

**IN-BETWEEN AFFINITY AND DIFFERENCE:
(RE)CONSTRUCTING TRADITIONAL LITHUANIANNES
WITHIN THE PARADIGM OF THE EUROPEAN LGBTI
NORMATIVITY**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the contested and ongoing search for traditional Lithuanian identity by delving into the politics of sexuality. It explores how Lithuanian politicians discursively construct the meaning of traditional Lithuanianness *vis-à-vis* postmodern Europeanness through the paradigm of LGBTI. This thesis also investigates how the discourses pertain to and simultaneously resist the cultural incongruencies with the EU. It applied postcolonial lenses to discover the ambiguities of the political rhetoric and analyzed the statements delivered by the current Lithuanian President and conservative politicians. This research discovered that discourses aim to affirm Lithuanian agency as superior to Europeanness, and ambivalently inscribe Lithuanian inferiority within cultural asymmetries.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 1. Foundations of a Postcolonial Research Agenda	8
1.1 Situating Postcolonialism in Eastern Europe	8
1.2 The Fool’s Game of Colonialism – Appropriation, and Modes of Resistance	11
Chapter 2. Mapping European Pedagogy on LGBTI.....	16
Chapter 3. Unwrapping Sexuality in Socialist and Post-Socialist Lithuania.....	19
Chapter 4. In the Search of Lithuanianness Through an LGBTI Paradigm.....	24
4.1 In-Between: The Mimesis of Europeanness and Imbued Lithuanianness	25
4. 2 Back to the Roots: Reimagining European Identity Through Lithuanianness	32
CONCLUSIONS.....	37
BIBLIOGRAPHY	39

INTRODUCTION

When Lithuania became the first republic to break away from the Soviet Union, the long-awaited freedom and independence paved the way for its return home – Europe. The narratives of “belonging” and “returning to Europe” dominated mainstream political discourse, anchoring Lithuanian aspirations to become a member of the European Union (EU), which meant a return to “‘normal’ state of affairs.”¹ Striving for recognition, Lithuania started to imitate Western political and social practices, however the liberal culture confused the meaning of Lithuanianness, as the country found itself in an alien system of postmodern values.² Paradoxically, while the Western culture confused mental maps of traditional Lithuanianness, the path towards Europeanness was unquestionable.

The Lithuanian attempts to be acknowledged by Western Europe brought about novel notions of individualism, which entailed institutional and social change. In a country where “sex had not existed before,” according to a popular aphorism used by Lithuanians, the embracement of EU membership came with some prerequisites to “catch up” regarding human rights dimension, including LGBTI³ rights.⁴ In the absence of relevant traditions and institutional readiness, Lithuanian efforts to promote LGBTI rights were copy-pasted from Western European counterparts. These efforts were crucial for the LGBTI community because

¹ Inga Pavlovaitė, “Being European by Joining Europe: Accession and identity politics in Lithuania,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 16, no. 2 (2003): 239-244, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570302048>.

² Rasa Baločkaitė, “Between mimesis and non-existence: Lithuania in Europe, Europe in Lithuania,” *Eurozine*, May 8, 2008, <https://www.eurozine.com/between-mimesis-and-non-existence/>.

³ This research follows the abbreviation of LGBTI used by the EU and ILGA-Europe (international NGO promoting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex people interests) because of the scope of this research. However, the author of this thesis does not intend to generalize and is aware of other different sexual identities that are underrepresented.

⁴ Copenhagen criteria set the conditions for the EU membership and embraced human rights normative to protect and respect for minorities. See: “Lex Access to European Union Law,” EUR-Lex, accessed April 23, 2020, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen.html.

the accession to the EU served as the starting point for LGBTI people to come “out of the closet” and induced hopes to be accepted as equals in the traditional setting of Lithuania.

The increased visibility of “non-traditional sexualities” opened up a debate to the ideational juxtaposition of the notions of Europeanness and Lithuanianness. The inflow of liberal notions of society and culture focusing on the individual freedom was promoted by international organizations, and NGOs such as the Lithuanian Gay League (LGL) aimed to ensure human rights development and representation of the LGBTI community in Lithuania.⁵ Meanwhile, Lithuania’s choice to be “a European pluralist democracy, of the Western-type”⁶ opposed the traditional imagery of Lithuania in Europe as it is perceived to “make us limited, Lithuanians in the nook.”⁷ The notion that “only by being European we are fully Lithuanians”⁸ implies that the LGBTI promotion symbolically epitomizes the embracement of European sexual normativity and the path towards social progress and modernity.

The other side of the coin presents a competing normative notion of Lithuanianness, accentuating the Judeo-Christian system of values as the main pillar of Europe and proclaiming that “being Lithuanians we are Europeans.”⁹ While “there is a need to “hammer” pins in certain competencies,”¹⁰ meaning that certain EU norms are not applicable to Lithuanian setting, the discourse discloses resistance to the EU’s sexual normativity. This diverging notion of

⁵ “About Us,” LGL – National LGBT Rights Organization, February 19, 2020, https://www.lgl.lt/en/?page_id=112. Also see: Tolerant Youth Association and Human Rights Monitoring Institute’s main goals are to foster LGBTI and gender promotion and raise awareness of human rights violations in Lithuania.

⁶ Indrė Makaraitytė, „KT pirmininkas: Konstitucija negali leisti diskriminuoti dėl lyties ar seksualinės orientacijos,” *lrl.lt*, March 3, 2020, <https://www.lrl.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1148153/kt-pirmininkas-konstitucija-negali-leisti-diskriminuoti-del-lyties-ar-seksualines-orientacijos>.

⁷ Ignas Jačauskas, BNS, „Išsiskyrus nuomonėms dėl europinių vertybių konservatoriai atidėjo rezoliucijos priėmimą,” *delfi.lt*, April 28, 2018, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/issiskyrus-nuomonems-del-europiniu-vertybiu-konservatoriai-atidejo-rezoliucijos-priemima.d?id=77850053>.

⁸ Jačauskas, „Išsiskyrus nuomonėms.”

⁹ Jačauskas, „Išsiskyrus nuomonėms.”

¹⁰ Vaida Stundytė, „Lietuvai reikalinga stipresnė, vieningesnė, bet kartu ir reevangelizuota Europos Sąjunga,” *apzvalga.eu*, July 5, 2013, <http://apzvalga.eu/lietuvai-reikalinga-stipresne-vieningesne-bet-kartu-ir-reevangelizuota-europos-sajunga.html>.

Lithuanianness illuminates the conflict between the “liberal European agenda” and its antithesis, “traditional Lithuanian values.”¹¹ From the traditional perspective of Lithuania in Europe, the politics of sexuality can be regarded as an oxymoron – while the desire to emulate Europeanness is omnipresent, the equality of LGBTI people is viewed as incompatible with traditional tropes of Lithuanianness.

The collision of diverging outlooks reflects the inherent complexity of sexuality politics in Lithuania. While it stands out as one of the most pro-EU countries in the Union,¹² Lithuania still lags behind in terms of LGBTI rights promotion.¹³ This ambiguity between Lithuanian and EU LGBTI-friendly sexuality politics raises a general puzzle – what explains the reluctance of the Lithuanian political establishment to adopt and implement laws ensuring equality of LGBTI people, despite overt support for the EU?

To elucidate this conundrum, this thesis goes beyond rhetorical patterns embedded in the meaning of traditional Lithuanianness and problematizes the omnipresent cultural asymmetries within the EU. The ambivalent Lithuanian relationship with Europeanness exposes ideational convergence and collision – while the affirmation of Europeanness is prevalent, the unattractive notions of sexuality are resisted. This peculiar cultural relativism creates a need to analyze the ambiguous resistance, fluctuating between the Lithuanian affinity to Europeanness, and the affirmation of cultural inequalities. From this point of departure, the research asks the following: *How does Lithuania (re)construct its traditional identity through*

¹¹ Kjetil Duvold & Inga Aalia, “Fear and Floating in Lithuania,” *Baltic Worlds* 2 (2012): 40.

¹² „Spring 2019 Standard Eurobarometer: Europeans upbeat about the state of the European Union – best results in 5 years,” European Commission, August 5, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_4969.

¹³ According to the annual European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe) ranking, Lithuania is 24th out of 27th EU-member states regarding the situation of LGBTI people. See: “Country Ranking,” Rainbow Europe, accessed June 6, 2020, <https://rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking#eu>.

ambiguous sexuality politics in the presence of an omnipotent EU normativity on LGBTI rights?

