On Othering Migrants and Queers: Political Communication Strategies of Othering in Romania and the Republic of Moldova

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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>a.n.</td>
<td>Author’s note</td>
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<td>a.t.</td>
<td>Author’s translation</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIE</td>
<td>Alianța pentru Integrare Europeană (The Alliance for European Integration); the Republic of Moldova</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>Alianța Liberalilor și Democrațiilor (The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats); Romania</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUR</td>
<td>Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor (The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEE</td>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
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<td>DEMOS</td>
<td>Partidul Democrației și Solidarității (The Democracy and Solidarity Party); Romania</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>European People's Party</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBT+</td>
<td>lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender; “+” stands for the inclusion of the other identities</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEP</td>
<td>Member of the European Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate (Action and Solidarity Party); the Republic of Moldova</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDL</td>
<td>Partidul Democrat Liberal (The Democratic Liberal Party); Romania</td>
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<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Partidul liberal (The Liberal Party); the Republic of Moldova</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLDM</td>
<td>Partidul Liberal Democrat din Moldova (The Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLUS</td>
<td>Partidul Libertate, Unitate și Solidaritate (The Party of Liberty, Unity and Solidarity); Romania</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMP</td>
<td>Partidul Mișcarea Populară (People's Movement Party); Romania</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNL</td>
<td>Partidul Național Liberal (The National Liberal Party); Romania</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPCD</td>
<td>Partidul Popular Creștin Democrat (Christian-Democratic People's Party); the Republic of Moldova</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>Partidul Social Democrat (The Social Democratic Party); Romania</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSRM</td>
<td>Partidul Socialiştilor din Republica Moldova (The Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEE</td>
<td>South East Europe</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>USR</td>
<td>Uniunea Salvați România (The Save Romania Union)</td>
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Abstract

Research on migration often focuses on non-citizens such as migrants being excluded from the framework of citizenship. This study suggests a novel approach by focusing on non-citizens and citizens alike, while exploring the strategies of *othering* in relation to how citizenship is constructed. It discusses and comparatively analyses the ways in which migrants, as non-citizens, and LGBT+ individuals, as a particular category of citizens, are framed as not conforming to the norms proposed by nationalist and populist ideologies in South Eastern European (SEE) countries. Even if they are citizens, they are excluded from “national belonging” by populist political leaders in their communications.

The study compares the category of LGBT+ persons to that of migrants and explores how both are framed in political communications using populist strategies of *othering*. It also shows that these two categories are placed at the outside of the nation state and of the notion of citizenship. Moreover, it highlights the multiple tropes that are employed in the process of *othering* and that refer to how nations are defined through their “traditional values”, “morality”, “religious views” and a strong opposition to what is considered to belong to the Western progressive values.

The body of material comprises statements mostly made by highly positioned politicians such as Presidents, Ministers, Prime Ministers, etc. from Romania and the Republic of Moldova. These politicians shape the internal and foreign policies of the two countries and their communications have a great impact in different areas of the society. The analysis shows that the social dimension of citizenship is important in how a certain category of citizens is framed as not belonging to the nation state. The results based on the analysis of this less researched material are consistent with the trend of anti-gender movements and the increasing anti-immigration stances in other Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia.

**Key words:** citizenship, populism, national belonging, migrants, LGBT+, Romania, the Republic of Moldova.
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Chapter I

1. Introduction

This study presents a story about citizenship and national belonging. It is about citizenship especially when considering that the strategies of othering in political communications are not merely related to the rhetoric imaginarium of a nation. These strategies are not meant to construct and present the image of a nation to other states. They are more targeted at defining what both nation and citizenship are within the particular country. The nation and the idea of citizenship in these cases are built on the exclusion of different groups which are not seen as being part of these constructs. Moreover, these strategies also have concrete and legal consequences. One of these consequences is the exclusion of a whole group of citizens from having equal rights as the “majority” or what is constructed as majority. Clear examples of such groups are LGBT+ individuals who are excluded from the definition of family, and cannot form legal partnerships or access adoption or reproductive support. Some are not even recognized, as it is the case of transgender citizens currently lacking legal recognition in Hungary.

But this is also a story of nation building, as the strategies of othering often revolve around a particular interpretation of “Christian values” strongly attached to the nation. Considering this, exclusionary discourses of what it is or what is not considered Christian transfer to the very idea of how a nation is shaped, mostly in opposition to certain categories such as Muslim persons or LGBT+ persons. This is why it is important to study how populist strategies of othering function in relation to both citizenship and nation, as they intersect and overlap.

