⁰

Different spaces for different publics

The GayFest parade has been assigned to a route in the ‘new’ part of Bucharest since it began in 2005, a space that primarily signifies the erasure of pre-socialist society under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu. The anti-GayFest march, which named itself the March of Normality, parades on the route that the fascist Iron Guard movement used for popular public rallies in the 1930s. Departing and returning to the Patriarchy of the Orthodox Church for sermons on the threat of homosexuality to the Romanian family, the Normality March route traced Calea Victoriei, passing the major sites of the 1989 anti-communist revolution. Compared with the GayFest route through ‘communist’ apartment blocks of the 1980s, the Normality March route through historic Bucharest inscribed the claims of the participants in public space: that Romanian heritage is threatened by new external ideologies and ‘values.’ In the rhetoric of the Normality March the European Union, representing neo-liberalism from the West, replaces godless Communism from the East as threat to ‘Romanian values.’

The violent protesters at the GayFest march in 2006 were clearly not spontaneous or unexpected –the attackers themselves had announced they would attend. The *Noua Dreaptă* parade included Orthodox priests and nuns carrying icons and uniformed members carrying neo-fascist symbols and anti-homosexuality posters. Many of the fascist marchers then attacked the GayFest parade and 51 anti-GayFest protesters were arrested and fined for provoking violence (Human Rights First 2007).

Despite the protesters, participants in GayFest 2006 recounted that there was a more relaxed atmosphere the second time around; there was music, and the police were not hostile towards the marchers. As the *Accept* press statement reported, however, ‘after the closing of the march six youths, amongst whom were two citizens of the European Union, were verbally and physically assaulted in the subway. The attackers shouted ‘Faggots, go to Holland’ as they bestially beat the youths’ (Accept 2006).¹¹ The severity of this violence thus influenced how members of the LGBT community blogged about the parade in the following days, and stimulated discussion about how fears and experiences of violence affected individuals and the gay community. The violence that participants experienced was reconfigured as a baptism of fire by some and used to articulate divisions within the community between those who watched the parade from the sidelines or from home, and those who had paraded.

One participant (Valy 2006) blogged about the hatred of the *Noua Dreaptă* and Orthodox Church protesters and continued that

similarly toxic are the inhumane reactions of the faggots (which is what we call the homosexuals who stand on the margins and dare to judge those who have the courage and honour to recognise that they are gay, lesbian, transsexual and bisexual) who splatter with the mud of cowardice those on their left and right.

I'm a realist, I don't think ALL those who are different will find the courage to come to a march like this. Everyone finds their own place in the rhythm and will come to the community when the time is right for them. But the jealousy of those who came and felt good about themselves (is expressed when they say) 'how good that I didn't go, it was dangerous.'

This is an incalculable cowardice.

Sure people were bashed up in the metro, and seriously, but what is most disgusting is that no one intervened when the group from the march was beaten. In the end, after those who had been beaten got up, one of them found the great power to be sarcastic to the people in the wagon and thank them for their help.

This blogger actively identifies courage and honour in the behaviour of LGBT march participants and victims of violence, insulting those who do not participate as cowards. Of course this is just one of the reconfigurations of the effects of violence after the incident, and in the context of the march being judged a success by organisers and participants alike on the basis that no one was physically harmed in the actual parade. I support the recommendations of the US Department of State (2008: 4) report that Romanian government officials need to 'ensure that LGBT people can enjoy their rights in an environment that is not dominated by fear, violence and homophobia.' And of course individuals suffer greatly from the trauma of violent incidents at Gay Pride parades, as Sanja Kajinić (2003) has shown. But let us remember that LGBT identified individuals in Bucharest live with constant fear of attack in public space based on personal experience, and recall that the value of GayFest was articulated by many as a moment when it was safe and possible to claim a group identity in public space – face-to-face with protesters. In the above account of the 2006 violent bashing in the subway, it was the fact that the victims spoke back to the hostile bystanders that made it a story of survival and resistance rather than yet another proscriptive example of homophobic violence in Romanian public space.