Even though the issue over LGBTI rights is widely discussed and debated in the media, there is a lacuna in the academic literature. Most of the related analysis focuses on LGBTI visibility¹⁴ and competing normative trajectory against traditionalism during the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania,¹⁵ and representations in the media producing national and sexual hierarchies.¹⁶ Other research applied analytical lenses of nationalism to demonstrate the ideational clashes between homosexuality and national identities.¹⁷ This thesis is instead centered on cultural incongruencies to reveal the complexity behind political reluctance to support LGBTI promotion. It applied postcolonial lenses to grasp political opposition to the EU's normativity on sexualities prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and fills the gap by disclosing ambiguous discursive *modus operandi* found beyond the linear rhetorical radar. This research solely focuses on the conservative side and is an exploration of how conflictual relations between traditional Lithuanianness and postmodern Europeanness are represented in nuanced ways that defy easy categorizations of Lithuanian agency's resistance to cultural subordination.

¹⁴ Darja Davydova, "Baltic Pride 2010: Articulating Sexual Difference and Heteronormative Nationalism in Contemporary Lithuania," *Sextures* 2, no. 2 (2012): 32-46.

¹⁵ Liudas Mažylis, Sima Rakutienė, and Inga Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, "Two Competing Normative Trajectories in the Context of the First Baltic Gay Pride Parade in Lithuania," *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics* 7, no. 2 (2014): 37-76, <https://doi.org/10.1515/bjlp-2015-0002>.

¹⁶ Artūras Tereškinas, "'Not private enough?' Homophobic and Injurious Speech in the Lithuanian Media," *Lithuanian Gay League* (2007): 1-24, https://ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Attachments/lithuania_-_not_private_enough.pdf.

¹⁷ Richard Mole, "Nationality and sexuality: homophobic discourse and the 'national threat' in contemporary Latvia," *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 3 (January 2011): 540-560, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00476.x>; Phillip Ayoub, "With Arms Wide Shut: Threat Perception, Norm Reception, and Mobilized Resistance to LGBT Rights," *Journal of Human Rights* 13, no. 3 (September 2014): 337-362, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2014.919213>; Koen Sloopmaeckers, Touquet Heleen, Vermeersch Peter, "Introduction: EU Enlargement and LGBT Rights—Beyond Symbolism?" in *The EU Enlargement and Gay Politics. The Impact of Eastern Enlargement on Rights, Activism and Prejudice*, ed. Koen Sloopmaeckers, Heleen Touquet, Peter Vermeersch (Palgrave Macmillan: London, UK, 2016), 1-16; Richard Mole, "Nationalism and Homophobia in Central and Eastern Europe," in *The EU Enlargement and Gay Politics. The Impact of Eastern Enlargement on Rights, Activism and Prejudice*, ed. Koen Sloopmaeckers, Heleen Touquet, Peter Vermeersch (Palgrave Macmillan: London, UK, 2016), 99-121.

Taking inspiration from postcolonial theory, which scrutinizes sexuality politics in the post-communist space by deconstructing Euro-centric binarism between East-West,¹⁸ this thesis analyzes the discursive political struggles over the meaning of traditional Lithuanianness in relation to the LGBTI-friendly Europeanness. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Milica Bakić-Hayden, the research aims to explain how the discursive ambiguity operates within cultural hierarchies. This thesis argues that *the relational complexities between Lithuania and Europe expose sophisticated signs of resistance, which simultaneously aims to disrupt and affirm cultural asymmetries*. By discovering discursive ambiguity, the analysis illuminates how Lithuanian conservatives assert and inscribe their agency within the hierarchical relations of Oriental power.

The research thus employs discourse analysis, a “study of language in use,”¹⁹ which examines how the specific meaning of traditional Lithuanianness is produced and represented as “a particular ‘regime of truth’,”²⁰ which correspondingly excludes other possible subjective meanings and identities.²¹ However, while the discourse aims to establish itself as stable, “neither fixity nor absolute non-fixity is possible”²² – making it easily modifiable and inconsistent. The ambiguous nature of the conservative discourse produces a particular meaning of Lithuanianness, which excludes other identities – such as LGBTI – but is unstable as it aims to identify itself with Europeanness and simultaneously subvert cultural incongruencies. The research scrutinizes statements as delivered by the Lithuanian President

¹⁸ Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielinska, ed., *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives* (London: Ashgate, 2011).

¹⁹ Stephanie Taylor, “Locating and Conducting Discourse Analytic Research,” in *Discourse as Data: A guide for Analysis*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon Yates (London: SAGE, 2001), 5.

²⁰ Jennifer Milliken, “The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods,” *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (1999): 229, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1354066199005002003>.

²¹ Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006), 18-19.

²² Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 111.

Gitanas Nausėda and conservative political figures and their discourses on EU and Lithuanian identity and human rights encompassing the LGBTI dimension.

The analysis delineates storylines across political speeches and identifies the sets of social meanings, values, and norms specific to the historical and socio-cultural²³ context in Lithuania. The analytical process of discursive linking and differentiation traces the discourse appropriation and resistance to Europeanness “through series of signs that are linked to each other to constitute relations of sameness as well as through a differentiation to another series of juxtaposed signs.”²⁴ It entailed finding signs of discursive cultural appropriation of Europeanness and to discover the strategies of resistance fluctuating between appropriation and subversion of cultural hierarchies.

Some important details must be acknowledged which impacted the research process. Firstly, the research was carried out because of author’s personal interest in human rights promotion, and Lithuanian passiveness towards LGBTI rights, which fueled curiosity to scrutinize the dilemma of LGBTI equality in Lithuania. This thesis also did not intend to provide any generalizations and the author is aware that there are political incentives aiming to contribute to the well-being of LGBTI people. Lastly, limitations should be addressed during the research process. Due to the extraordinary Covid-19 situation in the spring of 2020, access to Lithuanian archives to retrieve historical discourse on sexualities and to conduct interviews with politicians was impossible and thus data was gathered from media sources only. As sources are published in Lithuanian, all translations provided here are the author’s own.

The thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter locates Lithuania within a broader post-communist Eastern European region to expose asymmetrical power relations between East-West and presents a postcolonial theoretical framework regarding the appropriation and

²³ Laclau and Mouffe, 1-5.

²⁴ Hansen, 37.

practices of resistance towards cultural hegemony. Following the introduction of postcolonial thought, the second chapter sheds light on the asymmetries of sexuality politics within the EU. Chapter 3 contextualizes sexuality politics in Lithuania, which helps to grasp the inherent ambiguity of Lithuania's quest to be like 'European' and simultaneous disavowal of its sexual normativity. The fourth chapter shifts to an analysis of the Lithuanian political discourse to expose the ambivalent double articulation embracing the appropriation of language and signs of resistance vis-à-vis the European LGBTI-friendly identity. Lastly, the paper reflects upon the findings and presents recommendations for further research.

Chapter 1. Foundations of a Postcolonial Research Agenda

As mentioned above, the project draws upon postcolonial theory to unveil tensions between traditional Lithuanian and European liberal tenets. This research agenda is employed to capture signs of discursive hybridity and thus helps to approach the ambivalent fluctuation between compliance and resistance to the European liberal notion of sexual freedom. This chapter seeks to explore how the postcolonial framework can be used to understand European cultural domination *vis-à-vis* Eastern Europe and reflects on the discourses of resistance against cultural asymmetries, which embrace a human rights dimension.

Postcolonial theorists, such as Gayatri Spivak, Frantz Fanon, and Homi Bhabha, have rebuked the conventional perceptions of Western superiority and have argued about the importance of postcolonial socio-cultural practices.²⁵ By giving epistemic weight to the postcolonial subject, theorists have established an intellectual space to deconstruct hierarchical power relations and disclose the ambivalent cultural appropriation and resistance to hegemony. Therefore, in the case of the post-Soviet Lithuania, where sexuality politics are lagging behind in relation to Western Europe, the postcolonial debates on “Western superiority *vs.* resistance” opens an analytical space to understand the local agency within power relations.

1.1 *Situating Postcolonialism in Eastern Europe*

Edward Said critical inquiry into postcolonial studies describes the term “Orientalism” by exposing epistemological and ontological hierarchies between West and East. The Western essentialist representations have perpetuated the meaning of the Eastern cultures as inferior to the West. These discursive practices thus embedded the meaning of the West as “civilizational”

²⁵ See: Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

and simultaneously declared the intrinsic cultural subordination of the Orient.²⁶ While postcolonial theory is applied predominantly to former Western colonies, the intersections of power dynamics can be sketched onto the Eastern European region.

After the Cold War, the postcolonial framework was employed to deconstruct Western-centric mechanisms of suppression and exclusion in the post-communist region.²⁷ From the historical perspective, the assumption of the other *within* Europe –Eastern Europe – was invented as the other half to Western Europe during the age of Enlightenment.²⁸ Whereas the West was valorized and cultivated as the ideational nest of “civilization,” the East was a complementary retroactive mirror of backwardness and barbarism.²⁹ Therefore, the perception of Eastern backwardness was enforced by Western intellectual, political, and socio-cultural domination.