The populism strategies in connection to the anti-liberal and anti-gender movements currently documented throughout Europe (e.g. Guasti & Bustikova 2020; Grzebalska & Pető 2018) show this contemporary trend where discriminative and populist discourses are closely connected to gender and sexuality. While the anti-Western and anti-liberal tendencies can be observed in a series of countries around the SEE region, this study is based on two country contexts, as a way to focus the discussion and to present nuanced results that can contribute to further understanding of the contemporary anti-gender trends in the region.
1.1 Aim and motivation

Using the concept of othering applied to migrants and non-migrants, this thesis analyzes how belonging to a nation is constructed regardless of citizenship in the political communications in some South Eastern European countries. Starting from two cases\(^1\), those of Romania and the Republic of Moldova, this research explores how “non-citizen” categories – migrants and LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) persons – are constructed in different populist messages issued by politicians and parties in these two countries between 2012 – 2020.

The two countries provide a common body of material and context. The decision of analyzing the two country contexts together is informed by my preliminary research and knowledge on the background information which provide a solid ground for choosing this topic and constructing the research design. The time frame coincides with important political shifts in the two countries under scrutiny, that have to do both with legitimizing right-wing populist discourses against migration and minorities, as well as with a regress concerning LGBT+ rights in the region. Thus, the empirical material analyzed includes political speeches, media interviews and statements on social media made by politicians and are treated as one body of material.

While some of these politicians can be regarded as nationalists, it is mainly the nature of their communications and populist strategies employed that are into focus in this study. As the populist strategies contribute to the shaping of nationalist discourses, these two notions are used throughout this study as complementing each other and not interchangeably.

The comparison in this study concerns the two categories – migrants and LGBT+ persons – and the way they are both often portrayed as Others. Although the two categories might initially seem unrelated, this research offers an insight on how similar othering strategies function in relation to both LGBT+ persons who are citizens of a state, and to non-citizens – migrants. As it will be presented in the review of the existent research, these othering strategies refer to how LGBT+ persons and migrants are considered as not being part of the nation. These

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\(^1\) I use “case” to encompass the particularities of the socio-political contexts of the two countries as well as the empirical material that relates to othering and citizenship in the contemporary political communications.
include: xenophobic and homophobic political statements, reiterations of national myths, framing these categories as opposing the “national values”, religion and traditions while posing a “threat” to the nation. Consequently, it also leads to how human rights issues specific to these categories are addressed by politicians – often the same persons who construct these two categories as not being part of the nation. This particularity of the othering process relates to the political construction of citizenship and to how different kinds of rights are influenced by inclusion/exclusion principles, also common to other South Eastern European countries; these processes are covered by specific dedicated literature and are relevant for offering an overview on how these common issues are present across the SEE space. By employing the concept of othering, a bridge between these two stigmatized categories is created in this thesis. This offers a possibility of an encompassing and focused analysis of the multifaceted populist manifestations of exclusion as well as of defining how “national belonging” is built and how it is not connected to citizenship.

Another reason for choosing these two country contexts is the position of Romania and the Republic of Moldova within the SEE region. Historically, their territories were shaped by the presence of different empires such as the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires. Populist processes mostly initiated during the communist regime have succeeded in erasing the multicultural diversity of these territories, constructing national myths based on a dominant religion and ethnicity. At the same time, the close strategic cooperation between the two countries as well as the position with regards to the European Union: Romania as a member state, and the Republic of Moldova as an aspiring one, at the border of the EU, offer an excellent opportunity of research in how citizenship, borders and migration are discussed and negotiated.

My preliminary readings of relevant literature in the field, also supported by opinion polls and reports\(^2\), show that both Romania and the Republic of Moldova score high on discrimination of Roma persons, LGBT\(^+\) individuals, persons of different ethnicity, persons with disabilities, age, particular religions or non-religious persons. This makes the two cases an interesting ground for a comparative analysis on how the two categories under scrutiny are constructed by politicians through populist strategies.

Ideas around populism (in media, public discourses) are most often connected to right-wing strategies. In the SEE countries, a variety of these “right-wing” strategies and discourses are also employed by traditionally left-wing parties, so the “mainstreaming of extremism” (Mudde 2019; Hellström 2016; Wodak 2019) becomes more obvious than in Western European countries. It is therefore necessary, and therein lies the importance of this study, to also consider the specificities of the SEE political contexts and how established research frameworks can be adapted to better explain them.

The operationalization of the concept of *othering* opens the way for correlating this study with similar research (Mole 2018; Cărstocea 2006; Bosniak 2006; Fielder & Catalano 2017) in both the migration and queer studies fields. Guided by the relevant literature, I operationalize the concept as a tool for analysing how exclusion functions in the chosen specific contemporary context. It may also be useful for further research on how exclusion based on categorizations is used in political discourses and ideologies within the European spaces and beyond.

### 1.2 Research questions

The problem addressed by this study is how two marginalized categories (LGBT+ persons and migrants) can be positioned outside the national citizenship sphere, even though one of the categories consists, *de facto*, of citizens.

