

Transgender People in Lithuania or An Ethnography of Illegal Community

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the historicity of the transgender subject in post-socialist Lithuania through the ethnographic material based on the interviews with transgender people and LGBT activists.

First, it argues that under the workings of orientalism towards post-socialist Lithuania a liberal amnesia was imposed on transgender subject that presented it as a new neoliberal phenomenon.

Second, the thesis demonstrates that with the politicization of gay identity in Lithuania through the accession to the EU in 2004 and the formation of the LGBT identitarian movement onwards, transgender people in Lithuania were perceived as the “Other” within the LGBT community. Due to the intensified nationalist discourse that emphasized traditional gender roles and the perception that transgender people were on the very outskirts of this system, the LGBT community members and NGOs included the letter “T” in the acronym only discursively due to the perceived threat to constructed respectability as neoliberal gay subjects.

Third, the thesis sets the first gay pride parade in 2010 was a temporal marker in changing the perception of “normality” within society, suggesting that the understanding of what is normal should be based on human rights and individual freedoms, expression, equality and tolerance. The shift to the neoliberal Western discourse of civil rights opened the space for extension of representation of LGBT people and inclusion of transgender subject into the LGBT movement. As this shift did not question “traditional” gender roles, the transgender subject that was included in LGBT activism was a transsexual binary subject, which excluded more fluid gender identifications.

Finally, it shows that due to the dominance of the Western understanding of what a transgender community should be, based on the visibility and commodified practices of gay consumption, transgender people in Lithuania do not recognize the existence of their community. This thesis demonstrates that community exists and has a unique way of forming community through sharing information on illegal transition practices.

Declaration of Original Research and the Word Count

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 20552 words

Entire manuscript: 24118 words

Signed _____ (Jūratė Juškaitė)

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List of interviewees:

Transgender interviewees:

Rasa, 53 years old, identifies as a woman who went through a transsexual period;

Tadas, 21 years old, identifies as a man. Avoids identifying with the transgender spectrum, unless has to expose his body. In those situations, he calls himself a “transgender person”;

Matas, 28 years old, identifies as a man. Similarly as Tadas, does not identify with the transgender spectrum unless he cannot avoid that. However, Tadas is less reluctant to talk about himself as a transgender person;

Julius, 19 years old, identifies as a man, feels confused about the terminology and how much it is applicable to him;

Viltė, 21 years old, identifies as a transgender, non-binary person;

Arcana Femina, 27 years old, identifies as a transgender, non-binary person;

Lina, 18 years old, identifies as a trans woman. For her that means actively reflecting and including the history of her body changes into her life narrative;

Greta, 23 years old, identifies as a woman. Similarly as Lina, actively reflects and includes the history of her body changes into her life narrative;

Domas, 28 years old, identifies as a man, situationally, to politicize the question of transition, identifies as a trans man;

Simas, 21 years old, identifies as a man. Similarly as Rasa, considers his transsexuality to be a stage in his life;

Jay, 30 years old, author of this thesis, identifies as a transgender, non-binary person;

Other interviewees:

Tomas, 27 years old, a policy coordinator at the local LGBT rights NGO “LGL”, where he is responsible for creating and implementing a transgender rights policy;

Vladimir, 51 years old, executive director at the LGL;

Vilma, 34 years old, an educator and founder of the House for Diversity and Education;

Interviews that were conducted via email/ “Facebook” messages:

Raimondas, 43 years old, former activist and chairperson at the Tolerant Youth Association;

Oxious, founder and administrator of the gayline.lt;

Diana, 26 years old, a coordinator for volunteers at the LGL;

Lena, 53 years old, an administrator of the group for transvestites, transsexuals from male to female, and the members of their families in Russian (<https://groups.io/g/TGrus>);

Introduction

There is nothing even now, in these days. Back then, during the Soviet times probably there was nothing at all. It's interesting that things were happening in Russia. Even during these somber Soviet times. There was just nothing in Lithuania. (Rasa)

Eight years have passed since my last conversation with Rasa, one of the first Lithuanians to undergo a sex reassignment procedure. When we met in 2009, I was finishing journalism studies at Vilnius University. I interviewed Rasa for my final BA portfolio. The interview was more than depressing. Back then, Rasa had recently returned from Thailand, a country thousands of miles away from Lithuania, where she had undergone the risky and painful transition surgery all by herself. During the interview, she tried to smile with her eyes. At times, however her lips would quiver leaving me guessing if this was an expression of Rasa's physical pain or an attempt to keep herself together and withhold from me the despair and humiliation she had experienced. After our conversation, I felt terrible. The sensation that I might have something in common with her was overwhelmingly confusing. On the one hand, I never felt as a woman myself and thought that transsexualism was something that I should explore or at least consider. On the other hand, Rasa's conviction that she was a woman and had always been one, unsettled me. How can one be so sure about their gender and clear binary categories? If I do not feel as a woman, does this necessarily make me a man? The label "lesbian" seemed to provide me with more opportunities and back then I strongly identified with it. In 2009, two LGBT rights organizations operated in my native Lithuania. During the meetings at the Tolerant Youth Association (TYA) and the Lithuanian Gay League (LGL), people would passionately discuss and strategize how to make gays and lesbians appear normal and welcomed to the larger society. Conversations about transsexual people were uncommon. Transsexuals rarely came to these advocacy organizations, and even

if they would, the atmosphere was expressive enough to see the problems of gays and lesbians as a priority. Once these issues are resolved, we might work on this strange phenomenon, called transsexual people. I never saw Rasa in those meetings.

It is April 2017. Lithuania is the only EU country that has no legal gender reassignment procedure,¹ people still use hormones illegally and reach out to surgeons for “top surgeries.” Yet many things have changed since I last spoke with Rasa., When I ask her to define herself in terms of gender identity, I use the word “transgender” instead of “transsexual”. Just before I start recording, Rasa jokes that after all these years she feels like a “grandma” and doubts if she will be able to help me. She says here are young people who can tell me more, thus suggesting a sense of temporal continuity and the presence of a community of transgender individuals. I also changed. Now I identify as a transgender non-binary person and this helps me relate to Rasa. And yet, she stuns me. Several times during our interview she stresses that the “third sex” (Lith. – “trečioji lytis”)² has nothing to do with her and her former “condition” – transsexualism. She has no interest in the latter. As far as she is concerned, now she is a woman, as she was able to acquire woman’s identity documents through a court ruling. She just wants to live her life:

We should talk more about the normal people, not about those who strip for money.

About those who do what everybody else does – economists, IT specialists, engineers, etc. (Rasa)

I choose Rasa’s story to introduce this thesis for several reasons. Contrary to most of my interviewees, her story starts in late Soviet years and it continues after the fall of state socialism. As independent Lithuania and Central Eastern European (CEE) countries were

1 TGEU.org, “Trans Rights Europe Index 2016”, 1 July, 2016. Web. 9 May 2017.

2 Rasa makes a distinction between people who went through the “condition” of transsexuality and became the part of the binary gender system and those that do not see them in this binary system. The later ones she calls “third gender”.

“transitioning” from state socialism to neoliberal democracies, Rasa, too, experienced a transformation. Her body was at the center of changing discourses and regulations.

In this Master’s thesis, I will historicize the formation of transgender subject in Lithuania and chart it in relation to three broader contexts relevant to local LGBT community and human rights activism. These three contexts are as follows: the orientalizing of the post-socialist region; the reemergence of discourse around “traditional” gender roles in this region; and the development of identity politics promoting LGBT respectability as part of the new neoliberal order.

First, I will chart the discourse on transsexualism under state socialism to argue that Rasa’s sentiment about the Soviet times in terms of absence (“there was nothing at all”) is the result of two developments that resulted in Lithuania during the shift from state socialism to neoliberalism. In the 1990’s, new nation-state democracies redesigned themselves in accordance to a return of “traditional” gender roles, echoing the global system of identity politics and human rights. The post-socialist discourse around gender identity was possible only within a binary gender system. The politicization of gay identity, which started in 2004 with once local LGBT rights NGO’s adopting identity politics, established another landmark moment key to understanding the persistence of a narrative about the “backwardness” of socialist times for gender and sexuality expression. Initially, local LGBT movement regarded transgender individuals as inferior subjects to the community’s respectability in society at large. After the first Pride parade in Lithuania in 2010, inclusion of transgender people into the movement started. Its focus was advocacy efforts around the legalization of medical procedures required for transition. I will argue that the reasons for this rather narrow inclusion of transgender subjects were twofold: first, they resulted from a discourse around a binary gender system; and second, inclusion of transgender subjects

emerged with neoliberal logic increasingly shaping local NGO's and demanding a consolidated subject for its advocacy.

This thesis initiates scholarship on the formation of the transgender subject in Lithuania. The contextualization of the transgender subject within the LGBT movement in Lithuania also charts the history of this movement that no scholarship did to date.

Usage of the Term “Transgender”

I start by briefly describing the terminology used in this Master's Thesis and, specifically, my take on the term “transgender” as the main term in this work. The term “transgender” has multiple meanings and it has been adapted in different contexts. Western academic and activist discourses appropriated “transgender” as a signifier for diverse gender-variant practices and identities such as transsexuality, transvestism, intersex, gender queer, gender fucking, female and male drag, gender blending, and cross-dressing, to name a few (Stryker 2008). In some local contexts, this term has acquired additional meanings. For example, in South Africa, “transgender” refers to the “people whose gender does not match the sex category that they were placed into at birth and who therefore usually opt for medical intervention (hormone therapy and/or gender reassignment surgery) to align body with gender identity” (Husakouskaya 2012). I will use the term “transgender” as suggested by Hines, namely, as a “range of gender experiences, subjectivities and presentations that fall across, between or beyond stable categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’” (Hines 2010, 1). I make this choice with certain exceptions. As this thesis demonstrates, the term “transsexual” was used in Soviet medical discourses and in the independent Lithuania up until the end of the first decade of twenty-first century. Later the term “transgender” was introduced. As I demonstrate, this turn marked the LGBT community pursuit of making “transsexual” people more respectable and included in the LGBT movement. The word “transsexual” was perceived to have a negative connotation. Gradually, the word “transgender” started

signifying a broader spectrum of gender identities and people who identify as such are non-binary or transition from one gender to another. Therefore, I use the term “transgender” as an umbrella term both for the people who have fluid and less fluid gender identities. In this thesis I will also use the term “transsexual” where emphasis on medical procedures is important. I will also use the term “transsexual” to refer to gender expression practices under state socialism since scholarship available to me articulates a binary and medicalized understanding of gender back in those days.

Methodology and Scope of the Research

Oral history as a methodology has been instrumental to researchers working on histories of queer/LGBT communities. For example, when George Chauncey started working on his ethnography “Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940” the most important source of evidence concerning the internal workings of the gay world was oral history (Chauncey 1994, 177). When scarcity of print resources is an issue, as in my case the only sources about the recent past of queers/LGBTs individual are the non-heteronormative people themselves. Therefore, in this thesis I will rely on feminist methodologies that emerged from the recognition that the lives of women were neglected and that the oral history offered means of including women into historical scholarship (Sangster 1994, 5). Drawing on feminist oral history practices, queer methodologies emerged to make room for the history of neglected queers. I recognize that the queer subject is unique in its positionality and poses multiple question for oral history, as its object – history of sex, sexuality and desire – have a unique relationship to self-disclosure and, thus, to oral history methods (Boyd 2008, 178). Moreover, queer theory’s reliance on the oral history means that a historian is dependent on the self-knowing of narrators and at the same time it requires transparent subjectivity - that is, that historians can somehow come to know these “selves” through their self-descriptions (Ibid., 180). It becomes especially important acknowledge this,

as this thesis includes the personal narratives of the author as an member of the transgender community, which historicity is the object of this thesis. It is also important to acknowledge that the oral history method also finds itself in the heated territory of identity politics vs. queer politics: for the narrators that tell their life stories it is nearly impossible to remove themselves from the discursive practices that create stable subject positions and use a language that is outside the parameters of modern sexual identities. Following Boyd's suggestion that in oral accounts of queer history the speaking subject does not necessarily become transparent, I will interpret the stories told by my interviewees as texts open to interpretation, and their disclosures will be understood as part of a larger process of reiteration, where identities are constantly reconstituted (Boyd 2008, 179-180).