The GayFests of 2005 and 2006 were moments when the state-sanctioned and popular violence of Romanian society against LGBT individuals was performed in public space and the LGBT identified community spoke back to this violence. The parade functioned as a space of communication in which the LGBT community chose peaceful visible protest as their language of communication in line with the non-violent human rights discourse of Europe. Anti-GayFest protesters used physical violence and the Romanian state did not provide adequate police protection or offence to prevent this occurring. In 2007, however, the Romanian state not only again failed to prevent the use of physical violence by anti-

GayFest protesters, but also limited the ability of GayFest marchers to respond through visibility or enunciation to their attackers.

'Diversity' versus 'normality' in EUropean Romania

Romania was admitted to the European Union in 2007, and EU funding for redevelopment in state institutions such as the police force increased with the expectation that they would perform to EUropean standards.¹² During the week leading up to the parade, the LGBT and civil society activist communities anxiously looked for signs as to how violent the events might become. Pre-march omens were ambiguous. Two men were severely beaten exiting a cinema where one of the gay film festival screenings took place, and yet two Romanian women who appeared on a mainstream television show to talk about being lesbians did not receive any physical threats. The slogan of GayFest 2007, the first year with Romania as an EU member country, was 'Celebrate diversity! Respect rights!' The Bucharest Local Government again granted *Noua Dreaptă* permission to march on the more central route through Bucharest a few hours before the GayFest Parade, under the name 'Normality March.' The media predictably pedalled the two parades as 'diversity versus normality,' echoing the popular post-accession discourse of EUrope as an external force in traditional Romania, bringing 'foreign' concepts such as 'diversity' into 'normal' Romanian society.

Due to heavy rain and the violent incidents of 2006 and the previous week, only about 400 people of the expected 1000 arrived to march with the GayFest parade. For the first time the event began with speeches by the Romanian vice-president of ACCEPT Florin Buhuceanu, Dianne Fisher, an American Lesbian Elder with the Metropolitan Community Churches Canada, the director of ILGA Europe, and the co-ordinator of Stuttgart Gay Pride.¹³ While police had accompanied the *Noua Dreaptă* protest in the morning, it was at GayFest that the Romanian government showcased the security forces. More than 800 regular, military and riot police were in attendance, on horseback, with dogs, and backed up with water canon trucks and military equipment.¹⁴ For those who were curious how EUropean 'diversity' would be incorporated into Romanian social space, the answer was clear: cordoned and corralled into an isolated and 'protected' space. Maxim Anmeghichean (2007) ILGA-Europe's Programme Director described the event on the ILGA country-by-country news website

The march itself started at 17:00, and some 400 participants took part, LGBT and their supporters, protected by some 800 policemen. The police did a very professional work (sic), and being in the march one could only hear incidents and not see them. The participants were guarded by tall iron police trucks on one side, which, being literally half a meter behind each other formed a protection fence, behind which most of the violence

occurred. And hundreds of policemen stood on the other side of the march, also forming a live fence of protection.¹⁵

GayFest was given an entire half of the boulevard, traffic was redirected, and the borders of the marching space were the police trucks on one side and the wide nature strip (for the media and those with cameras running alongside the march) and traffic on the other. Although before the event there was informal assurance from organisers that police would go ahead and investigate any open windows in apartment blocks along the route, in the event, eggs and garbage were thrown at the marchers from above, and smoke bombs were lobbed into the parade from the margins. While the aforementioned ILGA representative considered the police cordon a success, other marchers reflected on the effects of enclosing the parade in a heavily policed space with more ambivalence. As one participant (Elena 2007) wrote in her blog:

I can't talk about violent incidents cos I didn't see anything important, only people running on the margins of the parade and the police accelerating after them with tear gas at a certain moment...the people outside the march saw much more. My sister said it was an atmosphere of hatred and violence. Amongst us it was an atmosphere not as electric as last year...tension rose as we approached Izvor Park as usual, where the parade ends. Everyone began to organise, to call friends with cars and taxis. The transvestites had been evacuated from the march (by van) earlier, at the suggestion of the police, because the biggest dangers for them were in Izvor Park...my sister picked me up because I didn't want to take the subway where people were violently beaten after last year's parade. Later, at 9pm, a friend with a GayFest badge on her shirt was beaten and insulted on the metro.