In order to address it, my contribution starts from the main research question:

*How are both non-citizen migrants and citizens who are part of a stigmatized category positioned as Others in populist and nationalist political communications?*

In order to highlight the specificities and achieve clarity, two secondary questions derive from this main research question:

- What is the content of the political communications constructed through strategies of othering related to LGBT+ persons and migrants and in connection to citizenship?
What are the similarities and differences of how these strategies are employed in the case of the two categories?

1.3 Delimitations

Although it is not the purpose of this study, the analysis following the two country contexts could also be generalized to other country contexts, as the main strategies of othering are deeply embedded in populist messages across the SEE countries (Mole, 2018).

A pragmatic delimitation concerning the language of the analyzed material is necessary, since I am not aiming to analyse political communications coming from other SEE spaces which have other national recognized languages. Both countries in question have Romanian as official language. I am a Romanian native speaker, having lived for the first 29 years of my life in Bucharest. The present research thus benefits from having access to the material in its original language, especially since I am familiar with both the context and language in its functional and nuanced dimensions which enable a deeper understanding of the studied communications. Moreover, my research expertise revolves around LGBT+ rights, issues and related themes in Romania and in the larger context of SEE, as my previous research is part of the current specialized literature on SEE (see Dima 2018; 2019; 2020). At the same time, the migration studies program equipped me with useful tools for analyzing the interconnections between different categories affected by the process of othering in nationalist contexts. Having these in mind, both migration and queer studies are helpful in constructing the present study.

Another delimitation, on a more in depth level, revolves on the use of the concepts of belonging and non-belonging. In this study, these two concepts are mainly referring to the processes imposed by political agents through their discursive shaping of the undesired categories. It is not the scope of this study to analyse how the persons within these categories negotiate their own identities and views on national, political, or social belonging.

As the thesis’ focus is on exclusion of the two categories at the political communication level, I have chosen the material specifically addressing exclusions. The purpose is to reveal the strategies of othering, therefore indicating and analysing other types of communications that could be considered “inclusive” is outside of the scope of the thesis.
Limitations of the study

The thesis’ time and length constraints influenced the decision of selecting the two country cases. The analytical framework is constructed in close relation to the relevant theoretical inputs from other CEE and SEE contexts. These are important for the analysis and for strengthening the comparative aspect as well as the specificities of the two countries.

Another limitation concerns the nature of the analyzed materials. As access to physical sources such as newspapers, magazines, etc. is hindered by my inability to travel to the two countries due to the current developments, I chose to focus on easily available materials: online newspapers\(^3\) and platforms, social media, online audio-visual material.

2. Literature review

The literature concerning LGBT+ persons and migrants in the Republic of Moldova and Romania is scarce, compared to the one focusing on other states in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Poland, Hungary) or European regions (e.g. Nordic countries or Western Europe).

I could not find studies published in English or Romanian which explicitly link these two categories within the larger frame of citizenship and belonging in the two countries. Therefore, this section of the thesis focuses on studies that are based on different empirical examples from other spaces. The main themes addressed by the current literature connected to the topic of my interest relate to the matters of integration, belonging and trends in migration, the othering of LGBT+ citizens and migrants, stereotypes advanced through media and online platforms, and different perspectives on citizenship.

The condensed state of the art review that follows is built around the comparison between how the strategies of othering function with regards to migrants within the nation states on one hand, and how the same strategies are successful in othering LGBT+ citizens. It is thus

\(^3\) In both countries the vast majority of newspapers in digital form are free to read and require no subscription. Their print (and paid) versions differ, and usually offer more content than the online versions.
necessary to discuss relevant academic pieces focused on different spaces, mostly concerning
Europe, in order to position the present study within the field of migration studies.

Othering is also studied in relation to post-national Europe and how it communicates the
ideas of diversity and inclusiveness while still being unable to “decenter its perspective” (El-
Tayeb, 2011). El-Tayeb argues that the European Union creates a narrative of racelessness that
“creates Europe through a streamlined memory whose binary structure demands the dialectic
construction of an Other that can only do its work on the inside, while being forever discursively
placed on (and as) the outside of Europe” (El-Tayeb, 2011). This translates into different life
situations, from the common “Where are you from?” question addressed to persons actually
born in the same country as the inquirer, to how the time spent in a country legitimizes access to
different rights. According to El-Tayeb, this implied othering only leaves two options for
racialized minorities: either they position themselves as Insiders and then they are subjected to
questions such as the previous one, either they position themselves as Outsiders and accept the
foreigner status (El-Tayeb, 2011).

Another example on how the Other is constructed and related to within the borders of the
European Union is the case of Eastern European migrants to Western countries. In 2014 the
work restriction for the new EU member states Romania and Bulgaria were lifted. An analysis
of the comment section from different articles in the UK media on the subject showed that there
is a range of strategies of othering employed by the engaged audience: othering of those
opposing right-wing political views, of non-natives, of migrants and Roma persons, positioning
Bulgarian and Romanian workers as economically inferior to the British persons while arguing
that the migrants were burdening the social services (Fielder & Catalano, 2017). The othering of
the EU in the British media is also an important factor connected to the “moral panics over
<illegal>/EU immigrants”, since the EU was often portrayed by media as an entry point of
migrants towards the UK (Tong & Zuo, 2019: 445).