This qualitative research is based on 10 semi-structured interviews with transgender individuals who live in Lithuania and whose gender experiences and identifications fall across, between or beyond stable categories of "man" and "woman". The interviewees fall across a broad spectrum of transgender identifications: three of them identify as non-binary, seven of them identify as binary individuals ranging from those treating transsexuality as a temporal stage (two interviewees), to those identifying with gender that was not assigned at their birth, yet all of them address transition of their life and identities (see the List of Interviewees). Most of my interviewees are somewhat active in the Lithuanian transgender community – they actively participate in the "Facebook" group "Trans* Pica" (Lith. "Trans* Pizza") or post about transgender issues on this social network. Only Rasa is relatively detached from these activities as I met her almost a decade ago when she went through her surgeries. Most of the names of my interviewees are changed in order to protect their privacy and not to put them in legally risky situation (many of them take hormones illegally or had "top surgeries" done which are illegal in Lithuania). In order to historicize of transgender identity in Lithuania and better understand the historical context in which transgender people

lived and developed their sense of selves, I interviewed three LGBT activists. Two of them are members of staff at the largest LGBT rights organization in Lithuania – LGL. My research is complemented with information I acquired through extensive exchange of emails with a transsexual activist from Moldova, who helped me map the discourse on transsexualism in CEE under state socialism. My research also includes reflections of several long-time LGBT activists involved in the Lithuanian community organizing between 2005 and 2010. And finally, this Master's thesis also relies on experiences and reflections of the author of this work who actively participated in the Lithuanian LGBT movement in 2005-2017, with an intermission between 2011 and 2014.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

Transgender Discourses in the Socialist and Post-Socialist Region

I start the theoretical framework of this thesis by relating to Rasa's introductory quote stating that "Back then, during the Soviet times probably there was nothing at all." Rasa's conviction that there was nothing "back then", as I demonstrate in the subchapter "Transsexual Discourses under State Socialism", is a sentiment shared even by some academics who research sexual politics in CEE countries. By presenting neglected scholarly work and information I was able to gather during my fieldwork, I argue for ample discourses around transsexualism in the Soviet times. The chapter "Orientalism in the Post-socialist Region" suggests orientalism towards and within CEE countries as a framework to explain this process of forgetting and its relation to the process of neoliberalization of CEE region. In the subchapter "Restructuring the CEE through 'Traditional' Gender Roles" I demonstrate how the reemergence of "traditional" gender roles necessitated historical amnesia as a part of the democratization of CEE countries. This chapter allows me to conceptualize the binary logic of the transgender movement in Lithuania in the ethnographic part of my thesis. Finally, in the chapter "Imagined LGBT communities" I explain how identity politics and its push for

normativity and respectability generated initial exclusion of transgender individuals from LGBT activism in Lithuania.

Transsexual Discourses Under State Socialism

In this subchapter, I briefly overview the developments of sexual politics in the Western countries (specifically the US) since the Anglo-American thought continues to dominate queer theory (Stella 2014) despite attempts at decentralizing it (Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011). I challenge the idea that while the transgender subject and movement based on this identity category evolved in the West no developments were socialist societies. The transgender movement in CEE countries started before the fall of state socialism.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term “transvestite” to refer to the wide range of gender-variant identities and. In contemporary Western contexts, the term “transgender” is used similarly to Hirschfeld’s idea of “transvestite.” The term “transsexualism” is often traced to Hirschfeld as well (citation). It refers to people experiencing a strong desire to change their sexual morphology in order to live as members of a different gender rather than the one assigned at birth (Stryker 2008). Contemporary definitions referring to the possibility of changing gender physically first appeared in 1950 in the work of American surgeon David O. Cauldwell under the title “Questions and Answers on the Sex Life and Sexual Problems of Trans-Sexuals (Solymár, Takács 2007, 145-6). Throughout the 1960-1980’s, medical articulation of the subject ranged from discussions about “abnormality” to later debates about the ways “patients” could be helped to treat this encompassed “condition” (Ibid.).

From the 1990s onwards, the concept of transsexuality was transformed by the emergence of the term “transgender.” It derived from Virginia Prince’s coinage of the term “transgenderist” in the 1970’s (Valentine 2007) or, as Sandy Stone puts it, “post-transsexual” (Stone 1991). With activism and scholarship of early 1990’s, the term “transgender” gained a new a

meaning, referring to an alternative to binary gender logic (Valentine 2007) and it relied “on post-modern queer theory that institutionalizes scepticism towards categories previously thought to be absolute” (Solymár, Takács 2007, 146). With transgender activists and scholars engaging in a discussion that tried to emphasize the distinction between homosexual and transgender subjectivities (Valentine 2007), a call for “transgender liberation” – a social movement based on this category – was issued by the American labor organizer Leslie Feinberg (Ibid.). The early 1990’s, thus, was the moment when collective and institutionalized category of transgender emerged (Ibid.).

As sexuality researchers from Poland Mizielińska and Kulpa claim, this rather linear movement from “transgenderist” to a spectrum of identities, encompassed by the term “transgender”, and a social movement that followed it, was not observed in the Soviet Union and the countries of CEE. After the fall of the “Iron Curtain”, the CEE countries unanimously adopted Western framework of human rights activism (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011, 14). Yet the emergence of transgender activism and its expansion in the post-socialist context was somewhat problematic. The letter ‘T’ was included into the homosexual activism from the very beginning. However, as Mizielińska and Kulpa argue, this was primarily a discursive invocation. Actual transgender activism did not began until 2007-2008. This belatedness might be one of the reasons for lack of scholarship on the lives of transgender individuals and the problems the group faces (Ibid.).

However, Mizielińska’s and Kulpa’s hypothesis that starts the countdown of “transgender” with the emergence of neoliberal democracies in the post-socialist space is questionable. Scholarship on transgender subjectivities in what now is CEE and Russia is scarce, but it challenges the widely accepted narrative of “transgender time” as something that started only under neoliberal democracies. For example, Havelková has established a much more expansive timeline in relation to the former Czechoslovakia. Using records of the

Czechoslovakian? Institute of Sexology, she found that medical recognition of transsexuality came early in the CEE region (citation) Havelková located “6 ‘patients’ that have the first records of a diagnosis of transsexuality in 1942”. The records also include ‘patients’ with this diagnosis in the later years. Havelková states that the “maximum of two patients a year would come to the institute between 1942 until the late 1960s.” The situation slightly changed after 1968. Havelková suggests this was likely due to political ease that followed the Prague Spring. The figures, however, stayed in the single digits. Even though Havelková was not able to locate the year of the first surgical sex reassignment procedure, she suggests that this might have taken place in the mid-1960’s. Drawing on the research of another Czech scholar Jahodová, Havelková argues that “while in the 1970’s surgical intervention was largely discouraged, in 1980s it started to be accepted as part of the ‘cure’ for transsexuality.” (Havelková 2015, 2-3). It is important to note that in her reconstruction of the medical and legal discourses under state socialism in Czechoslovakia, Havelková suggests that transsexuality was understood in purely gender binary terms, which meant that sex reassignment was an instrument for reconciliation „with the biological understanding of men and women as two sexes with natural roles and heterosexual orientation. The term “transgender” was introduced only after the collapse of the state socialism in Czechoslovakia. (Ibid.)

Academic literature on the experiences of transgender individuals and how their lives were treated in the Soviet Union is scarce. Rare mentions about transsexuals can be found in the sources that deal with homosexuality in the Soviet region. Essig (1999) mentions that in some cases women with same sex attractions were considered to be transsexual (wanting to become men). While there is no academic literature on transsexualism in the Soviet Union, there are journalistic accounts of the first sex reassignment surgery in the Soviet Union. It dates back to as 1972 and was performed by the Latvian surgeon Viktor Kalnberz. In published interviews

Kalnberz emphasizes that the surgery was performed with substantial medical knowledge. It was not as groundbreaking as it might appear from the first glance. By that time, the topic was discussed in medical circles. He also confirms that he was familiar with the fact that a similar surgery had taken place in Czechoslovakia and some information about it was available to him.³ Kalnberz's account suggests that by the time he performed the surgery, a discourse on transsexualism already existed in the Soviet region and CEE. My research supports these claims. During my field research for this Master's thesis, I interviewed Lena, a transgender rights activist from Moldova. Now based in Ukraine, Lena spent half of her life under the Soviet regime. The research she conducted in the late 1980's indicates that a discourse on transsexualism existed in Russia under the Soviet regime (especially in the 1950's and 1960's) and even as early as the nineteenth century. Lena provided me with a list of literature ranging from Russian translations of early sexologists such as Kraft-Ebing and accounts on degeneration by Russian authors (for instance, the 1899 "Degeneration and Rebirth" by P. I. Kovalevsky (Rus. Ковалевский П.И, "Вырождение и возрождение")). There are also references to transsexualism and hermaphroditism in medical journals by soviet doctors. The list of literature Lena has compiled consists of 666 references. Titles such as "Premature Sexual Development of Girls" and "Endocrine Diseases in Children and Adolescents" indicated that in Russia, like in Czechoslovakia, transsexualism was couched in sophisticated medical discourse.⁴

To sum up, valuable scholarship and primary materials indicate that "transgender time" under socialism started way before the collapse of the socialist system. Under the new neoliberal order, the discourse around the transgender subjectivities was perceived as new and presented itself as part of the capitalist order.

3 Gnedinskaya Anastasiya, "A Soviet doctor pioneered the first sex change operation", Mokskovsky Komsomolets, RBTH.COM, 20 January 2016. Web. 9 May

4 a dissertation thesis by Tumilovich (Rus. Тумилович Л.Г. "Преждевременное половое развитие девочек. Диссертация докт. Мед", 1970), by Sokolov (Rus. Соколов Дмитрий Дмитриевич, "Эндокринные заболевания у детей и подростков", 1957)

Orientalism in the Post-socialist Space

In the following subchapters I will discuss the frameworks within which the historicity of transgender category formed in Lithuania. I will begin with unpacking the term “orientalism” by explaining how it was employed towards Central Eastern Europe and where does it leave the region in relation to the West.

Orientalism is a reductive logic based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and the “Occident” (Said 1979, 2). Orientalism created essentialist cultural representations of subjects living in the Orient as “backward.” This differentiation justified the Western political and intellectual domination over the Orient as a civilizing project. Originally, Said located orientalism in relation to Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. His work has inspired scholars to examine Western ideas about Eastern Europe as another noteworthy version of orientalism., For example, Wolff has argued that in the age of Enlightenment Western Europe invented Eastern Europe as its complimentary other half. By appropriating to itself the new notion of civilization, the West discovered its complement within the same continent, in shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism (Wolff 1994, 4). Bakić-Hayden drew on Wolff’s analysis to suggest that there are internal gradations of the “Orient,” which she termed “nesting orientalism” (Bakić-Hayden 1995, 919). Based on the original dichotomy between the West and the East, Asia is more East than Eastern Europe. However, in relation to Eastern Europe, the Balkans are perceived as more Eastern (Ibid.), thus suggesting internal hierarchies within the region. The geopolitical realities of the Cold War era increased the division between the civilized “West” and its complimentary other “East.” This division did not dissolve with the revolutions that exploded across CEE countries since 1989 and marked the fall of state socialism. On the contrary, “shifts in collective identities and the meaning of ‘the Other’ have become a part of the post-socialist transformations in Europe” (Buchowski 2006, 464). Now, the backwardness of “the

Other” was measured by adaptability and willingness of various countries, authorities, social groups and individuals to embrace the free market and democracy of“(post)modern-Western-liberals” (Rorty 1991, 198-199 in Buchowski 2006). In the post-socialist Eastern Europe, the conflict between “us” and “them” was scaled down to actual social spaces (as opposed to Said’s imaginary Orient). “The Others” started living side by side with “us” and new binaries (communism and capitalism, civility and primitivism, elites and plebians) were constructed (Buchowski 2006, 466-7). Drawing on Poland’s example, Buchowski argues that in the elite discourses and scholarly analysis, the newly disenfranchised masses were perceived as inherently lazy, ignorant, and uncivilized. Instead of critically evaluating the flaws of the neoliberal system which replaced the previous political order and facilitated these developments, emerging disenfranchised subjects were blamed for failing to adapt to the new system (Ibid, 467-468).

To sum, the discursive hegemonic practices of the West constructed Eastern Europe as uncivilized, ahistorical and unable to change. This understanding continued into the post-Cold War era. The backwardness of the “East” was measured by its adaptability to the free market and Western democracy.

Sexual Politics in the CEE under the Guise of Orientalism

“Everything that will ever happen in post-socialist societies is going to be just an imitation of what has already happened in the West.” (Navickaitė 2015, 128)

Orientalizing discourses shaped the sexual politics of Central Eastern European several ways. First, often scholarship that sought to research sexualities in the post-socialist region reproduced the orientalizing paradigm portraying CEE and Russia as caught in temporal backwardness and in need to “catch up” with the more advanced West (Ibid, 121). “The West” remained the normative ideal of liberated sexuality and sexual politics (Ibid. 126).

Second, the “democratization” of the CEE region, as imagined by the West, imported the idea of “civil society.” What followed was the NGO-ization of human rights, requiring consolidated, recognizable and politically active social groups (Ghodsee 2004). “Western funding relies on identification of a subject group and claiming 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” (Woodcock 2011). As Woodcock argues discussing the case of Romania, the emergence of the neoliberal state and NGO politics in the region came with spaces for the exposure of LGBT identities, such as the GayFest Parades of 2005 and of 2006. In these events, the main actors were a small group of participants representing overwhelmingly white and middle-class members of emerging civil society and supportive of LGBT. Grassroots gay community actively refused to support the idea of parading under a sexual identity banner (Ibid.). The idea to come out under the LGBT categories that was developed in the Western context did not seem appealing for working class non-heteronormative Romanians who knew of the dangers of exposing one’s sexuality, such as possible conflicts in the streets. moreover, they often considered Western identities to be useless in their context, rendering them?