And a participant (Namolosanu 2007) who posted his photographs on *FlickrR* accompanied them with this summary:

So this is what happened in a few words: gays marched for their rights. No gay was injured in the march. Police took care of the indignant and angry people. There were so many troops and so much police that I started asking myself if this wasn't the PoliceFest ☺ I guess there were like 20-30 police-soldiers at a single gay so 30-1. It looked more like a revolution. People threw bricks, eggs, garbage bags from balconies and police responded with smoke grenades. But civilians and police troops weren't the only ones fighting, photographers also 'fought' between them for the best shots and angles. To sum up, GayFest meant few gays and a lot of police, photographers, cameras and angry people.

This is not a discussion of whether there were too few or too many police at GayFest, but of how the spatial configurations of police presence framed the event. If we read the parade as an inscription of diversity in Romanian public space, then we can conclude that diversity is contained in opposition to the parade of normality through city spaces with less protection and more visibility. Those who marched in the GayFest parade were the objects of physical violence and they were physically forced out of visibility in the name of protection – the parade was visible as the containment of European 'diversity.' Knowing as we do that at previous marches individuals accustomed to fear in public space found

'freedom' in speaking back to protesters, then being prevented from speaking back to violence, or even seeing one's attackers, highlights the degree to which the 2007 Romanian government relied on preventing communication as the implementation of 'tolerance.' As Wendy Brown (2006: 96-99) discusses at length, the state bestows tolerance on gay subjects on the condition that they remain invisible in the public sphere. In 2007, the Romanian state used non-violent tolerance as the discursive rationalisation to physically prevent GayFest marchers from responding to anti-GayFest protesters who violently attacked them from the sphere of non-corralled public space. The Romanian state claimed it was acting in the name of Romanian adherence to EUropean values of freedom of expression, and the rights of LGBT citizens to trans-national state protection when they planned the police presence. This throws into stark relief the ways that the rhetoric of non-violence in democratic EUrope can be used as a form of violent containment.

The bind for those participating in the march is that they themselves had demanded that the state protect them from physical violence, thus interpellating them as EUropean citizens. In effect they were radically treated as such, provided with 'too much' state protection. How can one find the language to interrogate the violence inherent in these new structures of the tolerant, paternal, EUropean state? Participants in the parade mostly come from a long history of activism in the civil society sector, and they are used to working in the gaps between stated rights and the ways they are enacted or able to be claimed. The state actions at GayFest 2007 fulfilled EUropean ideals, both in terms of a supposedly non-violent Pride Parade, and in terms of creating a minority/LGBT community as a political identity/community. The event was a success according to the international LGBT movement and to EUropean legislation (despite the failure of the Romanian police to prosecute the display of fascist symbols or the violent attackers of 2006). Yet the state actions clearly signify the violent containment of a minority and support for 'normal' fascist violence, albeit under the new EUropean names of tolerance and protection.

***Antifa* and the EUropean Empire's new clothes**

On the same day as the GayFest parade, a group of about 30 young masked protesters confronted the marchers in the Normality Parade. Dressed in black, holding posters saying 'All different, All equal,' these youths physically seized the banners of *Noua Dreaptă* marchers and shouted at them in the streets. Television programs were interrupted with live scenes of the incident from the very centre of the city around University Square, the space where the anti-communist protesters gathered in 1989. Channel surfing via the internet from my office in Melbourne, it was clear that reporters and commentators alike had no idea who the black-clad protesters were, and some reporters were even shown

asking the youths if they were Greenpeace or a breakaway neo-fascist group as the police violently arrested them and forced them into police vehicles. The cameras honed in on the petite women with black bandanas covering their faces, and the footage was aired over and over throughout the afternoon. It was exhilarating to watch young women and men with the courage to simply walk up to fascists and take their banners out of their hands.¹⁶ The fascists were too shocked to retaliate. Some individuals who identified as LGBorT and knew the participants in this protest decided to avoid the GayFest parade for fear of reprisal violence, while many of the GayFest marchers that afternoon remained as confused about the protesters in black as the media was.