A consequence of this othering process is the growing Euroscepticism across EU
member states. Populist right-wing parties which favour the nation state and its sovereignty have
gained momentum and became mainstream, as it is the case of Law and Justice Party (Prawo i
Sprawiedliwość; PiS) in Poland or Fidesz and Jobbik parties in Hungary (Lazaridis& Campani,
2017). In Poland, the earlier anti-semitic stances are now reinforced by being transferred to the
anti-Muslim sphere in a correlation between Jewish persons and Muslim ones who are seen as a
threat and thus legitimizing anti-migration stances (Jaskułowski, 2019). Jaskułowski’s research shows that othering is placed on a cultural ground and it is an adequate strategy, since the Polish nation is mainly defined in cultural terms and its nationalism “is not unequivocally racist, but it has the potential to be racist towards selected groups” (Jaskułowski, 2019: 9). Benveniste, Lazaridis, and Puurunen show that the common strategies across Europe are to define European culture as Christian, as opposed to Islam while in the case of the more secular Nordic countries Islam is framed as opposing gender equality (Benveniste, et al., 2017).

The Hungarian case is, in a way, exceptional. The governmental anti-immigration campaign was already in place before 2015 when the number of migrants increased and to some extent the newly arrived were allowed to continue to cross the country, especially since the majority of them were not planning to remain in Hungary (Majtényi et. al., 2019). After 2015 the migration issue started to be politicized and the migrants were shaped as a “threat” to the Hungarian state and identity, giving the right-wing parties an efficient strategy to attract support as they positioned migrants as the “enemy others” (Majtényi et al., 2019: 179).

As citizenship concerns multiple aspects (legal, political, etc.), it is also a sociological category that has been broadened by various research that challenged the strict and restrictive connection between citizenship and belonging to a nation state (Aavik, 2020). Existent research suggests that it is also important to note that the access to citizenship itself is restricted and based on strict conditions which also have to do with sets of norms and desirable behaviours, doubled by citizenship tests in some countries. Other limitations or restrictions are subtler, for example, using temporary-work programs (mainly in Europe and North-America) that provide the countries with the necessary work force without offering the workers clear possibilities for accessing citizenship (Eisenberg & Lenard, 2020).

By researching empirical material from Estonia, Aavik (2020) pinpoints the core paradox of belonging and un-belonging⁴ of LGBT+ Estonian citizens. Estonia markets itself as a progressive country that advances the idea of e-residency for “a borderless digital society for global citizens”, while excluding and limiting some legal rights of certain groups, such as

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⁴ For the purpose of this study, I use “non-belonging” and “un-belonging” as two different states of belonging. The particle “un-” marks a detachment from a previous state of belonging: e.g. LGBT+ persons born as formal citizens but who are not considered as belonging to the nation anymore due to their sexualities. The “non-” prefix marks a permanent state which translates into a person or a group of persons who never belonged and might not ever be considered as belonging to a national identity (e.g. migrants).
LGBT+ persons in need for a same-sex partnership and relationship recognition or clear legislation related to parenting rights (Aavik, 2020: 149).

In a study dedicated to the relations between visibility and belonging of LGBT+ persons in Russian media, Edenborg (2016) argues that it is important to study how different issues are being made visible and how different hegemonic discourses around an issue reach the public sphere. Thus the author suggests that belonging does not only rely on what is made visible or not, but also on how this process is developed (Edenborg, 2016). This is in line with my current study, as the context and the way the issues regarding migrants and LGBT+ persons are shaped in relation to citizenship in political communications not only bring visibility to the subject, but also offer an interpretation on matters of citizenship, otherness and who is seen as part of a nation.

At the same time, sexuality is used by some countries with stronger policies that protect LGBT+ individual’s rights as a ground for denying or approving asylum applications. There is a growing body of literature on how different nation states judge what is deemed to be “true” in terms of the declared sexuality of asylum seekers and how arbitrary “Western” criteria in “proving” one’s sexuality influence the decisions on granting or denying asylum (Stonewall 2010, Akin 2018, Mole 2021, Perego 2021, McNeal & Brennan 2021).

As a response to the growing and arguably larger academic literature that focuses on migrants and the strategies of othering through dehumanisation, Kirkwood (2017) brings into attention a complementary approach. By applying a discursive analysis to transcripts of Parliamentary debates in UK, Kirkwood shifts the focus on how refugees are humanized, i.e. shaped as “fellow human beings” that are placed within the moral frame of the majority and thus this majority has the “moral duty” to help and offer support (Kirkwood, 2017: 122). This reminds me of some perspectives from the colonial times of Europe, for example of Bartolomé de las Casas in his Historia Apologética (see Clayton, 2012: 448). Through ethnographic observations during his travels, de las Casas advocated in favor of the Indian culture, placing it on parity with other European ones, in an attempt of “humanizing” the colonized populations (Clayton, 2012).