Third, democratization intensified homophobia in the CEE region. This has been demonstrated by Graaf (2010) in relation to Poland and this argument expands the work of several authors naming nationalism the root cause of homophobia in CEE (Waitt 2005, Verdery 1996). Graaf’s analysis demonstrates how the expansion of the European Union instrumentalized the “politicisation of homophobia.” In Poland, implementation of neoliberal policies as a precondition for joining the EU generated social anxieties and helped fuel nationalistic and conservative sentiments. Following the EU’s assistance in developing the

LGBT movement locally, right-wing populists were eager to capitalize on that. They directed resentment towards the LGBT population in Poland as the winners of the neoliberal system and Poland's Europeanization. As Kalb demonstrated (2014), opposition to Pride events in Poland by those who got socially disenfranchised during the country's neoliberalization was promoted as necessary resistance to neoliberal politics and internal orientalizing.

Kulpa and Mizielińska have suggested deconstructing the CEE and the West as separate and unitary categories to establish a more nuanced understanding of sexual politics in the CEE region (Kulpa, Mizielińska 2011). Historically, Western discourses have utilized sexual politics to claim the supposed 'backwardness' of the CEE region. Instead, we might look at the complexities that surround the LGBT politics in the region. To examine the LGBT activism in Poland and decenter traditional Western narrative, Mizielińska has introduced the term "geotemporal circumstance." The term refers to the fact that any activism, especially in the field of sexual and gender politics, was impossible before the fall of state socialism regimes in the CEE. In the post-socialist CEE LGBT identities are hybrid. In the West, the homophile movement of the 1950's and 1960's was followed by the identitarian politics of the 1970's and, subsequently, the politics of deconstruction in the 1990's. According to Mizielińska, the CEE region experienced no longitudinal narration and deconstruction of identities coincided with their construction (Mizielińska 2011, 91-95). As a result, the CEE is not as a "backwards" region, but rather an entity with distinct dynamics determined by historical and geopolitical circumstances. For example, McLellen (2011) has argued that in spite of censorship of public discussions of sexuality and limited opportunities to challenge traditional sexual norms and gender roles, socialist regime in East Germany did witness a sexual revolution. This is exemplified by wide availability of erotica, abortion services, and soaring numbers of divorces. Therefore, such attempts as Stella's (2014) repolitization of everyday practices of queer people and abandonment of Anglo-Saxonian idea of visibility as

the central practice in resistance to homonormativism, can more productive in understanding both the socialist and post-socialist practices of resistance.

To sum up, this subchapter demonstrates how the neoliberalization of the CEE region is couched in orientalizing understanding of the region as “backward” and how this has produced tensions both within the LGBT population and in respective societies at large. I argue that to better understand what constitutes practices of social and political LGBT resistance in the region, dominant normative Western discourses of sexual politics across the CEE countries should be abandoned.

Restructuring the CEE through Reintroduction of “Traditional” Gender Roles

In this section, I examine the reemergence of nationalism in CEE through reintroduces “traditional gender roles”, which was crucial in redesigning newly established democracies in the post-socialist region (Lobodzinska 1996). This redesign of post-socialist states influenced the transition of the discourse around transgender individuals in Lithuania. Transgender individuals transitioned from being considered as primarily medical subjects to those constituting marginal and freaky members of gender system. Scholarly literature on “transitional” period and its implications for gender system in Lithuania is scarce. I will rely on authors who theorized the “transition” in other post-socialist countries, particularly Poland. Poland’s proximity to Lithuania and the dominance of the Catholic church in its public life can illuminate how the discourse around “traditional” gender roles developed in Lithuania.

As (McClintock 1997) argued, women are key players in the discourses of nationalism. They are assigned to reproduce the nation, transmit national culture, and set the boundaries of the nation. Gal and Kligman (2000) argued that the collapse of socialism/Soviet Union led to the resurgence of the idea of the Nation, and nationalist ideology, in pretty much all the countries of CEE and suggested that questions of gender should be central in analyses of socialist and

post-socialist policies. State socialism turned women's movement into wage work as a key feature of socialism (Fodor 2003), which in reality meant providing services for the public sphere such as public dining rooms and state-sponsored childcare (De Soto 1993, 291). State policies allowed women to enter the workplace while maintaining certain independence. However, these policies did not address the gendered structure of the domestic sphere, in which gender relations remained unchanged (Einhorn 1993, 31). Socialist gender ideals which stressed women's ability to do any work (powerfully expressed in the widely circulated image of a woman-tractor driver), competed with the ideas of women's proper gender roles, such as mother-reproducer of "the nation" and homemaker (Wolchik 2000, 61). For many women this ambiguous structure of gender roles resulted in a "triple burden" of paid employment, housework, and political activity (Owczarzak 2009, 7). Meanwhile, men maintained "the most power, highest status, and best remunerated positions in all spheres of society" (Ashwin 2000: 12).

With the fall of state socialism and transition to neoliberal democracies, the reemergence of the "traditional gender roles" was observed throughout the post-socialist region (Lobodzinska 1996, 521). Often through pushing women out of the labor force (Ibid.) which was perceived as imposed by foreign—Soviet—rule (Keinz 2009, 40) different questions related to the gender roles were framed to be crucial in separation with the socialist past. It is also important to emphasize that with political restructuring of the post socialist region, religious identity emerged as an significant component of national identity. In Poland, where the Catholic church provided a platform for opposition to the soviet regime, particularly during Jeruzelski's rule (Buchowski 1994), the emergence of the new state meant inclusion of the Catholic values to the fabric of the nation. Essentializing ideas of gender difference were instrumentalized to support the conservative political regime and ideological domination (Niedermüller 1994, 29). Not surprisingly, as Keinz writes,

“although the dominant discourse on the ‘transition to democracy’ presents it as a ‘velvet revolution,’ as ‘the fall of the iron curtain,’ and indeed a process toward ‘normalcy,’ in activist women’s accounts the ‘transition’ from socialism to democracy usually appears as a narrative of loss.” (Keinz 2009, 40).

To sum up, the return to political “normalcy” meant loss of women’s rights and spread of restricted gender norms. These developments had a direct impact on binary articulations of gender identities and, subsequently, placement of transgender individuals outside of ideas of “normalcy.”

Imagined LGBT Communities

LGBT identities play a significant role in neoliberal and nationalist discourses alike. In this section I will briefly discuss the idea of “imagined communities” and relate it to the formation of identity politics across the CEE region. These politics, I argue, promote normative identity standards and exclude subjects who do not conform to them.

I would like to start with Anderson’s term “imagined communities”. It refers to community formations in which face-to-face contact is impossible and, as Anderson terms it, is imagined (Anderson 1983, 12). Anderson argues that such communities are imagined due to the fact that members of even the smallest nation will never meet most fellow nationals or will never know all of them. As Mosse (1985) has demonstrated, in modern European nationalism, imagination shaped ideas of sexual “respectability”, whereby respectable members of the nation were considered to be heterosexual and “properly” gendered individuals who reproduce in order to sustain the nation.

The juncture between the LGBT movement and the idea of the nation intensified with the rise of identity politics in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Ethnic model of the nation required consolidated identities in whose name the claims for civil rights could be made. As Patton suggests, on the one hand, identity politics served “as a useful strategy for extending

representation, both expanding the content of what might count as a subject and increasing channels of access to an already constituted polis and quickly became the principal means of staging political claims” (citation) On the other hand, she argues, consolidated identities exclude the prediscursive constituency and functions as a holograph for formation of an appropriate subject where “referents of identities are now less important than the capacity to look like an identity.” (Patton 1993, 161). Or in other words, the notion of a “gay” subject unified by common interests becomes “a disciplinary social force oppressive to large segments of the community in whose name it speaks” (Seidman 1993, 125).

I survey these aspects in the historical development of identity politics for two reasons. First, as was the case in the US homophile movement, identity politics often employed the politics of respectability within the LGBT movements (D’Emillio 1998). Clear boundaries were drawn between what ideas and acts were appropriate in the imagined LGBT community. As a result, radical critique was abandoned and conservative politics were embraced (advocating for the need to adjust to living in a homophobic society and adopt heterosexual societal and cultural mores). Some examples of the push for respectability include advocacy for same-sex couples’ right to adoption and same-sex marriage (Warner 1993). The second reason I survey identity politics is the juncture between the politics of respectability and neoliberalism. Duggan called this homonormativism, pointing out that the workings of the homonormative practices of the LGBT movements in the West sought “not to contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but uphold and sustain them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” thus rendering the LGBT population as the “vanguard of neoliberal transformation” (Duggan 2002, 179).

To sum up, this subchapter demonstrates how identity politics intersects with promotion of nationalist ideology and sets the normative standard for members of the imagined LGBT

community. This subchapter also shows politics of respectability and LGBT movements intersect. In the following ethnographic part of this thesis, this intersection will be important to account for expulsion of transgender individuals from LGBT activism in Lithuania

Chapter 2: Introduction to Ethnography: Mapping Community and the Lithuanian Political Realities

Early Saturday morning in the beginning of April 2017. I get out of bed reluctantly, get my morning coffee and try to make myself ready for “Trans_LT: Consultation with the Members of the Trans*⁵ Community” at the local LGBT rights organization LGL. Established in 1993, the acronym LGL used to read as the Lithuanian Gay League. In 2013, the association rebranded itself as the National LGBT rights organization LGL and started actively working on transgender issues. That early Saturday morning it was holding a meeting with the members of the transgender community in order to have a consultation before a meeting with the Lithuanian health minister. Being in Vilnius and doing my fieldwork for the thesis, I could not afford to miss it.

With the change of the governing parties in Lithuania in the fall of 2016, the new Prime Minister S. Skvernelis decided that his cabinet “cannot ignore the complaints for the violations of transgender rights from international organizations”⁶ and put the ministries for Health and Justice under obligation to draft a law until September 2017. The complaints and urgings to adopt a law that would legalize and regulate sex reassignment procedures in Lithuania were coming from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from 2014. Unsurprisingly enough, the enhanced supervision procedure from the Council of Europe was initiated seven years after the ruling in the case *L. vs. Lithuania*, with the local NGOs – the LGL and the Human Rights Monitoring Institute – putting this question into their agenda in

5 The LGL introduced the term “trans*”. The meaning this term will be explained later in the chapter “The Breakthrough or the year of 2012-2013: Pop Culture and the LGL’s Trans Advocacy Agenda.”

6 “Ar įveiksime abejingumą translyčių žmonių rūpesčiams?”. 15min.lt. As Postimees Grupp, 4 May 2017. Web. 9 May 2017.

2013, which was later followed by an exhausting advocacy with the Council of Europe. Hoping for a positive change in the political will, the LGL decided to invite transgender people to talk on what stance the organization should adopt when talking to the minister of health, to decide what is the minimum that the LGL should ask for and not to back off from that.

When I was approaching the LGL's office, still in a slightly grumpy mood, a group of seven people was smoking outside the building. When I joined them, I saw Tadas was coming from around a corner store with a celebratory cake from a nearby supermarket. On Friday, he had the first hearing in his case at the court. Together with the LGL, in January 2017 he had started a litigation in order to get his documents changed. Tadas, a 21-year-old student whom I knew for two years and whose transition I followed closely, was able to acquire the hormones and even top surgery in Lithuania illegally. Together with another trans guy who happens to be my friend as well – Matas (28 y/o) – he called all the private endocrinologist practitioners in Vilnius and found a doctor who prescribes them hormones illegally. With their transition on the way, Tadas and Matas sued the Ministry for Justice and sought to get their documents changed, arguing that their sex in the documents does not correspond how they look and how they feel socially.

With no legal sex reassignment procedure in Lithuania, a rather complicated and discriminatory practice for the change of the documents was formed through courts. In 2010, the District Court of Vilnius City acknowledged a right to change of documents for Rasa, a transgender woman who went to Thailand for a sex reassignment procedure at the end of 2008. Rasa was partially compensated for non-material damage and the local authorities were

obligated to change her documents⁷. However, the case set a rather strange precedent: since in the eyes of court, Rasa has “fully” transitioned – had hormone therapy, both top and bottom sex reassignment surgeries and lived as a woman – she was granted permission to the change of documents. This ruling meant that those who wanted to get their documents changed also had to go to a court and have a “full” transition, though the transition as such is not available in Lithuania and any practitioners who perform it risk losing their licenses. The complicated legal situation seemed to be changing: in Tadas’ case, the Ministry of Justice refused to pursue the case as it agreed that this finally needs to be regulated, which means that he will be able to change his documents soon, unless the ministry changes its position. Tadas couldn’t be happier. The ritual of smoking was a medium for all of us to express our joy and how proud we were of Tadas and Matas. Standing there with a cigarette in my hand I realized that my grumpiness, which was actually just an expression of anxiety, was about my positionality: two years ago, I participated in the LGL’s transgender visibility campaign where, together with two transsexual people, I came out publicly as transgender non-binary person in a video that was broadcast on all main Lithuanian TV stations. My little-thought-through decision to participate in the campaign became somewhat problematic both for me personally and from the perspective of activism: it turned out that the campaign specifically targeted the absence of sex reassignment procedures in Lithuania. Somehow this was not discussed before the video, and the petition that followed it, was released. All of a sudden, I became the face for the transsexual movement, as the media did not really care about the differences between “those” who were featured on the video. A question from a journalist who understood little about gender identities - “So, what are medical procedures that you need and the state does not provide to you?” – meant a long explanation in front of a camera, which would be cut out

7 Digrytė, Eglė. Transseksualės išgyvenimus teismas įvertino 30 tūkst. Lt. DELFI.LT. „Ekspress Grupp“, 6 Nov. 2009. Web. 9 May 2017.

in the final production anyway. The reporting would start with the part where I would try to explain what transsexuals are, which meant that I talked for them and in their name. After three interviews, I decided that I would not be able to put forward my agenda, so I declined all other requests. However, since then I have been unsure how the transgender community (especially those who identify as transsexual) might perceive me – as an insider who appeared on the first ever transgender visibility campaign or as somebody who violated the rule not to speak for them. At least for now, it seems that everybody here is rather friendly. We finish our cigarettes and go to the LGL's office.