Nonetheless, the application of postcolonial analytical lenses in the post-communist context reveals peculiar complexities. While Eastern European countries have suffered under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union’s colonizing experiences, the standard Western colonization taxonomy does not apply in the region.³⁰ As the socialist experiment of modernity was refused, the Western modernity was promoted as the only alternative to follow and fostered a desire from Eastern Europe to “return to the Westernness that once was theirs.”³¹ Thus, the

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1-2.

²⁷ See: Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme “Balkans”: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 1-15, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/2500258>; Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 917-931, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/2501399>; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁸ Wolff, 4.

²⁹ Wolff, 4.

³⁰ David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique,” *PMLA* 166, no. 1 (January 2001): 116, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/463645>.

³¹ Moore, 118.

analysis must account that the West is perceived as the object of desire,³² and Eastern European countries and societies strive to be *like* the West.

The unquestionable orientation towards the West, nonetheless, complicates East-West relations. Historically subjugated Eastern European identities anchored Western superiority and predisposed inherent asymmetries between the regions after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The transformations in Europe perpetuated a quasi-colonialist relationship through a process of othering and have reproduced dualisms between the civilized “us” – the non-Soviet– and exotic “others” – post-communist countries.³³ Willingness to adopt a free-market economy and democracy became a yardstick for Eastern Bloc countries to fit into the paradigm of Western liberal postmodernity.³⁴ When the independence of Lithuania was declared in 1990, it did not establish a new state but proclaimed the continuity of interwar Lithuania, which was European at its heart. Hence, this new “return to Europe” meant making up for almost 50 years of presumed teleological backwardness and lagging behind in relation to the West.

In much the same way as (mis)perceived national identities, geo-temporal disparities are embedded in notions of sexuality. From the Western perspective, CEE is ‘lagging behind,’ while ‘trying to catch up with the West.’³⁵ The relational concepts of CEE and West entail sexual hierarchies, in which the CEE is assumed to be a “‘contemporary periphery’, [...] ‘European enough’ (geographically), but not yet ‘Western’ (temporary).”³⁶ Captured by the desire of Europeanness, the label of not-quite-but-yet Eastern Europe is reinforced through

³² Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1992), 37-38.

³³ Michal Buchowski, “The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 464-465, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/4150874>.

³⁴ Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 198-199, quoted in Buchowski: 464-465.

³⁵ Kulpa and Mizielinska, 17.

³⁶ Kulpa and Mizielinska, 23.

sexuality politics and thus reproduces cultural misalignments between Western and Eastern Europe.

The postcolonial lenses employed in this subchapter interrogate the Western-dominated epistemological and ontological realm *vis-à-vis* Eastern Europe. Socio-cultural and sexual hierarchies within the European continent can thus account for strategies of resistance, which induces marginalization and exclusion of LGBTI communities in Eastern European societies. Following regional contextualization, the next subchapter introduces colonial concepts of discursive modes of resistance. Specifically, the subchapter explores how the colonized appropriate and simultaneously resist Western hegemonic culture and sketches out the theoretical framework to be applied in the empirical chapters.

1.2 The Fool's Game of Colonialism – Appropriation, and Modes of Resistance

The postcolonial approach reveals the complexities lying within the discourses of resistance. While Lithuania is identified as European, the political discourse tends to appropriate and simultaneously resist specific notions of contemporary European identity by mimicking and reversing its cultural hegemony. This subchapter thus introduces concepts of cultural appropriation and modes of resistance through ambiguity, mimicry, and reversal Orientalist discourse, which help to understand how Lithuanian political discourse grapples with European LGBTI normativity.

As previously stated, the postcolonial endeavors to incorporate the colonial subjectivity aim to disrupt the binaries between West-East. Fanon has advanced the local agency in the social construction of the colonized subject³⁷ and explored the psychological and behavioral

³⁷ Fanon, 92.

dynamism within the colonial structure. The distorted and mutually constitutive colonial relations capture relational ambiguity. While the colonial identity is negotiated in relation to the colonizer, the internalized inferiority complex leads to neurotic behaviors and constant self-evaluation.³⁸ However, colonial interactions reveal disturbing behavioral patterns, which challenge the colonial subject's predetermined identity. These modes of conduct uncover ambivalent layers of social construction:

There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all cost, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect.³⁹

The paradoxical tension within the colonial structure reflects the everyday drama of the colonized. On the one hand, the colonial discourse establishes a clear line and draws boundaries between “us” – the superior West – and “them” – the inferior East. On the other hand, the colonial subject strives to demonstrate the value of his thought in the eyes of the colonizer. While the desire to be acknowledged occupies the mind of the colonized, it unveils inherent cultural hierarchies. In the case of Lithuania, the unquestionable appropriation of the Europeanness exposes internalized perceptions of cultural insufficiency and backwardness.

Fanon uncovers the ambiguous appropriation, the adoption of the colonial culture, and its essential elements through language. To speak the oppressor's language is “to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.”⁴⁰ While the colonizer reproduces cultural differences, cultural appropriation becomes a cornerstone for the colonized to gain legitimacy and social status.⁴¹ Lithuania's identification with Europeanness has affected national and

³⁸ Fanon, 4-7.

³⁹ Fanon, 3.

⁴⁰ Fanon, 8.

⁴¹ Fanon, 8-9.

cultural maps. While reconciling local and international cultures and ideations, the resistance to incompatible European cultural tenets is discovered through ambiguous discursive practices. As this research aims to expose the hybrid nature of the Lithuanian rhetoric resisting LGBTI-friendly Europeanness, it follows specific practices of mimicry and reversed Orientalist discourse discussed by Homi Bhabha and Milica Bakić-Hayden.

The colonized position towards the colonizer discloses practices of resistance, which aim to subvert and modify the colonial knowledge and power.⁴² Drawing on Fanon, Bhabha elaborates on the modes of resistance and exposes the ambiguity of the colonial discourse. According to him, the colonial subject is split between the desire to become like a colonizer while acknowledging the difference and keeping “his place in the slave’s *avenging* anger.”⁴³ The discourse unmasks an ambiguous production of the postcolonial “otherness” by simultaneously recognizing and disavowing inherent differences⁴⁴ utilizing strategies of mimicry and imitation of the colonial culture.

Practices of mimicry are “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge.”⁴⁵ Mimicry occurs when the colonized appropriate and imitate the culture of the colonizers. By advancing the Lacanian notion of mimicry as camouflage, Bhabha explains that:

[C]olonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.⁴⁶

⁴² David Jefferess, *Postcolonial Resistance: Culture, Liberation, and Transformation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 20.

⁴³ Bhabha, 44.

⁴⁴ Bhabha, 70-71.

⁴⁵ Bhabha, 85.

⁴⁶ Bhabha, 86.

Mimicry exposes inherent differences, while the disavowal process opens a space to refute omnipresent cultural superiority. The discourse of mimicry is thus a sign of double articulation – the colonial subject discursively appropriates and internalizes the hierarchies of Oriental power and strategically points out its inappropriate objects.⁴⁷ By representing resemblance and menace of cultural appropriation,⁴⁸ the colonized disclose hegemony's failure to establish domination.⁴⁹ The conservative strategy of mimicry constitutes the relational meaning between Lithuanianness and Europeanness, which entails both self-identification and dis-identification to the contemporary European identity.

Modes of mimicry, executed to appropriate and resist hegemonic power, affirm internalized perceptions of cultural inferiority and aims to subvert colonial power or assert the local cultural strength. The discursive analysis of Bakić-Hayden helps to understand how orientalist discourse operates in post-communist European nations. Her argument denotes a paradox within the Eastern nationalist discourse, which aims to reverse the hierarchical binarism but works “within the same epistemology which assumes uncritically the essential and unchanging distinction between “East” and “West.””⁵⁰ This means that while nationalist discourse aims to counter power hierarchies by objectifying internal inferiority, it produces the same asymmetries of Oriental power. More specifically, an internalized reversed Orientalist discourse is employed to advance local agency within the power hierarchies. At the same time, the discourse exposes internalized cultural inferiority in relation to Western superiority. In the case of Lithuania, the local setting is perceived as inferior to the West and reproduces

⁴⁷ Bhabha, 86.

⁴⁸ Bhabha, 86.

⁴⁹ Anshuman Prasad, *Postcolonial Theory and Organizational Analysis: A Critical Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 21.

⁵⁰ Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalism,” 920.

asymmetrical power relations. Simultaneously, the national imagery of Lithuanianness is presented as superior to the postmodern Europeanness.