This section has presented the state of the art concerning matters of citizenship, migration and LGBT+ representation in political communications and beyond. It offers a
starting point for presenting theoretical considerations relevant for this thesis, followed by a more in-depth analysis of the connections between the strategies of othering and the construction of citizenship in relation to two comparative categories (migrants and LGBT+ persons).

3. Theoretical considerations

3.1 Operationalization of concepts

Citizenship

Citizenship in this thesis is described both in the formal sense, as the recognition of social and political rights of an individual within a territory, and in the identitary-related sense which relates to persons who are formal citizens, although they are excluded from being part of the “national identity” construction, i.e. “community membership” (Bosniak 2006). This offers an appropriate conceptual reasoning that fits the purpose in this analysis. Generally, studies on migration are focused on a particular category, being that of refugees, asylum seekers or the more general one of “migrants”, without references to the person’s different types of experiences, class, sexuality, gender, etc. Through expanding the perspective on another category, that of LGBT+ persons, a better anchoring into the two country contexts proposed for analysis can be achieved.

Joppke (2010) takes into account the multiple dimensions of citizenship: status, rights and identities. When employing the concept of citizenship and its status aspect in the present analysis, I am interested in how sexual minorities are excluded from belonging to the national context, regardless of nationality. In the case of migrants as described through political communications, both the status- and the right-related elements apply: non-citizens cannot access certain political rights in the same way as citizens. When the residents and citizens of a given nation state take priority over those placed outside these descriptions, the stratification of citizenship takes place. This is caused by the “normative nationalism” which can be employed against different categories of citizens as well (Bosniak, 2006).
In a transnational study regarding the US and UK, Concannon (2008) looks at how these states relate to LGBT+ citizens, arguing that social policies are still based on the “traditional family model”, with consequences for the fundamental rights of this minority, as the policy-makers and the state continue to discriminate against these persons (Concannon, 2008: 336). Furthermore, Richardson explores the conceptual limitations of “sexual citizenship” as it is formed and applied mainly within the Global North that mainly concerns “privatised ‘choices’ such as, for instance, equal marriage, in addition to marginalising economic dimensions of sexual citizenship” (Richardson, 2015: 13).

Othering

For the purpose of this research, I use the concept of othering as the process of excluding a category of individuals from belonging to the national context. At the same time, I use othering in close connection to the concept of citizenship, where the Others, i.e. LGBT+ citizens and migrants, are constructed as different from the majority, not complying to the national identity, and are seen as non-citizens. This study highlights how different Others are discursively excluded from the category of citizens on different grounds.

Grove and Zwi (2006) explore the way in which the strategies of othering distance and disconnect migrants from the population in the receiving country. They argue that these interactions are shaped in a defensive manner, as the citizens of a given state are positioned as in need to be defended from refugees by different means: physical barriers, border screening, shaping some categories of migrants as illegal, avoiding contact, bringing into discussion the economical dimension of resources that must be shared (Grove & Zwi, 2006). All these are focused on “masses” and not on individual life experiences, in an attempt to deepen the gap in the “us/them” dichotomy (Grove & Zwi, 2006: 1934). This is one way of sketching what the process of “othering” means and it is the main way of understanding this concept throughout the study.

One of the most common strategies of exclusion is based on the dichotomy “us/them”. Thus this study investigates if and how these strategies are employed by populist politicians in their attempt to shape what citizenship and nationality are. Through strategies such as othering, certain categories are placed outside the status aspect of citizenship.
Belonging and non-belonging

The concepts of othering and citizenship are brought together by a third one: belonging. It is useful in analyzing how different nationalist ideas position particular groups outside the national identity frame. This concept has been employed in a variety of research projects, being theorized in various ways. The most useful trait of belonging for the purpose of this study is connected to the “public-oriented official membership in a community”, which most often refers to citizenship (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016: 4). Looking at belonging in the two country contexts, will allow observing how belonging is constructed and how it functions within the public sphere and in close connection to non-belonging.

The politics of belonging are also connected to national belonging and the status dimension of citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2016). A closer look into this concept enables researchers to study belonging in relation to political values and ethical considerations attached to the idea of citizenship. Another aspect of belonging is also related to who has access to it: “minorities and marginalized and oppressed people are often confronted with explicit and implicit inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion caused by limited or blocked access to belonging” (Lähdesmäki, Saresma, Hiltunen, et al., 2016: 8). As borders become fluid, it is necessary to employ concepts such as belonging that are not static and can be adapted depending on the studied contexts (Ibid.).