The meeting seems to be of a high importance: along with Tomas, who is the LGL's Coordinator for the Politics of Human Rights, the head of the organization Vladimir Simonko is also present. He serves coffee for everybody and joins us for the meeting.

In the beginning, we are asked to take a badge that would indicate the pronoun that we prefer. When I am asked what pronoun I go by, it often feels that I am forced to think about something and define myself in terms that I was not aware of before. I perfectly understand that we live in a very gendered world; however, it always seemed to me that it is not about me, it is about other people. This feeling would even evoke comic situations: when people refer to me as a “woman”, I look around trying to find the object of this naming around me. However, in this setting it seems that it bears a highly symbolic meaning and that for everybody it is a rather easy task to choose their pronouns. I notice curious and confused looks when I put two badges on my chest that stand for “he” and for “she”. A badge with “they” was not available – though some people will use it, in Lithuanian it sounds rather strange. In this consultation with the transgender community, out of eight transgender people and five cis-gender men and women there is only one non-binary person. It is also strange for me to realize that this event did not attract many transgender women; in fact, there is only one transsexual woman, Greta, who seems to be quiet, though she keeps trying to catch my eye.

Tomas starts with his presentation where he talks about the legal situation in Lithuania and what is at stake at the meeting with the Minister of Health. He starts from the moment which seems to be perceived as foundational for the transgender community in Lithuania – the adoption of the new Lithuanian Civil Code in 2000. The Code operates in a highly symbolic space – it marked a breaking away from the socialist system and was considered to be the second most important legal document in Lithuania after its Constitution. For transgender people, the adoption meant that they came into existence legally – the Code foresaw a right to a “sex change”, which had to be realized through a separate law. The Government was liable to draft such law before January of 2003⁸; however, it was never implemented. In 2007, following this failure, the state of Lithuania lost the case *L. vs. Lithuania* at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The country was obliged to create a legal mechanism for medical sex reassignment procedure or to pay a compensation of 40 000 Eur for the citizen L. The state chose to compensate and change nothing legal-wise, which eventually resulted in Enhanced supervision procedure from the Council of Europe⁹. The historical background eventually brings us to the question of what the LGL should do today: the government seems to be determined or, at least, forced by external pressure to adopt at least some sort of regulation, which could enhance the situation of most people’s lives in this room, but there’s a stark realization that expectations should be somewhat managed – one can hardly expect the government to adopt a super trans-friendly and inclusive law. Tomas asks if the LGL should fight for removing the F.64 diagnosis (the F.64 is a code for the gender identity disorder in the International Classification of Disorders by the World Health Organization) from the future regulation as a precondition for any gender reassignment procedures. The audience seems to be confused and the talk slowly shifts to the question of compensation for hormones

8 Lietuvos Respublikos Civilinis kodeksas. Stat. 50.1E. 18 July 2000. Web. 9 May 2017.

9 BNS.lt. Motina dovanojo paauglei hormonus, kad pakeistų lytį: to laukė dvejus metus. DELFI.lt. „Ekspress Grupp“, 29 Sep. 2015. Web. 9 May 2017.

and surgeries. Matas and Tadas share their experiences about how much the treatment cost them and the prices for private consultations and blood tests. Greta says that it would be great if the hormones would become legal, so she would not have to worry about getting illegal prescriptions. After the exchange, Tomas tries to come back to the F.64 question. The head of the LGL, Vladimir, comments that he heard from some transgender people who went to state hospitals to get their F.64 that it is a painful and often very degrading procedure: hospitals call a consilium of doctors and they don't necessarily diagnose a gender identity disorder. If the F.64 requirement gets included in the new regulatory system, that could result in the formal existence of a procedure; however, the diagnosis and, therefore, medical services will not be available for those in need due to biases from the medical staff.

While it seems that nobody is really sure about the F.64 question and the discussion continues, pizza arrives. In this context, the pizza is highly symbolic. Back in 2014, when the LGL had its first meeting for the transgender community, the organization offered pizzas as a means to come together and overcome anxieties. After the meeting, a secret Facebook group called "Trans* Pizza" was created, where some seventy members share their experiences or watch what others are posting. This is the only Facebook group for transgender people that is active today and seems to be a sharing place for many people, even for those who have never been to the LGL's office and did not participate in their events or meetings. The LGL is continuing its tradition and offers pizzas again. The pizzas divert attention, and it seems to me that the meeting ends somewhat ambiguously: on the one hand people talked about the hormones and the need to compensate or at least make them available legally; however, I am not exactly sure if the group formulated a clear opinion about the F.64. We end the meeting there.

This introduction to the ethnographic part of the thesis gives an overview of the main developments in the transgender community in independent Lithuania, pointing out that the

LGL became the epicenter of transgender community in Lithuania, that the community is rather young and dominated by transsexual people and transsexual subject is the subject in whose name the LGL fights for civil rights.

Where Has the History Gone? The Foundational Myth of Transgender in Lithuania

In this chapter I will reconstruct the historicity of the transgender subject in Lithuania from Soviet times until the first pride parade in Lithuania in 2010. I will do so by analyzing the stories told by transgender people and LGBT activists. I will also rely on media articles that will help to locate certain LGBT community events in time and explain the context that surrounded them. In the first part of this chapter, “The Exoticism of the 90s, or Transgender People Becoming the Freaks”, I will argue that neoliberalization engulfed the orientalist discourse that was taking place in Lithuania after the collapse of the Soviet Union and imposed the liberal amnesia towards the past under state socialism (Buchowski 2006). By doing so, it pushed out the discourse on transsexuality that was developed in socialist states and resulted in the disjunction between discourse on transsexuality under socialism and the neoliberal order, by presenting transgender people as a product of neoliberal discourses. Due to the reemergence and domination of “traditional” gender roles as a way to overcome the Soviet project (Owczarzak 2009) in post-socialist CEE, the reemerged discourse on transgender questions presented transgender people as an exotic and unintelligible Other falling from the gender binary picture. In the second part of this chapter, “Internal “Other” Within Us: Transgender People in LGBT movement in 2004-2010”, I will argue that with the politicization of gay identity with the accession to the EU (Graaf 2010) and the formation of the LGBT identitarian movement, transgender people were perceived as the “Other” within it (Buchowski 2006). This perception was influenced by the strengthened “traditional” gender roles that pushed transgender people to the very outskirts of the gender system, but also due to the perceived respectability of the neoliberal gay subject (Mosse 1985, D’Emillio 1998),

which can be possibly included in the idea of nation through the neoliberal figure of a gay citizen-consumer (Duggan 2002).

The Exoticism of the 90s, or Transgender People Becoming the Freaks

While joining the EU, as Graaf (2010) argues, which promoted the LGBT movement, Lithuania as other EU candidates had to implement thorough democratization as a precondition for membership (Pads kocimaitė 2016). Thus, unsurprisingly, the right to a sex change appeared in the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania in 2000 that was emphasized in Tomas's presentation at the LGL. Promoted by the LGL, it was constructed as a special temporal marker in the history of the category of transgender in Lithuania. The different versions of this story became the foundational myth of "transgender" in Lithuania – at least for those transgender people who were born while the Soviet state was collapsing and the independent Lithuania was emerging. All my interviewees mention or even emphasize this date, except Rasa, who is 53 years old. With the lack of any research on transgender subjectivities in Lithuania, for Greta (23 y/o), a student in her last year of BA who also participated in the meeting at the LGL, the "foundational" year of 2001 became an echo of a "long" history of transgender people in Lithuania:

"I think that the idea of trans has been in Lithuania for quite long. The Constitution of 2001 (she mixes it up with the Civil Code -J. J.) already mentions that people have a right to change their sex". (Greta).

When I ask Lina (18 y/o), who is my youngest respondent, if she thinks that there is a transgender rights movement in Lithuania, to my surprise she also begins her narrative with early 2000's:

Two days ago, I searched all the articles online dating back from 2001. In the beginning, there was a law that foresaw the sex change procedures, but it got repealed.

Since then, the situation has not changed. The state would rather pay compensations than legalize something”. (Liza).

Though it seems that Lina’s perception of history is slightly inaccurate factually – the procedures for sex change were never legal in independent Lithuania and a law that would regulate it was never adopted – her understanding of how “it all started” is couched in the beginning of 2000s, similar to the LGL’s narrative. When I ask her if she ever heard about any organizations that work with and for transgender people, Lina hesitates for a moment and names the LGL, adding that she has never been there and that generally she thinks that all the organizations look for their own interests.

After transcribing the interview with Lina, I read this part several times, trying to understand what is so “catchy” for me here. On the one hand, for somebody like Lina who was born in 1999, her whole lifetime embodies important and often mind-blowing changes in her perception of who she is: as she told me during the interview, they ranged from a boy who dreams of being a beautiful blond to the actual transition, venturing to acquire hormones illegally and taking them on a daily basis with no medical supervision. For her, the state’s inability to go hand in hand with her changes must contrast starkly with her own experiences. However, it seems that the imagined brevity of transgender history in Lithuania, and its formation around 2000, comes across to Lina as a normalized discourse, which corresponds with her own findings online. For somebody who has no living experience of the “old times” without internet, the actual realization that the largest news websites in Lithuania appeared around the same time (1999 - 2000¹⁰) as the Civil Code was passed, and that online media did almost nothing to present the history of transgender people, does not really come to mind easily.

10 Delfi.lt. “Kas yra DELFI?” [What is DELFI?]. DELFI.lt. “Ekspress Grupp”, Web. 9 May 2017.

However, it seems that this rather recent marker is not a question of the generation of transgender people who recently came out of their age and are in their early twenties. Being thirty, and having this feeling that there are people who experience the same things that I used to experience in a very different way, I stop for a moment and ask myself the question that I asked all my interviewees – when did I find out myself that transgender people exist? What is the story line that I narrated for myself before I started writing this thesis? This question brings me to 2005, when I moved to Vilnius for my BA and was able to have relatively free access to the internet. Before that I would use internet in a small library of my home village, where privacy and anonymity was a luxury. With endless computerized spaces in the Vilnius university library, [gayline.lt](#) – the oldest and most popular website for LGBT people in Lithuania, which historically created little content of its own and mostly republished articles in the media, and is therefore a good chronological indicator of the processes that took place in Lithuania in different periods of time – became a page that I would read on a daily basis. It seemed to me that at some point, around 2009, information about transgender people appeared out nowhere. In 2009 alone, [gayline.lt](#) published ten articles about transgender people or transsexuals, whereas in 2008 there were seven, and in 2007 only three. One of those articles published in 2009 was mine. As a student of journalism, I had a very good reason to interview Rasa and have a conversation with her, which I mentioned in the very introduction of this thesis. The interview made it to the [DELFI.lt](#), which was and still is the most popular news website in Lithuania. I could not have been more proud of myself, yet the pride came out of the feeling that I had published an interview with somebody who symbolizes the progress of Lithuania. With a subject that never existed before in the public, but came into existence through me. My temporal marker for the transgender “revolution” was obviously not the year 2001, but rather 2009.

The picture gets even more complicated when I think of Rasa and what a hard time she had in remembering when she had learnt about gender identities that do not correspond to the bodies that we are born with. Only after I remind her of the fact that it was common in some contexts to call transsexual people “hermaphrodites”, she recalls her parents having a conversation about them and whispering, so she could not hear.

I might have heard something before 1998-99, but my real knowledge came when I joined this “Yahoo” conference in Russian for transsexual people. I learnt everything from there. (Rasa)

For memories that would go beyond the late 90s, I turn to the interview with Oxious, the founder and one of the administrators of gayline.lt:

In the beginning of the independence, there was this tabloid “50 kapeikų” (en. – “50 Kopeck”). They would write about different stuff, often sensational. This is where I read about transgender people for the first time. Back in Soviet times this information was not available. (Oxious).

Though Oxious has a different marker of the emergence of the transgender time in Lithuania, for him – similarly to Rasa, Lina, Greta and me – the neoliberalization and the democratization of Lithuania produced the transgender subject. In post-socialist CEE, where the neoliberal order is perceived as a marker of progress, as suggested by Buchowski (2006), active forgetting is taking place. This is especially evident in Rasa’s perception of the Soviet times. Even though after a while she found out that the discourse of transsexuality existed under state socialism, this does not get integrated into her personal narrative as a part of the historical process:

Even during the first years of independence, there wasn’t much information. Then in 1998-1999 as IT programmer I started using the internet and found out the “Yahoo”

conference that was called TG RU where I talked a lot with people, learnt most of the stuff about transitioning that I know now and the fact that even back in those somber times (Soviet Union – J.J.) there were surgeries performed. Just in Lithuania (Soviet Republic of Lithuania) there was nothing. Before I joined this conference maybe I knew something, but basically the information was not available. That’s how I lived...” (Rasa).