The postcolonial framework introduced in this chapter located Lithuania within the Eastern European region, elaborated on the strategies of appropriation and resistance, and explored modes of mimicry and reversed Orientalist discourse. Regional complexities reveal that presence of the ‘self’ and relations between East and West are mutually constitutive, created through simultaneous differentiation and appropriation. The internal divisions are still haunting regional localities as essentialist cultural representations of not-quite Eastern Europe became an inseparable part of the “civilized” Western Europe. While the Lithuanian subject is produced by Western European imagery, practices of cultural appropriation and mimicry expose resistance to its cultural tenets. At the same time, the local discourse opposes and reproduces Western epistemological superiority, deepening hierarchies of power. While the presented theoretical framework is applied in the empirical chapters, the next chapter illuminates on the normative power of LGBTI-friendly European identity, which helps to understand sexual hierarchies between regions.

Chapter 2. Mapping European Pedagogy on LGBTI

The ideational underpinnings of EU identity help to grasp the intrinsic asymmetries of sexuality within the EU. This chapter thus illuminates the EU's sexual normativity power transgressing the boundaries of local and national moralities. By drawing sexuality binarism, the normative power of the EU can account for the ambiguity inscribed in Lithuanian conservative discourses.

As the EU is a self-proclaimed beacon of 'fundamental rights,' LGBTI rights have become an important parcel defining which countries are gay-friendly and *vice versa*.⁵¹ The symbolic meaning of LGBTI right recognition correlates with the Normative Power Europe framework. By diffusing these "core" universal values abroad, the EU is described as a power of an ideational nature.⁵² The EU's capability to forge meanings of "normal" in the international arena, "predisposes it to act in a normative way."⁵³ LGBTI rights promotion thus became a litmus test for candidate countries to prove their compliance with fundamental human rights standards.

However, while the EU identity is shaped in relation to its Others, its ideational formation exposes inherent cultural incongruencies. The self-representational image of a 'good guy' is created by referring to the non-complying "others" and produces binaries.⁵⁴ Regarding politics of sexuality, the historically evolved contemporary idea of Europe and LGBTI rights promotion go beyond the institutional practices,⁵⁵ which induces ideational shifts for local identities and modified the notions of traditional and national settings. Hierarchies of

⁵¹ Phillip Ayoub and David Paternotte, *LGBT Activism and the Making of Europe. A Rainbow. Europe?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 3.

⁵² Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (June 2002): 235-258, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353>.

⁵³ Manners, 242.

⁵⁴ Thomas Diez, "Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe'," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (June 2005): 641, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F03058298050330031701>.

⁵⁵ Ayoub and Paternotte, 2.

normativity forged European superiority towards Eastern Enlargement countries, where “non-traditional” sexuality promotion became a prerequisite for membership. Therefore, the EU’s “fundamental rights myth”⁵⁶ exposes asymmetrical relations with countries aiming to preserve socio-cultural traditionalism.

The Eastern Enlargement process has accelerated internal tensions within the EU and deepened cultural asymmetries. Even though it intended to transform candidate states, *genuine* transformation was limited and opened space for contestation.⁵⁷ Particularly concerning LGBTI rights, post-accession developments incited resistance and stimulated contentious cultural and social debates in some member states,⁵⁸ including Lithuania. The Western domination over sexualities can account for national resentment after accession when the liberal notion of sexual self-determination was perceived as a threat to the established social structure and embedded traditionalism of national imagery.⁵⁹

While Western promotion of human rights contributes significantly to LGBTI well-being, it’s *leveraged pedagogy* of sexuality politics “can be understood as a didactical and cultural hegemonic relation of power, where the Central Eastern Europe (CEE) figures as an object of West/European pedagogy.”⁶⁰ These inherently unequal relations render CEE placed in a backward position, constantly catching up with the Western modernity of sexualities. Thus, the EU’s LGBTI-friendly identity reveals inherently asymmetrical power relations within its

⁵⁶ Stijn Smismans, “The European Union’s Fundamental Rights Myth,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no.1 (December 2009): 45–66, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2009.02041.x>.

⁵⁷ Koen Sloomaeckers, “Constructing European Union Identity through LGBT Equality Promotion: Crises and Shifting Othering Processes in the European Union Enlargement,” *Political Studies Review* (September 2019): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1478929919877624>.

⁵⁸ Conor O’Dwyer, “From Conditionality to Persuasion? Europeanization and the Rights of Sexual Minorities in Post-Accession Poland,” *Journal of European Integration* 32, no. 3 (May 2010): 229–234, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036331003646819>.

⁵⁹ Rasa Navickaitė, “Sexuality in Eastern European Scholarship: Thinking Backwardness and Difference through the Lens of Postcolonial Theory,” (master’s thesis, Utrecht University, 2013), 42, <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/282083>.

⁶⁰ Robert Kulpa, “Western *leveraged pedagogy* of Central and Eastern Europe: discourses of homophobia, tolerance, and nationhood,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 21, no. 4 (2014), 432, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.793656>.

own geographies, exposing borders of sexuality, which are dichotomized between the advanced West and not-yet European East.

While human rights promotion is interlinked with the Europeanisation process, it creates tensions between LGBTI-friendly European and national identities. Western ideological superiority can thus account for Eastern European frustrations over inhibited traditional culture and socio-cultural morals. This chapter was a parsimonious attempt to illuminate the geo-temporal binaries of sexuality in Europe, and the next chapter shifts to the historicity of sexuality politics in Lithuania. It sets out the socio-cultural context of Lithuania, which would help to understand the underlying logic of contemporary discourse over national identity within the EU, embracing the LGBTI dimension.

Chapter 3. Unwrapping Sexuality in Socialist and Post-Socialist Lithuania

To understand what is at the heart of the struggle over LGBTI emancipation in Lithuania, this section briefly outlines conflicting socio-political contexts regarding sexualities during interwar, socialist and post-socialist periods. The historical overview of attitudes towards homosexuality exposes complexities lying within the ideations of traditional Lithuanianness and its unsuccessful reconciliation with European sexual normativity. While the Soviet occupation stimulated transition to liberalism, social attitudes towards sexual identities are still impacted by prevalent traditionalism, epitomizing the Lithuanian socio-political culture.

The nature of the current LGBTI situation can be traced back to the interwar period when Lithuanian national consciousness and culture were predominantly understood in conservative terms. The formula of Lithuanian identity was “founded upon the alliance and ideological kinship between conservative nationalism and the ecclesiastical power structure (i.e., the Roman Catholic Church and its ideological and political network).”⁶¹ Conservative thought perceived liberal cosmopolitanism as a menace to ideational Lithuanianness – its Christian spirituality, values, and national culture.⁶² While homosexuality was criminalized,⁶³ the Lithuanian ‘self’ was perceived through the lens of embedded traditionalism and conservatism. Interwar Lithuania was therefore fertile ground to reproduce traditionalist stance against homosexuality during the Soviet times.

⁶¹ Leonidas Donskis, “Mapping Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Lithuania,” *East European Politics and Societies* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 488, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325499013003002>.

⁶² Donskis, 489-493.

⁶³ Ugnius Antanavičius, „Nusikaltimas ir bausmė tarpukario Lietuvoje: kaip baudė už abortus, homoseksualumą ir santuoką su nekrikščionimis?“, *15min.lt*, July 23, 2017, <https://www.15min.lt/ar-zinai/naujienu/idomi-lietuva/nusikaltimas-ir-bausme-tarpukario-lietuvoje-kaip-baude-uz-abortus-homoseksualuma-ir-santuoka-su-nekrikscionimis-1162-829450>.

The social violence, which upheld socialist ideological underpinnings, embraced all segments of society, negating individuality and regulating private life. Homosexuality epitomized abnormality in the Soviet mindset because it posed a threat to the established legitimacy of heterosexual families, a model of normativity and ideological truth.⁶⁴ The ideologized relationship between the state and society aimed to control and govern individuals through social reproduction practices.⁶⁵ Whereas heterosexual families were perceived as beneficial for the future, stigmatized sexual minorities, unable to reproduce, were dangerous and deviant to the established socialist structure of society.⁶⁶

Moreover, to secularize the institution of ‘family,’ retroactive references to a religious narrative were combined with putative rejections of religious beliefs.⁶⁷ The alteration of traditionalism and its application to proletarian collectives regenerated traditional heterosexual familial imagery and perpetuated the idea of homosexuality as a deviant abnormality, which corresponded to the traditional Lithuanian approaches to sexualities. At the same time, traditionalism was a “defensive phenomenon” aiming to preserve the collective Lithuanian identity⁶⁸ and sustain the national existence of Lithuanianness during Soviet colonization. Therefore, the non-existence of homosexuality thus reproduced the ideational irreconciliation between traditionalism and openness to sexual identities.