3.2 Theoretical framework

The approach used in this study is mainly informed by the idea of “de-migrantization” of the migration research proposed and explained by Janine Dahinden (2016). The main argument is that migration studies would benefit from a theoretical framework that places issues concerning migration and beyond in a larger perspective. This is achieved by a more reflexive approach that takes into account the critiques against the commonly employed epistemology in migration studies that revolves around ethnicity and the nation-state (Dahinden, 2016). The main problem with the normalization within social sciences and, specifically, migration studies,
is that of essentialization of ethnicity and migration that leads to the fact that most of the
literature addresses the contrast between non-migrants and migrants (Dahinden, 2016). A
similar approach is employed by Çağlar (2016) who proposes shifting the focus from
differences to interactions, with the aim of building a framework that is valid for both non-
migrants and migrants.

In constructing the research design and questions I am thus taking into account the
existence of the essentialized category of “migrants” but from a critical perspective that does not
perpetuate it as a “central criterion of difference” (Dahinden, 2016: 5). Therefore, the core of
this analysis looks at how the two categories are used in different strategies of othering, and
offers an opportunity to broaden the understanding of different phenomenon that function
simultaneously for different stigmatized categories. This reflexive attitude enables a
repositioning outside of the normalization discourse and places this study within the larger
scope of social theory (Dahinden, 2016: 7).

By employing theories drawn from queer and gender studies, along with theories from
the migration studies field, this study proposes a deeper analysis on how two otherwise distinct
categories, generally studied by two different disciplines, are connected through populist
communications and used to shape different ideas of what citizenship is. Moreover, a queer
perspective within the migration studies field enables the exploration of the less examined
connections between gender, sexuality, belonging and citizenship. Thus migration studies can
benefit from this perspective because of the constant repositioning and re-examination of the
heteronormative frames often at work in the field (Manalansan, 2006). The interconnection
between gender, sexuality, nation and race offers the possibility of highlighting how nationalist
strategies make use of these concepts in building discriminatory measures and discourses
affecting some of the citizens while also contributing to the sense of belonging within LGBT+
migrant communities (Mole, 2018). Another important contribution of queer studies to the field
of migration studies concerns the understanding of transnationalism. The focus moves from the
negotiations of static and established “arrival” and “departure” places, as the boundaries
between them are blurred (Klapeer & Laskar, 2018).

Joppke argues that the concept of citizenship has become both more restrictive for non-
citizens aiming to obtain citizenship and inclusive at the same time – equally granted to all
citizens (Joppke, 2010: vi). A nuance added by this study is that, although formally true, there
are instances where the inclusiveness of citizenship is challenged; for example, see the non-equal treatment the LGBT+ citizens of a state are facing. This is more connected to the status aspect of citizenship that is not related to nationality and makes possible exclusion of certain categories (based on race, gender, etc.), up to the point that certain rights can be revoked (Joppke, 2010). An example is the recent un-recognition of transgender persons in Hungary (Knight & Gall, 2020).

The prioritization within categories of citizens is important to take into account, as it surpasses the citizen/ non-citizen, native/migrant dichotomies, bringing them together when it comes to exclusionary communications and frameworks. It is the “normative nationalism” (Bosniak, 2006) that functions in the process of prioritizing certain categories of citizens over non-citizens. However, this does not take into account the same process functioning within a category of citizens (e.g. Roma, LGBT+ persons) who are considered outsiders. This is why one should be cautious in employing categorization: some categories of persons become more prevalent in studies from migration research, leading to less literature on other segments and less opportunities for broadening the perspective on how socio-political contexts affect larger groups (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018).

Over time, migration studies were infused to some degree with contributions coming from different disciplines such as gender and queer studies. They offered poststructuralist perspectives which shifted the focus towards questions of difference and toward the terms and conditions for being a citizen (Bell & Binnie, 2000). The main concept arising from this body of literature is that of sexual citizenship which enabled researchers to explore how citizenship can be obtained or withdrawn in relation to certain sexual minorities (Richardson, 2015).

This study takes the necessary step forward in directing the analysis towards communications that concern a part of the citizens. Instead of shaping the categories of migrants and LGBT+ persons as the units of analysis, the purpose is to rather investigate how these categories are significant for the populist communications. As Dahinden suggests, this strategy moves the migrant-specific focus without losing the sensitivity towards the migration particularities within the proposed theme. It also offers the possibility for migration research to become more anchored in the general field of social sciences which can then incorporate various relevant perspectives on migration in its different disciplines (Dahinden, 2016).
3.3 Positionality and philosophical considerations

As I identify myself both as a queer person and as a migrant, this is one of the reasons for my interest in conducting the current study. I argue that what could be perceived by some readers as “researcher’s bias” is, in fact, an asset in conducting the present analysis, as I am aware of the multiplicity and interconnections of othering mechanisms functioning in the larger context of SEE spaces. The motivation of choosing the topic is subjective, according to my interests and research experience, and, as Rosenberg points out, “driven by the moral values and ethical imperatives” of the social scientist (Rosenberg, 2015: 283). In terms of objectivity related to the design, this study is constructed following the lines of an approach characterized by neutrality in building the research design, and choice of relevant material. Moreover, objectivity is also achieved by the fact that within the framework of interpretation, all the materials are processed in the same manner, following the same principles, steps, and analytical strategies.