Rasa disappointedly says that “there is nothing even in these days”. The word “even” indicates a hierarchy between the Soviet times and the post-socialist, neoliberal Lithuania. It reveals a conviction that the neoliberal “now” is somehow better, as Lithuania broke away from the “somber” past; however, it also speaks to the perceived “backwardness” of now. The “now” is somewhere on the horizon: there is a standard, an idea of where Lithuania is supposed to be, yet it is not there. This understanding renders the country as a specific, essentialist place where time is still and people cannot change even in the presumably superior capitalist system, which is the dominant economic and cultural model of the Western Societies. Rasa’s quote reveals the workings of the orientalist discourses where Central Eastern Europe is understood as an ambiguous place, an “elsewhere” place, disassociated from the “inherent goodness” of Europe, which renders the latter as a coherent and self-contained in opposition to its neighbor in the East (Böröcz 2006).

However, despite the perceived disjunction between the Soviet past where there was nothing and the present time, where there is something, yet something unsatisfying, I argue that the disjunction did not happen fully. The way Rasa understands the question of transsexualism is very similar as it was understood under state socialism, as demonstrated by Havelková’s (2015) attempts to trace back the history of transsexual politics in Czechoslovakia, where the question was seen as a medical question and in strictly binary terms.

Transsexualism is something like a transitional stage. Once you go through the procedures, and become what you want to be, I see no point in talking about oneself as a transsexual. I know that some people identify themselves as the third sex. I don't need that. I have my female documents and I feel fine now." (Rasa).

I interpret Rasa position on gender identity variance as an outcome of the joining the TG Ru conference. In the interview Rasa emphasized several times that the information that she knows now comes from this conference, and suggests that the moderator Lena provided its members with the scientific literature on transsexualism. In correspondence with Lena, I find out that she not only tracked 666 references on gender identity variance in the literature available under the Soviet regime, but under the influence of this literature she started her transition in the 80s by taking illegally acquired hormones. Lena's introductory webpage, where she also directs me, shows me a picture of a woman who in her introduction says she is proud not to be recognized as a transsexual woman and proud to be fully capable of living as a woman.

In this, Rasa rejoins the Soviet discourse of transsexuality, even without the conscious recognition of it. I find this junction in Oxious' story as well. When talking about the tabloids, Oxious remembers that back then tabloids talked about such topics as homosexuality and, thus, opened the gate to the world that he did not know existed before that. He emphasizes that whereas homosexuality was portrayed as something exotic and was not very uncommon in the tabloids, transsexuality would not appear that often – the understanding of it was couched in sophisticated medical language, and thus was not very appealing for the tabloid audience.

From Oxious' memories I would like to move to Vladimir Simonko, one of the founders and a long-time executive director of the LGL. After thinking for a little moment, Vladimir starts

vividly remembering a TV talk show that was hosted by a famous journalist, Edita Mildažytė: “Bobų vasara” (en. “The Summer of Women”). The show was often sensational and, in order to attract an audience, talked about marginalized topics.

It was the very first introductory show they chose to talk about transgender people! When I used to organize parties for gays in one private house with my partner in the early days of the independence, there would be some men who would dress up in explicitly feminine way. Back then I did not think about these people as transgender. I don't think they thought about themselves in those terms as well. But when I saw this talk show, I realized that some of these people want to transition and that they call themselves “transsexual”. The show itself was very, very disrespectful towards them. They portrayed them as some anomaly, freaks, as something neither man nor women. It must have been aired in 1998 or 1999.

Vladimir's quote brings another layer in tracking the historicity of transgender people in Lithuania and contextualizes transgender people in the reemergence of “traditional” gender roles in CEE. Whereas Oxious indicates that in the early 90s transgender people were rather uninteresting due to the medicalization around which transgender discourse evolved, Vladimir's memories indicate that a shift in perception of transgender had happened in the late 90s. From being placed in the discourse where they were considered to be sexual deviants, yet with sex reassignment surgery they could be normalized within the binary gender system under socialist discourses (Havelková), in the late 90s transgender people become an incomprehensible subject within the gender system. As perceived as neither man nor woman, I suggest that within the new conservative and essentializing ideas of gender difference in CEE (Niedermüller 1994), transgender people became the counterpoint of normalized gender roles and, thus, are placed outside the nation state that tried to return to “normalcy” through refeminization and remasculinization after the state socialism period.

To sum up, orientalist discourse that manifested itself through neoliberal discourses imposed the liberal amnesia in Lithuania that cause a disjunction between the socialist past and the neoliberal present. As a result, the transgender phenomenon was understood as a product of the neoliberal order and signified the perceived inferiority of the neoliberal system. However, to some extent the medicalized discourses of transgender people under socialism were transferred to the newly independent Lithuania, which with the reemergence of the “traditional” gender roles placed transgender people as the counterpoint to the nation.

Internal “Other” Within Us: Transgender People in LGBT movement in 2004-2010

Transgenderism existed in the club in Kaunas and Vilnius since the clubs opened. It was very much immersed in the drag culture and back then, nobody really knew the difference. Even transgender people themselves did not necessarily identify as such. I remember several people: Madonna (Saulius), Barabela, and Melani... Back then we did not really care who is what, the most important thing was that everybody could feel free. (Oxious).

This is quote from Oxious, who was active in Lithuania’s gay bar culture in the early and mid-90s. For him, transgender people were part of the space where he could feel free. Oxious also forwards me an article about one gay club in Vilnius in 1997 (run by Vladimir and his partner), where journalist Adžela Laukaitytė from the daily “Kauno diena” (engl. “Kaunas Daily”) comes to write about gay life in this club. In the report, called “Tikra meilė – tik tarp vyrų? (engl. „True love – Only Among Men?”), the journalist gives a vivid description of the gay scene, with dances, music and men having dramas over true and passionate love. Though the article concentrates on gay men, she also writes a brief paragraph called “Kartu su Madona” (engl. “Together with Madonna”) about a performer, Saulius, who dances to the American singer Madonna’s songs on the stage. Even though Saulius’s (typical masculine name in Lithuania – J. J.) feminine appearance stands out in the gay male context and seems

somewhat more exotic than everybody else, he receives applause and admiration from the public with people commenting “Look how he is moving. Not all girls can even do that.”¹¹

However, when I search the articles on transgender, and specifically read the comments left by website’s users on gayline.lt in the period 2004-2010, the view is not that idealistic. Though some people seem to be sympathetic towards the transgender cause, many are not, questioning the idea of transgender identity and the need for medical procedures:

First, this is not a sex change surgery, it’s a plastic surgery. Second, please don’t call hormone injection “hormone therapy”. This is not a therapy, sex is not a disease. Third, transsexuality is a phenomenon that comes from psychology, not the biology... (gayline.lt user Aquel, comment posted on 01-17-2009)¹²

Another user, Kregus, suggested sex reassignment to be a self-harming practice:

Prostitution, drug addiction and sex reassignment are perceived as something harmful in our society. I think every human being has a right to choose to harm himself/herself if they like it. We cannot protect these people from themselves (gayline.lt user Kregus, comment posted on 01-11-2009)¹³

Oxious’ memories from the early 90s and the vivid gay bar scene from 1997 sharply contrasts with the comments posted by gayline.lt users. They indicate that a split between the gay and transgender identity that in some cases resulted in adversity towards transgender people. As Rasa told me during our interview, “some people in the LGBT community understand me, some don’t”. In this subchapter I will contextualize this split by explaining the processes that were taking place in 2004-2010. I will argue that with the politicization of gay identity as the

11 Laukaityte, Andzela. “Tikra meile – tik tarp vyru?” [True love only among men?]. GAYLINE.LT. “Forter group”, 30 August 1997. Web. 11 May. 2017.

12 Gayline.lt. “Profesorė Marija Aušrinė Pavilionienė apie Rasą” [Professor Marija Aušrinė Pavilionienė about Rasa] GAYLINE.LT. “Forter group”, 16 January 2009. Web. 11 May 2017.

13 Gayline.lt. “Pagaliau esu moteris...” [At last I am a woman...]. GAYLINE.LT. “Forter group”, 11 January 2009. Web. 11 May 2017.

“other” within the heteronormative nation (Mosse 1985, Davydova 2010) starting in 2004, it also became a symbolic means to reject the “moral colonialism” by Western Europe (Renkin 2009) and the paradigm of the “goodness of Europe” (Böröcz 2006) by right wing politicians and their supporters. I will argue that due to this intensified context, the LGBT rights organizations did not actively promote a transgender agenda, as promoting a more radical approach would have meant challenging the paradigm of the return of “traditional” gender roles as a way to break away from the socialist past (Lobodzinska 1996). It would also have threatened LGBT respectability (D’Emillo 1998), and thus, the chance to be included in the nation through depoliticized gay culture (Duggan 2002). All of this resulted in the orientalization of transgender people within the LGBT community.

I will start the contextualization by coming back the LGL that Saturday morning that I described in the introduction. During the community consultation meeting at the LGL’s office, which was recently moved to another location, I notice that it had been redecorated with a series of photographs, called the “Life Together” by photo artist Ugnius Gelgaudas. Though today the series, which features both homosexual and heterosexual couples, does not look particularly eye-catching, for the LGL it carries a memory of historical marker: back in 2006, the pictures were not allowed to be exhibited in Nida House of Exhibition, a rather expensive seaside resort where the German writer Thomas Mann spent several summers. Through such institutions as Goethe Institut Litauen, the place became the epicenter of high culture and hosts the annual Thomas Mann festival. The LGL was aiming high with its attempt to bring the exhibition to Nida. Unsurprisingly, the curator Kristina Danilevičienė refused to allow the pictures in the art space in a highly cultured manner – without explicit insults, yet with a clear statement of what is normal and what is not: “*the pictures were rejected as they portray the non-traditional orientation families as if they were a societal*

norm.”¹⁴ Since then, the series, sponsored by the LGL’s EU-funded project, found its exhibition space in the LGL’s office. The scandal surrounding the “Life Together” was one of many public outcries regarding homosexuality that started in 2004 and represented broader changes in the public discourse.

The first shock came when the second largest Lithuanian newspaper “Respublika” (engl. “The Republic”) released a series of articles called “Kas valdo pasaulį?” (engl. “Who Rule the World?”) that sought to present gays as a part of the world-wide conspiracy, along with Jews and philanthropist Georges Soros, in 2004¹⁵. The series was followed by multiple articles in the tabloid “Vakaro žinios” (engl. “Evening News”) that belonged to the same media group as “Respublika” and tried to establish a derogatory term “vištgaidis” (an animal that has features of both a chicken and a rooster) as the common word to address homosexual males¹⁶. Civil groups led by right-wing populists such as Kazimieras Uoka started organizing protests against the perceived import of homosexuality and gay pride parades to Lithuania that were framed as generously financed by foreign donors.¹⁷ The public paranoia towards homosexuality was transferred to the national parliament, where decreasing the age of consent in National Penal Code was framed by right wing politicians as an EU imposed conspiracy to legalize sexual relations among homosexual men and underaged boys.¹⁸ Among the attempts to protect the “traditional values” were legislative incentives to change the Constitution of Lithuania and define the family as “the union between a married man and a

14 BNS.lt. “Neringa neisileido geju seimu nuotrauku” [Neringa did not allow photographs from gay families]. DELFI.LT. “Ekspress Grupp”, 18 February 2006. Web. 12 May 2017.

15 BNS.lt. “Pasipiktinta prieš žydus ir gėjus nukreiptomis publikacijomis ‘Respublikoje’” [Resentment against Jews and gays in publications in ,The Republic’]. DELFI.LT. “Ekspress Grupp”, 25 February 2004. Web. 12 May 2017.

16 Gayline.lt. “M.A. Pavilionienė: Skaitykite “Respubliką” ir vemkite” [M.A. Pavilionene: Read “The Republic” and vomit]. GAYLINE.LT. “Forter group”, 13 May 2009. Web. 12 May 2017.

17 Delfi.lt. “Piketas: “Homoseksualai puola” [Picket: ‘Homosexuals are attacking’]. DELFI.LT. “Ekspress Grupp”, 30 September 2005. Web. 12 May 2017.

18 Delfi.lt “Paaiškėjo, kad Lietuvoje įteisinti paauglių homoseksualiniai lytiniai santykiai” [It turned out that Lithuania legalized homosexual teen sex]. DELFI.LT. “Ekspress Grupp”, 16 September 2004. Web. 12 May 2017.

woman”¹⁹, as well as characterizing homosexuality as detrimental information for minors in a special law. The later initiative – though due to pressure from European institutions it was modified – got passed in the Parliament, and a ban on disseminating information to minors that “contradicts the family creation forms defined in the Constitution”²⁰ was enacted.

As Oxious notices, this radical change in discourse from the exotic “other”, which he experienced before 2004, to the politicization of gay identity as an import from the EU that threatens the institution of the heterosexual family and along with Jews and George Soros works against the interests of the Lithuanian nation, coincided with Lithuania’s accession to EU in 2004:

Starting 2004-2005, the society became suspicious of LGBT. Before Lithuania became a member of the EU, the LGBT was an “interesting” social group, but then it changed. The LGBT became a threat for minors, heterosexual families, “traditional” values, claiming that homosexual are not a part of the Lithuania nation. (Oxious).