As the protesters themselves wrote in their online statements of responsibility for the protest over the next days, they were a conglomerate of small *Antifa* groups from various Romanian cities.¹⁷ They communicate through a dense network of internet sites including MySpace, Facebook and Indymedia and through international anti-globalisation groups and social movements. These groups share a declared obligation to 'struggle against fascism,' and are closely aligned with the DIY punk political music scene in Romania.¹⁸ The manifesto of the anti-Normality protest movement is a document that deserves quoting at length here. It highlights the youthfulness of this movement and a new approach to how the European human rights discourse functions in Romanian society to contain identity movements seeking freedom even as it claims to liberate 'minority' subjects.

The media doesn't understand we are an 'informal network of groups.' The people in the Romanian press haven't heard of informal networks of action or grassroots activity or, pure and simply in the chase for sensational, spectacular and scandalous news, they can no longer believe that the 'public' can do something, can organise, can express themselves, take to the streets and have something to say...That's how you should understand that we bring 'punks, Roma and homosexuals' to the march.

We don't want 'multiculturalism' and 'diversity' to become a fashion as has happened in some western countries, becoming a kind of trump card in social life to say you 'know' about colour or different sexual orientations. And we don't like discrimination in any sense of the word, such as 'social discrimination.' We are convinced that discrimination doesn't benefit anyone that equality is more precious than anything and that no one can live in a world that is authoritarian, homophobic, sexist, racist or anti-Semitic, we believe that direct action against all forms of fascism is obligatory.

The 'normality' promoted by some is not our normality. No one can impose this 'normality' as being the most 'authentic'.¹⁹

Firstly, as Judith Butler (2008: 68) recently argued, we can understand 'the public exercise (of demanding freedom) as enacting the freedom it posits, and positing what is not yet there.' The *Antifa* manifesto picks up on the basic fact that 'civil society' contains the very groups that it requires to identify themselves in the name of 'rights,' and organises a grassroots public movement that protests as citizens against the inability of citizens to exist free of fascist policing sanctioned by state values. The *Antifa* protesters also refuse

categories such as 'diversity' and thus reject the liberal discourse that wants an identity politics claiming inherently minority subjects who are protected and segregated from state and society. The *Antifa* protesters refuse existing LGBT and racial categories of identification; they are the pioneers, in public and virtual space, of a self-named 'queer' movement in Romania. This is just one example of the ways that 'queer' can be used as a concept to reject claims to an inherently stable sexual identity and to refute the demand that subjects state their sexual identity in the normative binaries, or variations thereof.

The *Antifa* protest against Normality showed that it is possible to have direct action against state sanctioned and socially supported violence in Romania. The action in public space threw into stark contrast the containment that the 'Diversity/gay pride' marchers faced by claiming their identity and rights within the European human rights civil society model. Yet this new social movement generates its identity in virtual space, and thus faces its own limitations in the technological medium and its control – manifesting Žižek's (2008) question of how to read the violent structures of global capitalism when Bill Gates, amongst others, justifies the 'necessary evils' of his capitalist virtual monopolies by funding civil society. The internet plays a crucial role in the systemic violence that relies on combating 'subjective violence' and direct violence in the capitalist liberal democracies of today and we need to ask to what extent resistance can travel through mediums of a broader oppression.