This objectivity, however, does not imply that I am using objectivity in the epistemological sense. Instead, this research can be placed within the ontological subjectivism sphere. By using qualitative methods, by drawing ethic principles from feminist methodologies, by regarding theory as necessary in building the specific addressed context while building knowledge based on observation and analysis of facts from the public sphere, the thesis follows the constructivist line which is placed at the intersection of relativism in the ontological sense and subjectivity in the epistemological sense.

Therefore, as the epistemological position employed in this study is a constructivist one, I follow the relativism line according to which there are no absolute facts in relation to norms on beliefs, rationality and ideas deemed as justifiable (Baghramian & Carter, 2021). Moreover, as my research includes observing and analysing how different categories are described in connection to ideas on belonging shaped as absolute truths, it is constructed following the ontological relativism in analyzing different interpretations of the reality and the social constructions that are strictly dependant on these interpretations. By engaging with the different realities of individuals related to the concept of citizenship, this type of research aims to offer
contextual understandings derived from the analysis of the main research problem (Moon & Blackman, 2014).

4. Methodology

“Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes. But no recipe. Direction can and will be offered, but the final destination remains unique for each inquirer, known only when—and if—arrived at” (Patton, M. Q., 2002: 432).

4.1 Methods

As I am interested in the meaning of the messages communicated by top politicians with regards to LGBT+ persons and migrants in relations to notions of citizenship, the methods employed are qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. Both complement each other and are useful in identifying patterns in the selected texts which are then understood and interpreted. “Text” here refers to written and oral communication, as well as audio-video materials. These two methods have many common characteristics, as they both refer to a context-based analysis framework, rely on narrations of social phenomena during the theme development step, and are useful in analysing different types of mediated factors as symbols, metaphors, etc. (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

A notable difference that provides the rationale for combining these two methods in this study is the fact that qualitative content analysis operates with categories and these are useful in the initial stages of the analysis in order to identify relations between different types of data in the texts. Meanwhile, thematic analysis has a more reflexive nature and operates with themes which are developed in the next stage of analysis and facilitates a more in-depth analysis of the material (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Since thematic analysis is a flexible research method, it can provide detailed and complex accounts or interpretations of the data that complement the descriptive approach of qualitative content analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006).

Another trait of qualitative content analysis is connected to its data collection process: as this process has a reflexive framework, the analysis begins and develops while data are being collected, as opposed to quantitative methods that usually imply the data collection process is
finished in order for the analysis to start (Chambliss & Schutt, 2019). Furthermore, as new relationships between the categories are explored, this can influence the way the data collection process is employed, through constant adjustments and readjustments (Chambliss & Schutt, 2019).

Using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis has a series of advantages for this thesis. First, they are unobtrusive techniques since the texts are already produced and there is no need for the researcher to ask people to produce the data, as it is the case with focus groups or interviews, for example (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 1999). Secondly, through selecting the texts, coding, choosing the coding categories and defining them, etc., as part of the qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis brings a more focused view on the meaning and ideas stemming from the communications and less on the frequency of different variables occurring in the texts (Carley, 1993).

Both methods facilitate the interpretative analysis of text based on identifying themes and communication patterns. These patterns contribute to the understanding of how populist strategies of othering are employed in defining which categories of people belong of a nation. By presenting these categories as lesser citizens, populist strategies also have impact on the actual rights of these persons, as well as on how public opinion is influenced on the inclusion-exclusion axis. The Appendixes 2 and 3 include the coding schemes for the thematic and qualitative content analysis, while the Appendix 1 lists the corpus of texts for analysis.

Qualitative content analysis combined with thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify the different strategies in populist communications and how these reflect ideas on citizenship, migration and LGBT+ issues. It also allows a connection between the texts’ messages and the particular contexts (cultural, historical, etc.) in which the communications were produced. By also referring to elements related to context, the analysis not only highlights the particular meanings in the selected corpus of textual materials, but also makes the connection to other texts, as these communications are connected and correlated. Both approaches offer the possibility of a user-friendly way of analyzing the data as they offer transparent analytical structures that follow clearly defined steps (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013).

The different steps involved in this analysis are: selecting the materials and familiarizing with the data; initial coding of the data in close connection to the relevant passages, leaving
aside the ones outside of the focus of the research; category building; summarizing the data and comparing it (Kuckartz, 2014). By using thematic analysis, some steps are added: searching for themes and patterns in the selected material, reviewing the themes in connection to the theoretical part and the research questions, in-depth analysis of the themes (Neuendorf, 2019). More specifically, the analysis part mainly focuses on the comparison between statements concerning the LGBT+ persons and migrants in the two country contexts and it is aided by identifying and analyzing different categories and themes in the studied texts. This was achieved by first placing the materials in their corresponding sections according to the main patterns at work in the texts. The material is not compared across country contexts and it is designed as a single body of material. Subsequently, the codes were attached to the themes set while employing thematic analysis and then analyzed.