For Oxious, the accession to the EU opened the mouths of right wing groups, which kept silent before Lithuania became the member of this Western block that was perceived to be of a strategic importance (Mazyliis et. al. 2014). Once in the EU, conservative politicians and the Church started bragging against the “European values” as advancing LGBT rights in Lithuania (Pads kocimaitė 2016). With the first pride parade on the table as a part of the process of Europeanization, an “intolerant camp” was formed (Mazyliis et. al. 2014), which tied the transnational politics of post-socialist transition to the politics of nation. As Davydova (2010) suggests, this tension culminated during the first pride parade in 2010 in Vilnius, where protesters, who outnumbered the actual participants of the pride, came to the

19 Bielskiene, Jolanta. “Seimo LSDP frakcijos pareiškimas: Konstitucijos 38 str. dėl šeimos yra pakankamas” [Parliamentary LSDP fractions report: 38th article in the constitution about the family is sufficient]. LRS.LT “Office of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania”, 19 November 2015. Web. 12 May 2017.

20 Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucija [Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania]. 25 October, 1992. Web. 12 May 2017.

protection of the boundaries of the heteronormative nation. Reingardė (2007) suggests that homophobia even became perceived as a claim for Lithuanian authenticity. Renkin argues for contextualizing these tensions, not only reading them as the politics of nationalism but also as a “symbolic rejection of the “moral colonialism” by Western Europe and locating them within the larger frameworks of dominance and subordination” (Renkin 2009, 25).

While the right-wing politicians and groups organized themselves around the ideas of nation and resistance to “moral colonialism” and Western dominance, the LGBT community started organizing itself around NGO identity politics. Similarly as Woodcock (2011) argues in the Romanian case, where NGO identity politics were available only to certain privileged groups, I suggest that identitarian politics in Lithuania were not available to transgender people in the period of 2004-2010. I argue that LGBT NGOs did not actively include the transgender question in their agendas due to the perceived threat to their respectability.

In the end of 2005 a new organization, Tolerant Youth Association (TYA), was founded. As Mindaugas, one of the founders of the TYA, says, the name of the TYA reflected well the situation:

Back in 2005 we had lots of internal discussions but we ended up not referring to the LGBT in the name of the organization because we were not sure if people would not feel scared and threatened if they joined an organization that explicitly associated its name with LGBT. (Mindaugas)

Feeling protected by the relatively neutral name, the members of the TYA actively engaged in the identitarian politics: in period 2005-2010, together with gayline.lt, TYA organized the elections of the most homophobic politicians, filed multiple complains against hate speech in the media, organized public campaigns against the visits of American evangelist Scott Lively and the founder of the Family Research Institute Paul Cameron, etc. The LGL becomes more

visible too, through organizing the “Rainbow Days” festival and actively engaging in advocacy on international level, such as reporting homophobic legislative initiatives to international human rights organizations and Members of European Parliament, which resulted in resolutions condemning Lithuania for homophobia in 2009 and 2010. Both organizations unite their resources and in 2010 they organize the first pride parade, “Baltic Pride 2010”, in Vilnius.

However, the growing visibility and the voice of the LGBT community in Lithuania does not result in equal distribution of attention under the acronym LGBT. Mizielińska and Kulpa (2011) argue that in the Polish case, the letter “T” letter was included in activism from the very beginning but, for a long time, was rather a discursive invocation, and in Lithuania the situation seems to be similar. For example, the famous case *L. vs Lithuania* that, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, became the basis for LGL’s transgender advocacy strategy, was initiated by the Human Rights Monitoring Institute (HRMI) that works in the human rights field but does not define itself as an LGBT rights organization. As Natalija Bitiukova, a deputy director of the organization, explains me in an email, a friend of L. called the HRMI and this is how the case started; no other organizations were involved in the litigation.

When I ask Tomas from the LGL if he agrees with my hypothesis that initially transgender people were included discursively in LGBT activism, he nods his head in agreement:

I agree with that absolutely. Back then, the LGL would react if there would some negative information transgender people in media or to transphobic comments by politicians. But we did not form an active transgender advocacy agenda ourselves. Of course, it was partially determined by the fact that we simply did not have enough knowledge and resources. This changed in 2012. (Tomas)

Ruslanas, an activist and a former chairperson of the TYA, explains that this was partially done not only because of lack of resources, but also bearing in mind the society's attitudes towards those who might be perceived as being even more different:

It's to tell exactly how much transsexual people wanted to talk about their problems themselves back then. On the other hand, there was this practicality – the public relations logic. When one tries to desensitize the society on an issue that the society seems to be freaking out, one should not shock it with the things that will be perceived as “extreme”. First, one has to choose the communication that would convey the message that “I am like you” (Raimondas).

Raimondass's quote speaks to me to the earlier section “The Exoticism of the 90s, or Transgender People Becoming the Freaks”, where I demonstrated that under the influence of redrawing the boundaries of the nation through gender roles, transgender people became the counterpoint of normalized gender roles and were placed outside the nation state. In this context, to actively include transgender people and advocate for their rights means risking the “respectability” (D'Emillio 1998) of the whole LGBT movement when, as Zdanevičius (2007) demonstrates, to come out as gay already meant risking social exclusion. Whereas, as Duggan (2002) demonstrated, this homonormativism that does not seek to contest the dominant heteronormative institutions and assumptions can be included in the nation through the depoliticized gay culture, raising the question of transgender people would have meant challenging the whole paradigm of coming back to “normalcy” prevalent in CEE after the fall of state socialism.

The “Breakthrough”! What Does It Really Means?

It was the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013 when I was able to acknowledge for myself (that she is transgender – J. J.). And to feel determined that no matter what awaits me in the future, no matter how much people laugh at me, I am going to do my transition. (Greta)

This is Greta's answer to my question if she thinks that there were any especially important transgender visibility moments in transgender history in Lithuania. Interestingly enough, she connects that with her/a personal story of coming to terms that she is transgender. Though from the first glance the story can be understood as an example of an individual struggle, the fact that Greta brings up her own story in relation to broader Lithuanian context signals that more things were happening that Greta might be not articulating, yet keeping in mind. I ask the same question Tadas, he is more explicit and even names certain events as a "wave", invoking a strong image of power and relentlessness:

There used to be? nothing, then we had a wave that sought to get attention for LGB people, there was a pride parade (the first pride took place in 2010 – J. J.), etc. After that everybody realized that the letter T was forgotten. The TRANS_LT campaign (the campaign was released in 2015 – J. J.) brought a lot of visibility for it. I think my judgment is based on what I heard from ordinary people. Now we have this litigation process with a huge media interest. (Tadas)

As I mentioned in the introductory part to this ethnography, he started a litigation process with the LGL against the state in January 2017. In fact, as I write this thesis now, in the very beginning of June of 2017, the case is over - he won and he was granted permission to the change his documents. As I've known Tadas for three or four years already and remember him presenting himself as somebody who is definitely not an activist, somebody who "just wants to live his life" and that long ago, this change looks rather impressive both on Tadas' personal level, and in terms that this litigation was initiated and supported by the LGL.

To portray a bigger picture, I want to bring a quote from Lina, who adds another layer to what was taking place in Lithuania since the "waves," in Tadas terms, started taking place in 2010:

Agnes used to be an example of a transgender person. I felt that this is how I would like to look in the future. I would look at her hair and would imagine, if I let my hair grow, they would be exactly the same as hers. But after some time, I stopped admiring her. Mostly due to her personality and how she would act in certain situations. (Lina)

In this quote, Lina talks about Agnes Landau, a glamorous transsexual pop-culture figure that appeared in the Lithuanian scene in 2013, and her story of transition that was closely followed by the gossip media. In the period at beginning of 2013 to the end of 2014, the Lithuanian online version of

the magazine “People” (Lith. – “Žmonės”) kept publishing articles on Agnes’s life and transition: from her becoming a blonde, breaking up with her boyfriend, to sexualized pictures of Agnes’s body changes. Thin and looking as somebody from a magazine cover, which Agnes liked to emphasize in the media by stressing how much time she spends in front of a mirror²¹, she participated in several fashion shoots and walked on the catwalk during one of Vilnius' fashion weeks²². In later years, after Agnes had fully transitioned, it seemed that the interest in her decreased.

Judging from what Greta, Tadas and Lina said in the period of 2010-2015, some changes were taking place - people felt safe to come out, a transition of a transsexual person was covered by the gossip media, the LGL released a transgender visibility campaign. It was during this time that Tadas, who did not previously consider himself to be an activist, started a litigation process.

In this subchapter I will present and contextualize these events. Similarly as Tadas, I argue that the first pride parade, “Baltic Pride 2010” was an event that eventually created a space for transgender activism. Davydova’s (2010a) analysis suggested that “Baltic Pride 2010” was a contestation of who belongs to the nation and who does not, resulting in associating the LGBT population with the discourse of Europeanization, as the embassies of the European countries in Lithuania contributed financially and politically to the organization of the pride. However, Mažylis et. al. (2014) suggest that even though the pride parade consolidated the right wing camp, or as they call it “intolerant camp”, “the tolerant camp” (those who supported the LGBT community) was able to spark a discussion and initiate the conversation about LGBT people in society for the first time in the country’s history. This divisive shift was seen more as victory than a defeat for the LGBT activists, as the visibility of the parade and the members of the LGBT community itself ignited a significant debate on a topic not otherwise experienced in Lithuania, and (re)introduced a question about the perception of “normality” within society, suggesting that an understanding of what is normal should be “based on human rights and individual freedoms, expression, equality and tolerance—all the norms and rights practiced in the

21 Žmonės.lt. “Agness Landau pakeitė šukuoseną: gerbėjai lygina su Kim Kardashian” [Agness Landau has changed her hairstyle: fans are comparing her to Kim Kardashian]. Žmonės.lt, UAB “Journal publishing group”, 9 March 2015. Web. 12 May 2017.

22 15min.lt. “Raulio Mammadli debiutas ant podiumo įvertintas gerbėjų ovacijomis” [Raul Mammadli debut on the catwalk was greeted by applause]. 15min.lt “Eesti media” 22 March 2014. Web. 12 May 2017.

West“ (Mažylis et. al. 2014, 60). The shift to the neoliberal Western discourse of civil rights opened the space for further NGO-ization that, as Seidman (1993) suggests, extends the representation of the LGBT people, but also, requires a consolidated identity in whose name the fight for the civil rights is fought and, thus excludes certain subjectivities. Also, since this shift did not question “traditional” gender roles, the consolidated transgender subject that was included into the LGBT activism was a transsexual binary subject.

LGL’s advocacy agenda

It was my first event when I talked about myself as transgender person in public. We watched this movie “She Is the Boy That I Used to Know” and then there was a discussion on transgender people in Lithuania in the same cinema theatre “Skalvija”. Many people stayed for the discussion after the movie, it actually felt to me that the hall was overcrowded. (Domas)

This is how Domas remembers his first appearance as a transgender person in front of an audience back in 2011. To be precise, the “premier” was not only for Domas – this was the first public event in the history of the LGBT community in Lithuania about transgender people explicitly. Domas’s memory reminds me of how I experienced this event myself: I went to “Skalvija” with several LGBT activists with whom almost a year ago I participated in the first pride parade. We were very nervous. Though the pride parade was a very scary experience – the counter-protesters outnumbered some 500 pride participants four to one, and 800 police officers were deployed to protect the marchers from protesters, the film screening and the discussion seemed to be more anxiety-provoking: it seemed to us that whereas society might somehow eventually accept gays and lesbians, the same would never happened with transgender people. While on our way to the theatre we were seriously discussing how we were going to leave the hall if somebody throws a Molotov cocktail into it, yet we were hungry for information about transgender as a phenomenon. To everybody’s relief, nothing happened. The screening of the film was organized by the human rights documentary festival “Inconvenient Films” and the LGL. This marks the shift in the LGL’s policy, which seems to have become the epicenter of transgender cultural and political life from then on. though including the transgender agenda into

cultural events within the framework of the “Baltic Prides” in 2013 and 2016²³, their annual “Rainbow Days” and the small community events in the LGL’s office’s Community Center.

When I was still in school and I was living in Mažeikiai (a provincial town in the north-west part of Lithuania – J. J.), I kept dreaming how I will move to Vilnius and start volunteering with the LGL. I went to the LGL’s office on the very first week when I came to Vilnius. That was in 2014. And that was the first time in my life when I presented myself with the name Simas, not the one that I was assigned at birth. Since then, I was always open to everybody that I am a man who happened to be born in biological woman's body. I knew that I have a full support of the LGL’s team, especially from Tomas. (Simas)

In the interviews, only Tadas, Matas and Simas rather randomly sporadically? mention other organizations and initiatives, such as Tolerant Youth Association, the LGBT film festival “Kreivės”, and the queer summer festival “Sapfo” as somewhat related to transgender topics.