The *Antifa* protest was amongst the first of actions from a new generation, too young to have lived through the everyday fear and self-policing of Ceaușescu's socialist state and the subsequent bitterness at universal utopian ideals betrayed. This group came of age with the quotidian duplicity of performing European identity and scoffing at the impotence of legislative change without social change, and they are unashamedly interested in collaborative social revolution. In conversations with some of the participants of the *Antifa* movement and the punk scene in Bucharest in December 2007, I had a chance to get to know some activists better. Many are in their early 20s and are university undergraduate students. I met young women who were critical and verbal about masculinity being performed as violence within the punk scene, about how punk music can encode misogyny, homophobia and nationalism in music. They are 'queer' in that they refuse 'labels' of feminism and Gay Pride; yet they present themselves as sexual and political identities primarily in the virtual world with limited experience in 'real' space with 'real' people, and come across as young people on that anxious threshold of experimenting with embodied sexual and gendered identities. Savvy and critical of transnational communication and theoretical approach, it struck me that this new generation is yet to find its way to the courageous question of when it can be effective to claim a recognised community identity in public space such as 'gay' or 'lesbian.' Yet they, like my generation

before, are all eyes and ears to learn from those experiences they reject at the moment. Their courage in attacking neo-fascist organizations is beautiful, the kind of courage one has before one is beaten up for 'being' a 'punk, Roma or homosexual;' clothes can be taken off, a skin colour less easily, and you don't have to be gay to be beaten as a 'homosexual,' you just have to be at the wrong parade.²⁰

A concluding overview

The first three GayFest marches in Romania thus manifest how European discourses of human rights are being claimed, refuted and controlled in contemporary Romania. The prerogatives of the state were writ large in the face-to-face violence of the first marches; those claiming 'normality' wielded a language of violence against the LGBT community, who shouted back as a united public political identity. In 2007, the structural violence of adopted European 'human rights' discourses was performed by the Romanian state as it facilitated homophobic violence while physically containing the LGBT marchers from seeing or being seen. These events physically enacted the tolerance that the Romanian state bestows on European LGBT identity; as an out-of-sight subject that may claim legislative rights as individual citizen subjects, but will not be tolerated in public space. In the grand performance of European diversity versus Romanian normality, *Antifa's* direct physical action signposts the gap between what the system claims to provide, how it enacts provision, and what it thus fails to provide. The actors are those unschooled in the slippery rhetoric of both socialist society and post-socialist 'civil society,' and thus able to decry the nakedness of the new emperor.

¹ I primarily use web-posted blogs, media sources and reports as sources for this article, a veritable archive of queer community politics and performance in Romania. Having been actively engaged with the Romanian feminist and queer communities for a decade now, this work manifests my desire to record the dynamic and courageous battles for freedom of expression that are daily fought in post-socialist Europe. The arguments I make in this paper with written sources have been developed and sounded out with friends and participants in the events discussed through many informal discussions over the years.

² The United Nations Development Programme is 'the UN's global development network,' and the PHARE programme was originally created by the European Union as 'Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies', later expanded to Romania and other post-socialist countries.

³ This was a standard across post-socialist Europe. In Albania the lack of a specific LGBT NGO resulted from international donors refusing to fund or organise NGOs where people refused to 'come out' as lesbian or gay. See Shannon Woodcock 'The Globalization of LGBT identities: Containment masquerading as salvation Or Why Lesbians Have less Fun' in Mihaela Frunză and Theodora-Eliza Văcărescu, *Gender and the (Post) 'East'/'West' Divide* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Limes, 2004) 171- 188.

⁴ See also *Cartea Neagră egalități de șanse între femei și bărbați în România* Edited by Ioana Borza, Laura Grünberg and Theodora-Eliza Văcărescu (Bucharest; Editura AnA 2006).

⁵ For information on the history of legislation against 'homosexuality' in Romania, see *Public Scandals: Sexual Orientation and Criminal Law in Romania* A report by Human Rights Watch and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission New York (1998).