Although the Soviet occupation is predominantly considered as a parenthesis in Lithuania’s grand national narrative, it significantly shaped the country after its independence.

⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3, quoted in Skirmantė Česienė, „Homoseksualūs žmonės viešose ir privačiose erdvėse: socialistinis ir postsocialistinis Lietuvos kontekstas,” in *Heteronormos hegemonija: homoseksualių žmonių socialinės atskirties ir diskriminacijos patirtys*, ed. Arnoldas Zdanevičius (Kaunas: Vytauto Dižiojo universitetas, 2007), 123.

⁶⁵ Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender After Socialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 19.

⁶⁶ Gal and Kligman, 23.

⁶⁷ See: Alexander Kondakov, “Resisting the Silence: The Use of Tolerance and Equality Arguments by Gay and Lesbian Activist Groups in Russia,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 28, no. 3 (2013): 407, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cls.2013.3>; H. Kent Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

⁶⁸ Donskis, 488.

While homosexuality was historically suppressed and invisible, prejudices against sexuality have transferred to the post-independence Lithuanian mindset. Although independence paved the way for the long-awaited “return to European family,”⁶⁹ the liberal transition brought about novel notions of individuality and personal autonomy, something previously unknown to Lithuanian society. Even with increased access to information on sexuality in the 1990s, the presumptive sexual revolution stimulated “patriarchalism, the lack of basic civil rights for LGBTQ+ people and state-sponsored homophobia.”⁷⁰ While socialism in Lithuania vanished, the social mindset trapped in traditionalism, particularly regarding the attitudes towards LGBTI, remains profound.

The liberal transition implies an unsuccessful reconciliation of European liberal culture with the version of Lithuanianness dominating mainstream post-independence political discourse. While traditionalism safeguarded Lithuanian nationhood throughout the years of Soviet colonization, its preservation became pivotal after independence. Resentment over the liberal ascendance, embracing the emergence of LGBTI people, was expressed by Lithuanian neoconservative forces. In 1995, philosopher Arvydas Sliogeris claimed that the excessive liberal political culture weakened national sovereignty and blurred the lines “between what was real and what was imagined, for example “manhood” versus “transsexuality.”⁷¹ The deviant figure of “transsexual” acquired a symbolic meaning embedded within the paradigm of liberalism, which threatened the “manhood,” the Lithuanian nation. This resonates with philosopher’s Vytautas Radzvilas rampant criticism of liberal cosmopolitanism, which seeks

⁶⁹ Gediminas Vitkus, “Lithuania: A Case of Confidence in the European Project,” in *The European Union in the Fog: Building Bridges between National Perspectives on the European Union*, ed. Vivien Pertusot (Institut français des relations internationales, 2016), 135.

⁷⁰ Artūras Tereškinas, “Precarious Sexualities, Alternative Intimacies in Postsocialist Lithuania,” *Kultūra ir visuomenė: socialinių tyrimų žurnalas* 10, no. 1 (2019): 14, <https://doi.org/10.7220/2335-8777.10.1.1>.

⁷¹ Balázs Trencsenyi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, Maria Falina, and Mónika Baár, *In Search of a New Ideology. In A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume II, Part II: Negotiating Modernity in the “Short Twentieth Century” (1968 and Beyond)* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 288.

to create a “new man” and change human nature by eradicating the two pillars of the Lithuania national existence –Christianity and nationhood.⁷²

However, since membership of the EU was a *sine qua non*, its consequences for Lithuanian national self-determination vanished.⁷³ Until 2004, compatibility between Lithuania’s revived Christian and national folkloric tropes and elements of European political culture remained unquestioned.⁷⁴ Despite this the redefinition of the national identity, along the lines of Europeanness hindered genuine social change as LGBTI rights promotion has been shown to have been artificial in nature.⁷⁵ State-sponsored practices⁷⁶ continue to disempower LGBTI groups by refusing to grant them civil rights and setting legal grounds regulating individual behaviors and decisions.⁷⁷ Even though the Europeanisation process brought about positive changes for the LGBTI community,⁷⁸ the tension between sexualities and traditionalism sets a stage for a cultural battleground. The promotion of “traditional values,” i.e. heteronormativity, became a tool to resist the pro-LGBTI European identity.

Political reluctance to ensure LGBTI well-being reveals the unsuccessful reconciliation of liberalism and Lithuanian traditionalism, which kept nationhood alive throughout Soviet

⁷² Vytautas Radžvilas, „Šliaužiantis totalitarizmas,” *Bernardinai.lt*, January 13, 2010, <http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/2010-01-13-vytautas-radzvilas-sliauziantis-totalitarizmas/38382>.

⁷³ Kjetil Duvold and Mindaugas Jurkynas, “Lithuania,” in *The Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe, Third Edition*, ed. Sten Berglund, Joakim Ekman, Kevin Deegan-Krause, Terje Knuten (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), 150.

⁷⁴ Duvold and Jurkynas, 149-150.

⁷⁵ It should be noted that homosexuality was decriminalized in 1993. Following the EU membership conditions set by the Copenhagen criteria, Lithuania has passed a Law on Equal Treatment prohibiting any kind of discrimination based on sexual orientation. See: “LGBT* Rights in Lithuania,” LGL – National LGBT Rights Organization, last modified July 26, 2017, https://www.lgl.lt/en/?page_id=199.

⁷⁶ LGBTI people face discrimination, and their human rights are violated as same-sex partnerships and marriages are not legally recognized. Lithuanian authorities also refuse to ratify the Istanbul convention, and medical gender reassignment is legally unrecognized. The well-known “propaganda law”, the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information, curtails the rights of LGBTI people to freedom of expression. See: Tereškinas, 14; ““Amnesty International” criticizes Lithuania’s violation of LGBT* rights,” LGL – National LGBT Rights Organization, March 4, 2015, <https://www.lgl.lt/en/?p=8646>.

⁷⁷ Tereškinas, „Precarious Sexualities,” 4.

⁷⁸ The Lithuanian Gay League was established in 1993 to represent sexual minorities and since 2004 is actively lobbying for political and economic change and litigating for human rights. See: Ausra Padskocimaite, “LGBT Rights in Post-conditionality Lithuania: One Step Forward, One Step Back,” *Baltic Worlds* 9, no. 3 (October 2016): 6.

occupation. Whereas Europe was an example to follow, some of its cultural-liberal manifestations became incompatible with the hierarchical system of Lithuanian Christian values. As of today, the LGBTI community symbolically epitomizes the ideational struggles over the meaning of traditional Lithuanianness in the era of postmodernity. To this end, this paper exposed socio-cultural incongruencies and competing meanings of traditionalism and European normativity of sexuality. The next chapter presents an analysis of political discourse over LGBTI promotion and Lithuanian national imagery.

Chapter 4. In the Search of Lithuanianness Through an LGBTI Paradigm

As the previous chapters have shown, the tension between LGBTI rights promotion and local cultural tenets is a matter of embedded asymmetrical power relations within the postcolonial structure. This chapter explores how concrete actors employ different discursive strategies and mechanisms to appropriate Europeaness or to resist its LGBTI normativity.

The analysis presented here focuses on presidential speeches delivered at political and cultural events, and interviews with the local press. It also prioritizes online articles, press conferences, and speeches delivered by the key opponents of the LGBTI rights movement from the Lithuanian Homeland Union-Christian Democratic Party (CHP) and Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LFGU). To present more robust analytical results, the selected political figures uphold a non-Eurosceptic stance and support Lithuania's membership in the EU. Priority was given to statements regarding the promotion of LGBTI rights, the future of the EU and its identity, and the Lithuanian national identity. The research covered the period between 2013-2020 because of the divergent approaches to European integration, which gained momentum during the migrant crisis, the war in Ukraine, and Brexit. Political articles, speeches, and statements were retrieved from Lithuanian major media outlets,⁷⁹ YouTube and Facebook and the official President's, CHP, and LFGU websites.

By tracing political storylines, the analysis discovered the discursive strategies, which differentiates Lithuanian agency from Europeaness. The statements were selected to expose certain meanings of Lithuanianness, correspondingly excluding other subjectivities. This chapter argues that the *hybridity of the political discourse reveals signs of double articulation, aiming to forge a meaning of morally "truth" Lithuanianness*. The analysis of the President's

⁷⁹ The articles published in media outlets of *lrt.lt*, *lytas.lt*, *15min.lt*, *delfi.lt*, *alfa.lt* are analyzed.

statements discovers discursive appropriation of Europeanness and self-orientalization while the mimicry aims to differentiate traditional Lithuanianness by accentuating the need to preserve national identity. While the discourse attempts to reverse cultural asymmetries, it produces a partial presence of Lithuania within the power hierarchies. The second subchapter (4.2) presents the conservative discourse, which tends to ambiguously establish a cultural superiority of Lithuanianness *vis-à-vis* morally decadent Europe by emphasizing the importance of history, traditions, and Christianity. These cornerstone ideations posit LGBTI promotion as incompatible with the traditional imagery of Lithuanianness and its cultural mental maps. The analysis also exposes varying political representations of Lithuanianness and the discursive struggle over the meaningful identification of traditional Lithuanianness within the EU.