While Vladimir in his interview with me emphasizes that the LGL made some attempts to talk about transgender people even before the organization started actively formulating its transgender advocacy agenda in 2012, including initiating an interview with a transgender person Medėja in at a time main daily “Lietuvos rytas” (engl – “Lithuania Morning”) in 2008 and by presenting her case to the Ombudsman for Equal Opportunities, he agrees that the main changes came with the changes in the LGL’s staff when a CEU graduate in Human Rights Law, Tomas, joined the organization. Advocacy through legal means became the LGL’s grounding approach in adopting for transgender advocacy in Lithuania. Since 2007 when the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that Lithuania breached the rights of the citizen L. by not adopting a special law on sex reassignment procedures, nothing really changed. Several versions of the draft law did not even pass the acceptance for procedure in the Parliament. In 2008, 2011 and 2013 conservative members of the parliament even suggested to remove the line in the Civil Code that says that every citizen has a right to a sex change and eliminate any future cases against the state in case other transgender people decide to sue

23 Prides in Lithuania take place every-three years as they rotate between the three Baltic states.

Lithuania, however, their proposals did not pass the acceptance procedure as well. The legal standstill looked promising for somebody with a degree in human rights law:

The impulse to work on the transgender issues was the control of the implementation of the case *L. vs. Lithuania*. The case made Lithuania's situation unique as it provided an institutional pedestal, which allows us to push the Lithuanian institutions. So, I told everybody at the LGL that I got familiar with the case while I was studying at the CEU, so I told everybody at the office I could try to work on it. That was the starting point for all other activities that followed later. (Tomas)

By “work on it” Tomas means an extensive advocacy work with Council of Europe and initiating the enhanced supervision procedure in 2014, which is applied to the states that fail to comply with the rulings of the ECHR that require urgent individual measures or reveal important structural problems. Once the procedure is launched, a member-state of the Council of Europe has to submit action plans and action reports that explain its progress in complying with the ECHR ruling²⁴. It seems that after three years this strategy has given results: in March 2017 the Prime Minister of Lithuania Saulius Skvernelis came out saying that he will not keep sending “meaningless explanations” on the government's part to the Council of Europe. He put Ministries of Health and Justice to draft a new regulation and finally regulate the sex reassignment procedures in Lithuania²⁵

However, the advocacy plan adopted using the legal advantages that the case *L. vs Lithuania* created, also meant a rather complicated picture within the transgender community and its ability to participate in the developments. In the name of transgender people the LGL started demanding transgender civil rights and at the same time set a normative standard in terms of what rights the transgender community are entitled to. This does not seem to be appealing to all the members of the community. Rasa, who used to attend LGBT community's events but stopped doing at some point thinks that the current strategy, where the LGL is pushing for a law is ineffective as it singles out transgender people

24 Council of Europe, The Supervision Process. Department for the Execution of Judgments of the Court. Web. 12 May 2017.

25 Motuzaite, Donata, “Ministerijoms pavesta parengti projektus dėl lyties keitimo galimybės Lietuvoje” [Ministries were assigned to prepare draft acts to enable sex reassignment in Lithuania], 15min.lt. As Postimees Grupp, 22 March 2017. 12 May 2017.

as needing something special and not really addressing the lack of acceptance of transgender people in the society:

I don't think this question should not be politicized. Why do we need a special law for that? It would be enough to have a regulation signed by the Minister of Health. For example, who treats cancer with a special law??? Nobody. Then, why are we asking for a special law for transsexual people? Also, they can put into a law anything. They can say that one needs to go through a commission to get the F.64. But if there's a command from politicians not to give this diagnosis? With a law like that, nobody would even be able to sue the state anymore. We need education, we need that people would feel safe, that families would not fall apart because somebody is transitioning.

Rasa's emphasis on the normalization of transgender people and through education seems to contrast the LGL's approach also in a sense that in pushing for a separate law that would regulate the sex reassignment procedures, that would effectively mark transgender people as special and exclusive, to the extent that they need a separate law. Rasa, already knowing how much discussions and scandals compromised past attempts to pass such law, does not feel optimistic about such an option:

If we pressure society too much, there's going to be a counterreaction, that's basic physics. I feel that when the LGBT activists and organizations keep pushing their agenda, they do not really analyze what is the easiest to achieve, what will cause the least opposition. We need to look for some compromises. <...> We need a society where an individual who goes through sex reassignment can function after that.

Rasa's views on stress on the education of society are reiterated in the interviews with Viltė and educator Vilma. This reflects what Woodcock argued on the LGBT activism in Romania where NGO-ization, brought to the country by foreign donors, created a pool of activists who were immersed into the Western discourses that often seemed meaningless to many members of the community (Woodcock 2009).

To sum up, this subchapter demonstrates how changes in the perception of what is normal in Lithuania since 2010, including LGBT human rights, individual freedoms, expression, equality and tolerance (Mažylis et. al. 2014), coincides with the LGL's starting its targeted advocacy based on the

legal approach. As the subject in whose name the fight for the civil rights is fought requires a consolidated identity, the LGL defines it through a legalistic approach, narrowing it down to access to sex reassignment procedures. This move represents interests of some of the community members, yet at the same time excludes those transgender people who are looking for a normalization of discourse around transgender as a category, and greater acceptance from society.

What Does the LGL Mean When It Talks About Transgender People?

In the middle of April, when I came back to CEU from doing field research in Lithuania and browsed my “Facebook” feed, I came across the following reportage from the Lithuanian national TV. A very influential weekly news analysis bulletin “Savaitė” (Engl. – “The Week”) was talking about transgender people in Lithuania. The broadcast criticized the Minister of Health for his indecisiveness regarding sex reassignment procedure and blasted politicians for wasting taxpayers’ money for paying compensations for transgender people. The journalist of this news bulletin used 3-D video images of a sex reassignment procedure and the excerpts from the “TRANS_LT” visibility campaign. Little to my surprise, my face also appeared in the broadcasting relating me to sex reassignment procedures and hormonal therapies.

In the end of 2015 as a part of their legal advocacy campaign and in an attempt to counter the negative images of transgender people in the public space, the LGL launched the first transgender visibility campaign “TRANS_LT”. Two videos – one longer and one shorter, adapted for the social networks – featured two young transsexuals and one non-binary person in their late teen years and twenties.

When I saw the clip, I had this feeling that they are normal people. By then, I was sick of these freaks on the TV. When I saw the clips, I didn’t feel disgust and many people in my environment asked me how is that so that it turns out that not all transgender people want to be prostitutes. (Matas).

By referring to “to the freaks on TV” Matas reflects the broader contempt of transgender people of being misrepresented and framed as something exotic and of low morals in the media. For example, in the interview Rasa also complained to me how transsexuality is often related to the sex work portraying them as rather flaxy? people who decide that they want to go through transition and in

order to do so, they find rich sponsors from the Arab countries or Western Europe who pay for medical procedures for sexual services in return. Thus, the “TRANS_LT” campaign, was seen as a temporal marker that shifted the perception of Lithuania’s transgender population from being flaky and “immoral” to a more normalized and socially-acceptable representation.

Proliferation of the representations of transgender subjects in Lithuanian society was one of my goals as well. It seemed to me that the label “TRANS” under which the three of us came out, represent a broader spectrum of transgender identifications: from rather fixed binary representations of femininity and masculinity by Oskaras and Zhenia (the transsexual people that took part in the video), and myself who appeared as somebody not willing to define myself in terms of two conventionally available genders. For the media, my appearance was unintelligible and I was read as a transsexual subject. However, for the first time since the campaign was launched, I asked Tomas what does the LGL mean by the word “TRANS”, which in the Lithuanian context is used by the LGL only. In his answer, Tomas switches from “TRANS” to “trans*”, indicating that these two terms for him are synonyms:

I introduced the term trans*. <...> We use trans* in a conceptual meaning, defining our organization that represents transgender and transsexual people. It means that trans* for us includes the trans* identity spectrum and does not limit in terms of different identities.

Later, during the interview we came back to the question of terms again. This time Tomas shifts his emphasis on transsexual subjectivity:

It seems to me that “trans” with an asterisk is seeking more actively to incorporate the dimension of transsexuality than “transgender”. But now I am very subjective. “Trans” with an asterisk emphasizes the need of the procedures and refers to the process of transition. (Tomas)

I ask Tomas what is the difference for the LGL between the “transgender” and “transsexual”, which the organization uses as well:

Whereas transsexuality for me is always related to the medical procedures, transgender identity can be related to them but not necessarily, for me it is about different gender expressions. When it comes to transsexuality as a category, we see it as an important label that represents the letter “T” in the acronym LGBT. <...> It is understandable for the society and the opponents and implies that it is related to the sex reassignment.

<...> So, I use trans* and try to avoid using transsexual. When I try to emphasize the spectrum and inclusivity, I like using “transgender”, because for it seems to include a broader spectrum of people. (Tomas)

Now, after conducting this interview with Tomas, I understand that our perception of what “TRANS” means is rather different. Though the LGL understands and acknowledges the spectrum of transgender identities, however, the actual subject of its advocacy is a transsexual subject, which also gets to be named as “trans” and incorporated into the acronym of LGBT.

However, the LGL’s prioritizing of transsexual subjectivity seems to be normalized by non-binary people as well. When I interviewed Arcana Femina, at the end of our conversation, which went on for more than an hour, during which she extensively talked about transsexual people she met, the LGL’s events and policies, transgender community, I asked her what is her gender identity, just to confirm my assumption that she does not identify within the transgender spectrum. To my surprise, she says that she does but she avoids talking about that, so she would not divert the attention from those who needs it most:

Since I talk a lot about trans problematics, I feel if I come out as somebody in the spectrum, it might all become about me, though there might be people that face greater problems than I do and we actually need to talk about them, not about me.

Viltè, who also identifies as a non-binary holds similar views. For her the problems that transsexual people face seem to be greater and of immediate importance:

I think the idea that that when one goes to a store and is not sure if he/she/they will be able to a pack of cigarettes or a bottle of beer is just outrageous. I know instances when the cashiers ask for documents and out people in front of all customers by blaming them for using somebody else’s documents. For non-binary people, it’s more about dealing with people’s stupidity and looks, which is not that threatening. (Viltè)

To sum up, the LGL’s transgender advocacy based on prioritizing the consolidated transsexual binary subject speaks to the process that took place after the “Baltic Pride 2010”, which accelerated the

acceptance of the human rights agenda into the understanding of what “normalcy” is. However, as this shift did not include the question of the gender binary, the LGL was left in a rather strange place. On the one hand, internally the organization has enough knowledge about the spectrum of transgender identities, however, as Tomas puts it, when he talks about transgender in public, he refers to transsexual people, as this is what society understands. This situation speaks to Agnes Landau's story that I briefly mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Society accepts the right of Agnes to transition and even follows it closely as it is understood as an individual freedom as long as she spends enough time in front of the mirror, dyes her hair and does other things that are traditionally attributed to the strictly feminine appearance, and thus, similar to the LGL, does not challenge traditional gender norms based on binary.

“Community? There’s no community.” or Binding People Together Through Illegal Practices

In this last subchapter, I would like to discuss the Lithuanian transgender community in order to counter the widespread conviction that such community does not exist. I will argue that due to the dominance of a Western understanding of community that is based on visibility (Stella 2014) and commodified practices of gay consumption (Duggan 2002) transgender people in Lithuania do not recognize the binding practices, such as sharing illegal information, as communal practices.

By the time I went to the community consultation at LGL, I had done four interviews with Matas, Tadas, Julius and Viltė, and all of them claimed that transgender community does not exist in Lithuania. Two of the interviewees – Tadas and Matas – were present that morning. While in the LGL’s office I was trying to grasp the dynamics in the room, conversations that I had with Tadas and Matas several days ago kept occupying my mind:

JAY: Do you think there’s a transgender community in Lithuania?

TADAS: It doesn’t exist.

JAY: What do you think does it take to have a community?

TADAS: I have no idea. We tried to create an online community on “Facebook” [the group was called Trans* Pizza – J. J.) but I don’t think it worked out. I left that group. The members mostly talked about things did not really interest me. It was discouraging for me... Many people just kept complaining and repeating things all over again. I am not this kind of person, I look for solutions. I decided that I don’t really need this community. Now I talk, share information and it’s fine for me (outside the Trans* Pizza framework – J. J.).

Matas, who seemed to be joyful and active during the meeting and usually is somewhat more optimistic than Tadas, was even more critical about the “non-existence” of transgender community:

I think there are a lot of individual people, but not a community. (Matas).

Yet, before starting the meeting, when Tomas asked if we should wait and if there’s anybody on their way to the office, Tadas said that another guy is going to be late but he asked us not to wait for him as he will join us later. Out of all participants in the meeting, it seems that only one person in the room has never been to LGL and does not really know anybody here. During all the meeting, he kept silent and when we went to smoke for the second time, he smoked with a person who introduced herself as his friend and who came with him to LGL to support him.