⁶ See http://www.nouadreapta.org/actiuni_prezentare.php?id=72. I claim an affiliation of the Church and *Noua Dreaptă* based on the fact that priests and nuns of the church attend the marches and events in their robes, and because the Church services at the end of the *Noua Dreaptă* parade preach anti-homosexuality and accept skinheads from *Noua Dreaptă* in the church-going community.

⁷ As Valeriu Nicolae notes the 'overwhelming majority of Romanian intellectuals and opinion makers were again either silent, finding excuses for such incidents, or openly against any type of gay rights.' Valeriu Nicolae 'Fourth arm of the state' in *Index on Censorship* 3 (2006) 97.

⁸ For information and images of GayPride 2005 see <http://www.accept-romania.ro/fest/fest05EN2txt1.htm>; <http://romania.indymedia.org/en/2005/06/851.shtml>; and the video posts at <http://www.youtube.com/user/daraptii>; accessed 14 May 2008.

⁹ See http://www.nouadreapta.org/actiuni_prezentare.php?id=110; accessed 14 May 2008.

¹⁰ According to the United States Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor *Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Romania 2007* (March 11, 2008) Romanian law prohibits the public display of fascist symbols (p.8) and authorities failed to enforce the April 2006 Law to combat Anti-Semitism against participants in the June 9 2006 anti-gay parade who used Nazi symbols and slogans (p.12). See <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100580.htm>; accessed 14 May 2008. The law prohibiting fascist organisations, fascist symbols and the promotion of the cult of personalities guilty of crimes against peace and humanity is Art. 4. OUG (Ordonanța de urgență a Guvernului) nr. 31/2002.

¹¹ Press statement 5 June 2006 'Marșul Diversității: Inca un pas spre toleranta' accessed at http://Accept-romania.ro/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=52&pop=1 ; accessed 14 May 2008. Note that the attackers identified homosexuality with Holland and Western Europe, not a Romanian practice. The victims of this well-reported attack provided photographs of the alleged aggressors when they filed their complaints with police in June 2006, the police did not initiate an investigation until April 2007, and there has been no conclusion yet. See *Romania: The Status of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights* Report of ACCEPT, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) and the European Region of the International Lesbian and gay Association (ILGA- Europe). February 2008, p.4 accessible on www.iglhrc.org and through www.Accept-romania.ro

¹² For details of international funding for the Romanian Police see www.politiaromana.ro; accessed 14 May 2008.

¹³ Note that these are the donors and organisers of the event. You can find the website of The website of the Metropolitan Community Churches Canada at <http://www.mccchurch.org>; accessed 14 May 2008.

¹⁴ See photos at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rombaer/> tagged as 'law enforcement' and 'gay pride 2007.' See a wonderful series of photos and narratives about the day by a self-identified 'straight male' American participant (I note this because he is the only narrator to say he was 'sadistically longing' for a confrontation with the protesters) at www.romerican.com/2007/06/14/gayfest-2007/; accessed 14 May 2008.

¹⁵ http://www.ilgaeurope.org/europe/guide/country_by_country/romania/bucharest_pride_2007; accessed 14 May 2008.

¹⁶ Photos that were previously available on blogs of the participants have since been deleted. These included <http://www.allcatsareblue.wordpress.com> ; accessed 11 June 2007.

¹⁷ These groups included LoveKills Collective, Initiativa Autonoma CAF, Initiativa Libertara and other Antifa and anarcho-punk groups from Ploiesti, Brasov, Craiova, Bucuresti and Timisoara. For more information search the internet for 'Antifa Romania.'

¹⁸ See *Antifa Romania* at www.myspace.com and follow his (yes, a gendered anti-hegemony identity) links to other affiliated websites.

¹⁹ Posted as a collection of manifestos on Indymedia under the category 'Diversi'

<http://romania.indymedia.org/ro/2006/11/1742.shtml>; accessed 14 May 2008.

²⁰ The rhetorical inclusion of Roma Romanians in their manifestos is a noteworthy effort at fighting racial segregation in Romania which pervades even civil society. The Antifa movement, however, remains predominantly ethnic Romanian, as with the LGBT scene.

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