4.1 In-Between: The Mimesis⁸⁰ of Europeanness and Imbued Lithuanianness

As mentioned earlier, while Lithuania identifies itself as a European country, the LGBTI rights promotion has been much contested. This subchapter presents the Lithuanian President's discourse surrounding LGBTI rights and Lithuanian identity, revealing simultaneous appropriation and resistance to LGBTI rights promotion. Whereas LGBTI rights promotion pertains to Europeanness, the conventional Lithuanian setting becomes a tool of self-differentiation to challenge the omnipresent cultural hegemony. Nevertheless, the discursive representation of Lithuanian subjectivity still falls into the hierarchies of Oriental power.

⁸⁰ The name of this subchapter was inspired by previously referred Rasa Balockaite's article "Between mimesis and non-existence."

In 2018, President Nauseda nominated himself as an independent conservative⁸¹ candidate. While Nauseda refrained from antagonisms towards the LGBTI community, his ideational conservatism emerged through ambivalent discourses. According to him, whilst Lithuanians have “the strongest faith and trust in the EU’s future,”⁸² his discourse over sexuality politics implies an ambivalent relationship with the EU’s pro-LGBTI identity. Already in 2016, the President had declared that “family is an indisputable value in modern times [...] marriage is the foundation of the family, a tradition that has been around for centuries.”⁸³ The normative ideal of a nuclear family, an essential pillar of Lithuanianness, the unspoken “other” – LGBTI – becomes a parcel of non-Lithuanianness. As he said, “these people [LGBTI] have the right to live as they want, but this is not a marriage, a family whose concept is enshrined in the Constitution.”⁸⁴ His imagery of family,⁸⁵ as a national trope, constitutes an “*organic unity of interests*”⁸⁶ and weaves a legitimizing narrative explaining the Lithuanian community. His vision on LGBTI promotion and Lithuanian national identity exposes signs of double articulation.

The President’s discourse over LGBTI rights reveals the unfinished Lithuanian transition to Europeanness. To follow Fanon, while cultural appropriation means to take legitimate part in the Western *mission civilisatrice*,⁸⁷ the President’s narrative accentuated LGBTI rights promotion as a facet of Europeanness. Notably, while the human rights discourse

⁸¹ Ugnius Antanavičius, „G. Nausėda rinkimų programos pristatyme: „Esu konservatyvus, bet ne konservatorius”,“ *15min.lt*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/g-nauseda-atkskleide-kad-isrinktas-prezidentu-pirmojo-vizito-vyktu-i-lenkija-56-1106366>.

⁸² Gitanas Nauseda, „Su Europos diena!” Facebook, May 9, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/nausedagitanas/videos/su-europos-diena/1630272650444218/>.

⁸³ Laisvos visuomenės institutas, „G. Nausėda: „Valstybė be stiprios šeimos yra neįmanoma”,“ May 16, 2016, YouTube video, 1:30-3:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgwPMELmx2s&t=79s>.

⁸⁴ Modesta Gučaitė, Gytis Pankūnas, „Debatai: Šimonytė ir Nausėda sutarė, kol neprakalbo apie asmenvardžių rašybą,” *lrt.lt*, May 15, 2019, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1059455/debatai-simonyte-ir-nauseda-sutare-kol-neprakalbo-apie-asmenvardziu-rasyba>.

⁸⁵ Article 38 Section 3 “Society and state” of the Lithuanian Constitution states that family is a union between man and woman. This Constitutional provision is predominantly used to refute the legal establishment of partnerships. See: The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, art. 38, § 3.

⁸⁶ Anne McClintock, “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and Family,” *Feminist Review* no. 44 (Summer 1993): 63.

⁸⁷ Fanon, 8-9.

in Lithuania is of high importance because of the Soviet atrocities, it differentiates Lithuania as a beacon of democracy, respecting international law and fighting for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Eastern Partnership countries.⁸⁸ As the human rights dimension holds a symbolic meaning, LGBTI promotion affirms a sign of belonging to Europeanness:

I am European, a person who holds human rights above everything. And I will fight for the expression of everyone's human rights, and especially in the area we are talking about now [LGBTI].⁸⁹

While the desire of Europeanness implies Lithuanian participation in the civilizing mission, it also reveals the quest to gain recognition within the postcolonial structure. Nausėda's speech delivered to the residing ambassadors expressed Lithuania's historically developed belongingness and natural orientation towards the West:

The long-term orientation towards the West developed in Lithuania's history, unambiguously defines who we are and where we have always wanted to be.⁹⁰

While the discourse affirms Lithuanian identification with Europeanness, the appropriation of the human rights language and emphasis on a trajectory towards the West prompts the President to reconsider the Lithuanian socio-cultural setting. Talking about the legalization of same-sex partnerships, he acknowledged cultural modifications:

⁸⁸ See: Gitanas Nausėda „Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidento Gitano Nausėdos kalba Jungtinių Tautų Generalinėje Asamblėjoje,” delivered on September 26, 2020, <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/lietuvos-respublikos-prezidento-gitano-nausedos-kalba-jungtiniu-tautu-generalineje-asamblejoje/33148>.

⁸⁹ Minfo Lietuva, „Gitanas Nausėda už netradicinę šeimą,” March 9, 2019, Youtube video, 0:01-0:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXVK1EAb1EU>.

⁹⁰ BNS, „Nausėda atkreipė diplomatų dėmesį į bandymus istoriją paversti politikos tarnaite,” *lrt.lt*, February 17, 2020, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1143423/nauseda-atkreipe-diplomatu-demesi-i-bandymus-istorija-paversti-politikos-tarnaite>.

Lithuanian society is gradually becoming European, many people get acquainted with the situation in other countries of the world, and we cannot fail to see that change.⁹¹

In the President's statements describing the situation of the LGBTI community, the perception of Western cultural superiority – Lithuania's object of desire⁹² – is discursively internalized. By virtue of the perceived cultural inferiority, the discourse indicates social inadequacy and exposes practices of self-orientalization. While President Nauseda has promoted a constructive dialogue over LGBTI rights, he illustrates the social setting as backward, insufficiently European to deal with sensitive issues:

I think that in terms of the situation, partnership, marriage, we can achieve a lot and good for you [...] by talking about it openly, discussing and less throwing stones on the streets of Lithuania, because today, unfortunately, the attitude on sexual minorities among some categories of people is very very deplorable.⁹³

However, the imitation of Europeanness reveals discursive complexities. Following Bhabha's notion of mimicry, the imitation tends to resemble and oppose Western civilizing, and it's cultural "displacing gaze."⁹⁴ The discursive *modus operandi* of mimicry shows signs of double articulation, which distances Lithuania from the EU's sexual normativity. On the one hand, the appropriation of LGBTI-friendly language and self-identification to Europeanness exposes a postcolonial yearning to gain legitimacy within the power structure. On the other hand, the discursive strategy of mimicry opens a space for self-differentiation and resistance.

⁹¹ Vaidotas Beniušis, „G. Nausėda – apie LGBT asmenis, mokesčius, A. Lukašenką ir Bažnyčios įtaką jo sprendimams,” *Irytas.lt*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2019/09/09/news/g-nauseda-apie-mokescius-czv-kalejima-a-lukasenka-ir-baznycios-itaka-jo-sprendimams-11751243/>.

⁹² Derrida, 38-39.

⁹³ Minfo Lietuva, „Nausėda už netradicinę šeimą,” 2:30.

⁹⁴ Bhabha, 86.

The cultural misalignments stimulate to renegotiate power hierarchies by identifying the inherent differences of the local culture. While the President's ambivalent discourse simultaneously ascribes the desire of Europeanness through the LGBTI narratives, it opposes cultural hegemony by referring to the prevalent traditionalism within Lithuanian society. The discursive strategy of self-identification produces incompatibilities between LGBTI promotion and the Lithuanian social setting:

We live in a Christian society with attitudes that have developed over the years, so we should be very careful about human rights implementation when it comes to sexual minorities.⁹⁵

The ambivalent nature of the discourse draws cultural and national boundaries, where the long-standing traditional values that the Lithuanian majority holds become a tool to alienate Lithuanianess from Europeanness. The discourse on religion also reproduces the ideational incompatibility of LGBTI promotion. While religiosity does not necessarily condition negative attitudes towards the LGBTI community *per se*, the discursive reference to religion legitimizes certain ideas describing the national community.⁹⁶ That is, by referring to religion, Nausėda legitimizes a narrative of socio-cultural traditionalism, a vital trope of Lithuanian identity:

[W]ithout a doubt, it is necessary to take into account the opinion of the Catholic Church, considering that many Lithuanian people believe and believe as Catholics.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Vilius Petrauskas, „Kandidatų skirtumai: požiūris į homoseksualų partnerystę, vienas kitą ir Rusiją,” *alfa.lt*, April 10, 2019, <https://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/50383762/kandidatu-skirtumai-pozioris-i-homoseksualu-partneryste-vienas-kita-ir-rusija>.