I start counting in my mind and I realized that probably all the people that were present at LGL were also on the “Facebook” group called “Trans* Pica”. As Simas, who created the group back in 2014 explained to me during the interview, the group was created after a community meeting at the LGL. Similarly as in this meeting, for three years LGL has served pizzas as a way to create the sense of community through sharing food. The “Facebook” group was named after that. Now with some 70 members in the group it gives a feeling that everybody is there. Yet for Tadas this idealistic image of transgender people symbolically

transferring pizzas online and sharing them there does not seem appealing. For a while Tadas was an active member but eventually he left it with a bad taste in his mouth:

I missed openness (in the Trans* Pizza group – J. J.). Sometimes I would upload a video in that group, some 30-40 would watch those videos but nobody, except 2-3 people would react. Most group members did not introduce themselves, they did not say to other group members why they were in that group. Somebody would just add them but they would not really be active there. It seemed to me that I would be sharing information with people that I did not really know and I was not sure how they would use the information, which was often personal. (Tadas)

In Tadas' answer I read that the imagined ideal community that would satisfy his needs cannot really exist in today's Lithuania: with no legal hormone therapies and surgeries available for transgender people who are in need of them, Tadas does not feel safe in sharing the information that might be sensitive, such as the names of doctors that prescribe hormones illegally, private psychiatric clinics, where one can get an F.64 diagnosis without a humiliating questioning or trying to diagnose transgender people with other mental illnesses that they are used to diagnose, such as schizophrenia or depression, that is often the case in the state's mental hospitals. Tadas together with Matas were able to find a trans-friendly psychiatrist for F.64, an endocrinologist for the hormone therapies, and a surgeon who performed top surgeries for both of them. This was not an easy task and made them go through a lot of humiliation: they called countless number of doctors located in Vilnius and tried to explain their situation. Most of them said "no" immediately, a few of them accepted to see them and only one psychiatrist and one endocrinologist agree to provide them with the services that they needed. Obviously, both of them are private doctors. So, it costed money. And still does in the case of endocrinologist as they have to visit him on permanent basis and get their blood tested. Sharing this invaluable information is crucial for the formation of Tadas and Matas circles: in order to disclose this information, they need to know the person well and be sure that they will not cause any harm to the doctors who provide the services in a

safe and respectful manner. This practice defines who gets excluded and included into the group.

As I mentioned in the introduction to the ethnography, during the meeting at LGL it seems to me that Greta was trying to catch my look and looked somewhat uneasy. Now when I listen to our interview which we conducted after that meeting, I understand where her anxiety was coming from. Greta's physical transition started back in 2016 with meeting people at the LGL and getting an encouragement from other transgender people. At that point, she was quite knowledgeable in hormones and had got her first monthly doze from a pharmacy illegally by going there and simply pretending that she forgot to bring her grandmother's prescription. However, she says that at the LGL she got the contacts of a doctor who prescribed her drugs and? started following her health condition, which made her feel safer and ensured the continuity. In this way, she joined the group of people who were seeing the same endocrinologist found by Tadas and Matas. However, Greta says that acquiring this information is not an easy task:

I think it is obvious that people don't want to give this information that freely. This is not exactly legal stuff and they risk the success of their own transition, because if something happens to the doctors, they will not be able to continue their transition. This is definitely important, though the deeper ties do not form based on that. Friendships form in smaller circles, this is some sort of exchange. (Greta)

Greta's position is a partial outsider: she has a clear attachment to Tadas and Matas who are at the core of the group that I met at the LGL's office, however, a deeper friendship did not form. When I look at how Tadas and Matas are cracking jokes with the others FTM in the office and knowing how much they feel connected with each other from our conversations, it seems that gender plays an important role: the Tadas and Matas's group is of a very mixed class background – from working class people to medical students and it seems this is not an obstacle in forming closer attachments, however, the gender is.

With the hypothesis that transgender community forms around the exchange of illegal information, which helps to create the ties that can be both symbolically close as in Greta's situation and might evolve into deeper friendships as in the circle of Tadas and Matas, which seems to be based on gender, I talk to Lina who does not belong to this circle and lives in one of the big cities of Lithuania, however, she refuses to disclose her actual location. Lina is 18 years old and has been taking hormones for two years already. Whereas I am trusted by Tadas and Matas, I realize that this trust is a privilege: though it seems that Lina underwent some surgical procedures, she refuses to give me any information where did she find them. Only after a long explanation that my research does not seek to disclose concrete names of the doctors or schemes and I am mostly interested in how people are surviving in Lithuania, she tells me that she bought hormones on the internet:

I bought them on the black market, from abroad. It is impossible to get them legally in Lithuania. As my friend says, I think we must keep looking for illegal ways to acquire them. And I started looking for them and I found them. Now I feel fine. (Lina)

Lina's comment indicates that she discusses the issues of hormones with specific people only. As I ask to describe the relationship that she is having with them, she invokes words friends and community. When I ask her if she discusses the questions of hormones with them only and if these people are also transgender, she nods to confirm my claim and to my surprise returns to the question of surgeries:

There are surgeons (in Lithuania – J. J.) who perform these surgeries illegally. My friends went to see them, this is happening, but it is extremely dangerous, people might die and it is really not a good quality service. I wouldn't advice anyone to go to these fishy doctors. It is better go to abroad, pay the money and make sure that professionals do that, not a charlatan. (Lina)

Lina's circle is somewhat different from what I observed in the interaction with Matas, Tadas and Greta: Lina's relations with other transgender people are based on trying to create closer friendships. It also seems that Lina's circle does not get divided based on gender:

My best friend is a transgender woman. I also have a friend who is a transgender guy. I know these two transgender women with whom I talk a lot online, but we have not meet yet in reality. I used to be friends with two non-binary people that were assigned female gender at birth. (Lina)

Whereas Lina seeks deeper friendships with transgender people that can be determined on the basis of how reliable the person is in exchanging the information, my other interviewee Domas is somewhat more distant from members of the transgender community, which is often determined by the fact that he lives abroad where he does his PhD. Yet they seem to be very important to him.

The appearance of the community helped me to transition more smoothly. Through the yahoo group, which existed back then, I got introduced to Paul, he helped me to find an endocrinologist and understand my real capacity to change something. Back then he had done a top surgery while I was trying to get the F.64 from psychiatrists. Now I give advices on transition and support people emotionally. I call this big brother (end of the sentence – J. J.) They probably tell other people and then this is how the information gets circulated, I often don't really know how did they find out about me. I try to answer to everyone and be as much supportive as I can. (Domas)

To my little surprise, after a couple of days I spot Domas' and Paul's recent picture on Facebook, apparently Domas came back to Vilnius for several days. Even though Domas is relatively young – 28 years old - he started his hormone therapy back in 2011. When I ask Domas if he would call Paul his godfather or some other figure that he would symbolically relate to the process of initiation, his answer is yes. It seems to me that as a person who started his transition some six years ago and has not been living in Lithuania on the permanent basis for last several years, Domas was able to rationalize what is going on in Lithuania in a rational, yet caring way. When I present my hypothesis on 'gluing' community

through illegal practices, he agrees with that but also suggests not to get too enthusiastic about it:

The “glue” often is very pragmatic, people want to know where to get the treatment or find a doctor that would not tell them to go and fuck themselves. This type of transgender people is the most common type. Also, there are people that look for emotional support. They want to share their feelings, emotions, etc. But we all need to understand that people come from incredibly different backgrounds, they are so different in terms of their personalities. It is really hard to keep such group together. (Domas)

Domas reminds me not to overlook the fact that for many transgender people that I interviewed expressed this longing for emotional support (Tadas, Lina, Greta, Julius). Also, when I started collecting interviews for the thesis and the news about my work got spread in the community, a transsexual woman that I had not known before started messaging me on Facebook trying to create a space where she could share her painful emotional experiences and be reciprocated. I also recall having had at least a couple more encounters like that a year or two ago. It is not a surprise: in Lithuania counseling is still rarely available and mental health problems are often treated with pharmaceuticals, therefore, transgender people cannot acquire the help that they need and turn for counselling to the members of the community. This process is often painful and not reciprocated (as I could not reciprocate those people that reached out to me through Facebook), however, eventually, people create their safe circles of several friends, where the most painful experiences are being discussed, as Tadas, Lina and others did.

However, the experience of trying to share the emotional information with a wider circle of people and the feeling of not being listened to or cared about to, leaves an impression that the transgender community does not exist in Lithuania at all, despite the fact in most cases the refusal to provide the emotional support does not mean cutting people from the shared

knowledge about the doctors, hormones and therapies, which is indicated in Tadas quote in the beginning of this subchapter – “I talk, share information and it’s fine for me”.

So, although there is bonding happening, and sharing of precious information, people still feel there is no community. Which makes me ask – what is the image of community that they have and where does it come from? It seems that the image of pizza, used by LGL, offers a hint for understanding this as it evokes this idealistic Western globalized picture where people eat and share together. This suggests me to look into the domination of the Western ideas of what constitutes a community and how it gets translated into the local context.

Julius’s quote indicates the problematics in a nutshell:

I know that in the US and other countries in the West, there are bars and community organizations where people get support. I have been to Belgium several times. The feeling is completely different than in Lithuania. You can find so many people there and they are friendly to each other. (Julius)

Though Julius’s feeling that Lithuania lacks services for transgender people in many respect is well based, it also reveals that there is clear hierarchy between the Western practices and community organizing principles that are practiced in Lithuania. Julius describes a situation of the Western commodification of the community practices, which as Warner (1993) suggests were often commodified due to the unavailability of community institutions, and dominated the activist discourses (Stella 2014). However, Stella (2014) argues, that in non-Western contexts, due to the historical and political circumstances LGBT people have a different model or relating should not be devalued. I suggest that in Lithuania transgender community building is centered around the illegal practices of sharing information on how to acquire hormone therapies, surgeries, etc. As demonstrated in the examples of Domas, Linas, Tadas, Greta and others this creates a special bond between the members and forms an

alternative, non-heteronormative way creating kin or as suggested by Weston (1991) “families we choose”.

Conclusion

This thesis started with my personal hunger and the hunger that I heard from all of my interviewees that was embodied in Rasa's line "There was nothing back then". I call this hunger longing for continuation and being part of history as opposed to being a historical legend, myth or fiction. This thesis initiates the work of constructing the historicity of transgender subject in Lithuania and suggests insights that shape our understanding of the history of transgender people in post-socialist Lithuania.

First, I argue that the idea that "there was nothing back then" is a construct of the workings of orientalism towards and within post-socialist Lithuania and reemerged nationalism in Central Eastern Europe after the fall of state socialism. The available scholarship is still rather scarce; however, Havelková (2015) and the extensive list of 666 references in the literature on people that had different gender identities than they were assigned at birth available under state socialism indicate that the "transgender time" started earlier than many authors (Kulpa and Mizieleńska 2011) tend to think. With sex reassignment surgeries starting from the early 70s in the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, I claim that transgender identity, though medicalized and understood in strictly binary terms (Havelková 2015), was available and practiced by transgender people. However, with the restructurings that took place after the fall of state socialism that, through the agenda of democratization, rendered Central Eastern Europe as inherently backwards (Buchowski 2006) and in need of catching up with the West (Navickaitė 2016), there was an imposed liberal amnesia that started counting progress with the appearance of capitalism in the region and positioned the region as lagging behind, as if discourses on transgender did not exist before. The reemergence of "traditional" gender roles as a way to break away with the socialist past and as a narrative of coming back to normalcy

(Owczarzak 2009) rendered transgender people outside of this system in 90s Lithuania, shifting the discourse around transgender people from the medicalization that was prevalent under state socialism to the outskirts of the new normalcy of gender system.

Second, I demonstrate that with the politicization of gay identity in Lithuania through the accession to the EU in 2004 and the formation of the LGBT identitarian movement onwards, transgender people in Lithuania were perceived as the “Other” within the LGBT community. Due to the intensified nationalist discourse that emphasized traditional gender roles and the perception that transgender people were on the very outskirts of this system, the LGBT community members and NGOs included the letter “T” in the acronym only discursively due to the perceived threat to their respectability as neoliberal gay subjects (Mosse 1985, D’Emillio 1998) and the possibly of being included in the idea of the nation through a neoliberal figure of a gay citizen-consumer (Duggan 2002).

Third, I claim that the first pride parade in Lithuania in 2010 was a temporal marker in changing the perception of “normality” within society, suggesting that the understanding of what is normal should be “based on human rights and individual freedoms, expression, equality and tolerance—all the norms and rights practiced in the West” (Mažylis et. al. 2014). The shift to the neoliberal Western discourse of civil rights opened the space for further NGO-ization that extended the representation of LGBT people; however, it required a consolidated identity in whose name civil rights are fought for (Seidman 1993) and excluded certain subjectivities. Transgender people were included in the activism as those who should also receive civil rights. However, since this shift did not question “traditional” gender roles, the consolidated transgender subject that was included in LGBT activism was a transsexual binary subject, that excluded more fluid gender identifications.

Finally, I show that due to the dominance of the Western understanding of what a transgender community should be, based on the visibility (Stella 2014) and commodified practices of gay consumption (Duggan 2002), transgender people in Lithuania do not recognize the existence of their community. I show that this community does exist and has a unique way of forming community through sharing information on illegal transition practices that binds them for the rest of their lives.

However, as the author of this thesis I must acknowledge its limitations. This thesis provides a broad overview of the key events and transformations that took place in post-socialist Lithuania both within the LGBT community and the transgender community itself. However, there is still plenty of space for reconstructing on the historicity of transgender people under state socialism in Lithuania particularly in relation to what information and to whom was available for those transgender people that lived in the Socialist Republic of Lithuania. It would also be important to conduct media discourse analysis in understanding the particularities of how it changed after the fall of state socialism, what particular images of transgender people it provided and what role it played for constituting the normalcy in the state. Finally, in the second chapter of this thesis I situate transgender people within the broader LGBT movement. This task seems to me to be of particular delicacy – even though the period of 2004-2010 was intensive in events and changing perceptions, it underresearched and worth scholarly attention.

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