⁹⁶ See: Ayoub: 337-362; Dorota Hall, “Antagonism in the Making: Religion and Homosexuality in Post-Communist Poland,” in *Religious and Sexual Nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe. Gods, Gays and Governments*, ed. Srdjan Sremac and R. Ruud Ganzevoort (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 74-92; Mole, “Nationalism and Homophobia in Central and Eastern Europe,” 109.

⁹⁷ Beniušis, „G. Nausėda – apie LGBT asmenis, mokesčius, A. Lukašenką ir Bažnyčios įtaką jo sprendimams.”

The history of our state is inseparable from the history of Christianity in Lithuania.⁹⁸

Moreover, the President's statements on identity peculiarly position Lithuanian agency within a broader international web. According to Bakić-Hayden, while acknowledging the subordinate position in relation to the West, the nationalist discourse aims to reverse hierarchical asymmetries by exposing the strength of local agency whilst remaining in the same power frame.⁹⁹ The President's emphasis on the preservation of Lithuanian identity resonates with the notion of reversed Orientalist discourse. The narrative forges a symbolic meaning of differentiating Lithuanianness amid postmodernity, where the orientation towards the West and identification to Europeaness vanish:

Today, I see that our national identity is also under threat, and perhaps not so much because we are no longer able to protect our own national identity, but because *there are many temptations, a globalized world, many different international currents* [...] Let's offer *our exclusivity, our success* [emphasis added].¹⁰⁰

[W]e need to resist the temptations of globalism that we must remain Lithuanians first, and then Europeans and everything else.¹⁰¹

While international threats undermining the nationhood urge discursive responses to nurture Lithuanian subjectivity, its national weakness is presented as a strength to conceal

⁹⁸ Gitanas Nausėda „Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidento Gitano Nausėdos kalba Nacionalinių maldos pusryčių metu,” delivered on December 6, 2019, <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/lietuvos-respublikos-prezidento-gitano-nausedos-kalba-nacionaliniu-maldos-pusryciu-metu/33552>.

⁹⁹ Bakić-Hayden, 920.

¹⁰⁰ Violeta Grigaliūnaitė, „Gitanas Nausėda prie paminklo Jonui Basanavičiui: „Pasakiau žmonai – tu nuostabiai atrodei,” *15min.lt*, July 12, 2019, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/prezidento-gitano-nausedos-inauguracija-pirmasis-akcentas-pagarba-jonui-basanaviciui-56-1173130>.

¹⁰¹ Vaidotas Beniušis, „Nausėda: pirmiausia reikia išlikti lietuviais, o jau tada būti europiečiais ir visu kitu,” *lrt.lt*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1095673/nauseda-pirmiausia-reikia-islikti-lietuviais-o-jau-tada-buti-europieciais-ir-visu-kitu>.

ideational affiliations with Europe. Self-differentiation becomes a prerogative to establish legitimate subjectivity internationally, but the emphasis on foreign threats affirms an Oriental power relationship. The inherent asymmetries within the discourse disclose internalized inferiority of Lithuanianness that is captured by the cultural domination of the West.

The discourse produces the ambiguous positionality of traditional Lithuanianness within asymmetrical power structures. The internal conflict over the meaning of postcolonial identity creates its partial presence¹⁰² – while the struggle for Europeanness is declared, the disavowal becomes not only a space of resistance but also reveals the ambiguity of Lithuanian subjectivity. To follow Bhabha, “to be *for* an Other – entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of otherness.”¹⁰³ While lost in the postmodern era, Lithuania’s claim of Europeanness subsequently produces uncertainties of traditional imageries of Lithuanianness captured by the Orientalist power structure.

Reconstruction of the President’s discourse discerned double articulation strategies that present mutually constitutive and yet different imageries of Lithuanian and European identities. Although the President’s narratives about LGBTI promotion revealed internalized cultural inferiorities, self-identification through mimicry and reserved Orientalist discourse disclosed the incompatibility of LGBTI equality within the traditional Lithuanian society. His discourse thus delineates national and cultural boundaries, where LGBTI promotion opposes identity maps of Lithuanianness but is simultaneously articulated as a sign of Europeanness.

The President’s discourse reveals the ideational collisions between Lithuanian notions of traditionalism and European postmodernity and thus serves as an entry point into grasping the variations of resistance to European sexuality norms. The next subsection turns to the conservative discourse to discern the struggle over the notion of Lithuanianness within the

¹⁰² Bhabha, 40-65.

¹⁰³ Bhabha, 45.

asymmetrical power structures. While linking Lithuania with the European civilizational paradigm, conservative figures forge a particular meaning of traditional Lithuanian identity, which prompts a renegotiation of contemporary ideational underpinnings of the EU.

4. 2 Back to the Roots: Reimagining European Identity Through Lithuanianness

As shown in the previous subchapter, the Presidential discourse ambivalently identifies Lithuanianness to Europeanness through LGBTI promotion but simultaneously negates its compatibility by accentuating prevalent traditionalism. To find a rationale behind the meaning of Lithuanianness, this subchapter is devoted to presenting an analysis of the conservative political discourse. The discourse forges a meaning of Lithuanianness based on its historicity, which stimulates a renegotiation of the contemporary European ideations in line with its ‘civilizational’ values of Christianity and national self-determination. While emphasizing Lithuania’s political and cultural dependence on European civilization as the main source of the state’s security,¹⁰⁴ the conservative narratives aim to reverse the cultural hierarchies by affirming the strength of traditional Lithuanianness and present Europeanness as a descent into moral oblivion.

While appropriating the language of human rights, the conservative discourse explicitly aims to reinforce the Lithuanian agency *vis-à-vis* Europeanness. Compared with the President’s statements, the imitation of the human rights discourse is different but does not reject the core identification with the EU and still declares a commitment to human rights. To follow Bhabha, “the displacing gaze”¹⁰⁵ of postmodernism is resisted by referring to the

¹⁰⁴ Audronius Ažubalis, Žygimantas Pavilionis, Laurynas Kasčiūnas, „A. Ažubalis, Ž. Pavilionis L. Kasčiūnas. Socialdemokratų užsienio politika: ką darytume kitaip?” *delfi.lt*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/a-azubalis-z-pavilionis-l-kasciunas-socialdemokratu-uzsienio-politika-ka-darytume-kitaip.d?id=71815212>.

¹⁰⁵ Bhabha, 86.

national system of traditional values, which creates a narrative of ‘truth,’ while the other (i.e., liberal) socio-cultural ideational forms are displaced:

We have great respect for human rights, of course, and there can be no debate about that, but there are traditions, there is our approach to the family. If someone tries to tell us that human rights are not important to us ... Excuse me, different countries have different approaches to human rights in the notion of family. In this situation, we are a country with a very old family tradition.¹⁰⁶

The things [traditional values] that made Lithuania stand out from other EU countries, the ones we can be proud of. We cannot boast of any value that we can call liberal as our own, as a Lithuanian value.¹⁰⁷

The Lithuanian historicity of traditionalism deflects the unquestionable path to embrace contemporary European socio-cultural manifestations. ‘Civilizational’ values become a tool not only to differentiate oneself but also to present traditional Lithuanianness as morally superior to European cultural hegemony. This resonates with the notion of reversed Orientalist discourse when the nationalist discourse establishes local agency as superior to Europe and aims to subvert cultural hierarchies.¹⁰⁸ The conservative discourse on traditional Lithuanianness thus signals a narrative of European inferiority.

The EU’s ideational distortion is explained as “*that* [emphasis added] Europe [...] first brings the flag of the rainbow.”¹⁰⁹ This forges a meaning of cultural decadence by presenting contemporary Europe as alienated from its own essence. Assumed traditional and cultural

¹⁰⁶ Gytis Pankūnas, „Karbauskio LVŽS – savo nuomonę apie šeimą turintys žalieji ar industrinio žemės ūkio oligarchai?” *lrt.lt*, September 24, 2019, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1099465/karbauskio-lvzs-savo-nuomone-apie-seima-turintys-zalieji-ar-industrinio-zemes-ukio-oligarchai>.

¹⁰⁷ Benas Brunalas, ELTA, „Karbauskis apie Šimonytės sprendimą: sprendimą gerbiu, bet TS-LKD yra krizėje,” *lrt.lt*, March 3, 2020, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1148014/karbauskis-apie-simonytes-sprendima-sprendima-gerbiu-bet-ts-lkd-yra-krizeje>.

¹⁰⁸ Bakić-Hayden, 920.

¹⁰⁹ Vladimiras Laučius, „L. Kasčiūnas: jei Europa negerbia savęs, tai kodėl imigrantai turi ją gerbti?” *delfi.lt*, April 8, 2019, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/l-kasciunas-jei-europa-negerbia-saves-tai-kodel-imigrantai-turi-ja-gerbti.d?id=70939918>.

turmoil of the EU expose discursive resistance to its liberal notions, encompassing individual freedoms and rights dimension:

The search for a common European identity is limited to aspects of consumer freedoms, individualism, or the EU, as a symbol of the four freedoms, and peace in Europe. And this has, in principle, nothing to do with the idea of Europe of nations, in favor of nation-states or with its Christian vision fostered by the founding fathers of the European Community.¹¹⁰

The most important task for Europeans today [is] to agree on [...] “European values,” identity [...]. We must start talking again about the *role of ideas, collective ties, shared identities, and traditions in European life* [emphasis added].¹¹¹

The perceived moral decadence of contemporary Europeanness represents traditional Lithuanianness as morally “truthful,” a beacon of sustaining ‘civilizational’ essence. While the European soul is found in history – its traditional vision of the nation-state based on Christian values and norms- its liberal notion of Europeanness is left outside. The conservatives discourse thus resists the postmodern manifestations of Europeanness by pointing out its cultural negligence and its fall into moral oblivion.

Conservative discourse revolving around the main pillars of Lithuanianness – historicity and preserved traditionalism – asserts the Lithuanian agency inscribed within the power structure. While historical lessons of Soviet colonialism are learned and deeply embedded in mental maps, the national suffering becomes a tool to contest the ideational EU hegemony. Since Soviet rule aimed to impose the utopian vision of Homo Sovieticus identity

¹¹⁰ Audronius Ažubalis, Laurynas Kasčiūnas, „A. Ažubalis ir L. Kasčiūnas siūlo „lietuvišką“ ES ateities viziją,” *tsajunga.lt*, May 4, 2018, <https://tsajunga.lt/aktualijos/a-azubalis-ir-l-kasciunas-siulo-lietuviska-es-ateities-vizija/>.

¹¹¹ Audronius Ažubalis, „Audronius Ažubalis. Politikos autentiškumas ir konservatyvios Europos ateitis,” *delfi.lt*, August 28, 2018, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/audronius-azubalis-politikos-autentiskumas-ir-konservatyvios-europos-ateitis.d?id=78915705>.

by erasing any manifestations of national identities,¹¹² the preservation of the national essence acquires a symbolic meaning within the contemporary discourse. Lithuania's orientation towards Europe is resisted by encouraging the liberation of Lithuanian mental maps and anchoring the right for self-determination and sovereignty:

Lithuania must free itself from the trap of postcolonial thinking. Decision-making saturated with a postcolonial provincial mentality assumes that everyone else is stronger or smarter, so it is supposed to have to adapt to them or delegate part of our sovereignty.¹¹³

While the ideational underpinnings of the Lithuanian statehood and national imagery were developed in the interwar period, the influence of traditional conservatism¹¹⁴ transmits to the contemporary notion of the Lithuanian nation-state:

When you distance yourself from the historical tradition, in which the accents of the nation-state and Christian democracy, which have laid the foundations for the modern Lithuanian nation, are especially significant, various artificial constructs appear in political rhetoric and visions.¹¹⁵

Whereas in the 1990s, the abrupt shift to Europeanism was perceived to be an existential choice between East and West, a bulwark of freedom from the "creeping Russian influence,"¹¹⁶ the Soviet colonizing experience is presented as a historical reminder to not give up on national self-determination. While EU membership has altered national identity, to recuperate the meaning of Lithuanianness, the strength of the national fantasy is represented

¹¹² Richard Mole, *The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union: Identity, discourse and power in the post-communist transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (London: Routledge, 2012), xiv.

¹¹³ Ažubalis, Kaščiūnas, „A. Ažubalis ir L. Kaščiūnas siūlo „lietuvišką“ ES ateities viziją.“

¹¹⁴ Donskis, 478-489.

¹¹⁵ Laurynas Kaščiūnas, „L. Kaščiūnas. Nacionalinė valstybė - lietuviškojo konservatizmo atrama,” *delfi.lt*, January 13, 2014, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/1-kasciunas-nacionaline-valstybe-lietuviskojo-konservatizmo-atrama.d?id=63706270>.

¹¹⁶ Duvold and Jurkynas, 150.

through its cultural heritage and historicity. Today's Lithuania, captured by the postmodern modifications of statehood and individualism, represents the morally righteous elements of Western civilization. This directly posits LGBTI equality incompatible neither with European civilizational identity nor traditional Lithuanianness as: "Europeanness or democracy is not measured by the scale of LGBT."¹¹⁷

In this subchapter, the analysis of the conservative discourse revealed the rationale behind Lithuania's reluctance to accept postmodern notion of sexualities. While appropriating and mimicking the language of human rights promotion, the analysis discerned that conservatives employed a reversal Orientalist discourse, aiming to produce the meaning of Lithuanianness as morally superior to the decadent European postmodernism. The emphasis on Lithuania's traumatizing history and traditional notions of Christianity and national self-determination weaves a legitimizing narrative of "true" Lithuanianness, which correspondingly stimulates to renegotiate European identity. In other words, while traditional purview is employed to sustain Lithuanianness, its essentialist meaning is still inscribed within cultural power hierarchies.

¹¹⁷ Laurynas Kasčiūnas, „L. Kasčiūnas. „Liberalizmas“, kuris naudingas Rusijai,” *delfi.lt*, October 10, 2014, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/l-kasciunas-liberalizmas-kuris-naudingas-rusijai.d?id=66080996>.

CONCLUSION

This research project aimed to reveal the complexities between traditional imagery of Lithuanianness and postmodern Europeanness through the paradigm of LGBTI. The research question arose from the contradiction between Lithuanian political reluctance to ensure LGBTI people's well-being and overt support for the EU. The research aimed to answer the question of how political discourse identifies and resists the postmodern European identity. It unveiled sophisticated strategies of resistance by tracing different storylines and linking them to the meaning of Europeanness and dissected differentiations between traditional Lithuanianness and contemporary Europeanness.

The analysis discovered the hybrid nature of the discourse and hidden signs of double articulation that aimed to counter the cultural hegemony. Paradoxically, whilst the Presidential discourse exposed self-orientalization practices depicting the Lithuanian socio-political setting as not-European enough, it fluctuated with self-identification discourse, which revealed the incompatibility between traditional Lithuanianness and LGBTI rights promotion. The discourse thus represented Lithuania as a partial subject dominated by the Western socio-cultural realm. The analysis of conservative political statements also exposed the mode of ambiguous mimicry by utilizing the reserved Orientalist discourse. The discourse represented resistance to the EU's ideations of LGBTI and aimed to establish a superior meaning of traditional Lithuanianness to the morally decadent Europeanness. The historically evolved Lithuanian identity, together with its national tropes of tradition and Christianity, bolsters the political discourse to reconfigure the ideational underpinnings of the EU.

Although the EU heavily criticizes Lithuanian discriminatory politics towards LGBTI people, the Lithuanian quest to be *like* Europe and to preserve its own *unique* character must consider these ideational collisions. Cultural backwardness and perceived inferiority stimulate socio-political resentments and antagonisms towards LGBTI communities as scapegoats for

the national identity configurations. This thesis tried to dismantle Eurocentrism on sexualities by exposing the “other,” conservative side, and discursive *modus operandi* of resistance to the LGBTI-friendly European identity. It aimed to contribute to the existing literature analyzing political antagonisms towards LGBTI by incorporating cultural asymmetries between the EU and Lithuania from the perspective of postcolonial IR.

To illustrate a more comprehensive backdrop of Lithuanian sexuality politics, this thesis proposes further directions for research. First, while the anti-LGBTI rhetoric is gaining momentum in neighboring countries such as Poland and Hungary, it is important to consider the impact of an increasing backlash to sexuality politics on Lithuanian politics and society. Bearing in mind Lithuania’s geopolitical position, the factor of Russia also fuels academic curiosity to analyze the impact on Lithuanian LGBTI communities. While Lithuanian anti-LGBTI politics resonate with Russian antagonisms, further research could focus on the Russian aspect and examine how preservation of traditional Lithuanianness is negotiated between Europeanness and Russianness.

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