4.2 Data selection

The research corpus consists of secondary sources: online media articles, communications on different public figures’ social media (mainly Facebook) and websites issued by nationalist and populist parties or political actors in the two country contexts. These politicians are part of the Government, Parliament and the Presidential spheres, therefore their position is not marginal in the politics of the two countries. Many of them are affiliated to the ruling parties or coalitions and have the power of influencing and implementing policies and laws with regards to minorities. In analyzing how citizenship is shaped in political communications which specifically address the categories of migrants and LGBT+ persons in both Romania and the Republic of Moldova, I look into recent political communications (2016-2021). The reason for choosing this time frame is connected to the length restrictions of the thesis, as well as to the recent political shifts in the two countries.

The material selection and collection followed Chambliss & Schutt’s (2019) definition of purposive sampling, which means that there is a reason behind choosing to analyze some materials and not others. First of all, the focus of the thesis is on political communications therefore only texts issued by politicians were selected. The material is not representative, as the length and time limitations do not allow for an analysis of an extensive body of materials.
However, my background knowledge allows me to identify the trends in these texts while not claiming that this analysis is exhaustive and can be generalized.

The choice of using two country contexts is based on different reasons. Firstly, they offer both “context-dependant knowledge” as well as contribute to the production of examples which are indispensable in social sciences (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 224). Secondly, a close reading of the materials in relation to these country contexts is necessary in building up a comprehensive view on the chosen topic, diminishing the risk of overgeneralizations. Another reason for selecting the two country contexts is that they both score high compared to the Western European ones in studies that measure the degree of discrimination on different grounds. Therefore, this thesis also takes into the account how the politicians present the two categories (LGBT+ and migrant persons) while contributing to the othering processes. Furthermore, identifying the deeper elements of a given issue taking into account all the concerned factors and consequences might prove more useful “than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur”, as it is the case with generally more valued quantitative methods, which employ a hypothetic-deductive approach (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 229). Finally, as qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis are more focused on in-depth study of the materials in search of meanings rather than on phenomena that can be quantifiable, these two methods are more concerned with collecting a substantial set of data from few different case contexts than collecting less data from many other cases (Chambliss & Schutt, 2019).

The material was selected based on several criteria: accessibility, relevance to the topic, connection to political figures or parties active in the socio-political scenes of Romania and the Republic of Moldova, time of issuing the communication, different events that triggered reactions and their contexts.

4.3 Notes on reliability and validity

As the issue explored in this thesis is quite complex and context-dependant, it greatly benefits from using a qualitative approach instead of quantitative ones which are mainly focused on large samples. The limited number of empirical country contexts, that of Romania and the Republic of Moldova, offers the possibility of a large number of observations within them while
also facilitating the connection of theory with the observations in a viable and useful way (6 & Bellamy, 2012).

By describing the coding categories as precisely as possible, the reliability and the replicability of the study are insured, as the final coding scheme can be used by other researchers in analyzing the material (Kuckartz, 2014). Therefore, in order to achieve soundness, the present research will reference the coding frames and other research instruments in a transparent manner. Another factor enhancing the replicability is that the selected data is already available and openly accessible online, and can be used for further replications of the analysis in order to test the validity of the results (6 & Bellamy, 2012). However, as this is a qualitative study with a reflexive and interpretative component, this means that it would be difficult to repeat the study in its entirety; the data might be the same, but the background and different experiences of different researchers influence its replicability.

In terms of validity, by permanently connecting the theoretical and the empirical parts, this study ensures internal validity. Furthermore, through pairing qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis in a hybrid approach, the reliability and validity are increased, since the initial coding scheme attached to qualitative content analysis in close connection to the theoretical part is complemented by additional codes and interpretations provided by the thematic analysis (Neuendorf, 2019).

The reliability of the study is achieved by using triangulation in selecting the data from different sources, presenting different theories and using different complementary methods (Salkind, 2010).

4.4 Ethical considerations

By having researched sensitive topics before (see Dima 2018; 2019; 2020), I have developed a strong research ethics in relation to different stigmatized perspectives. As this study does not employ any ethnographic methods of inquiry, matters of ethics with regards to study participants, care in analysing micro histories or in conducting interviews are not relevant. However, the analysed corpus of materials often contains derogatory terms and expressions, as well as hate speech. Therefore, there is a degree of caution and ethical involvement needed
while analyzing this type of material in order not to contribute to the further exclusion of people within the two categories. This means that each reproduction of the populist politicians’ communications is accompanied by a critical reflection, in order not to have mere reproductions of problematic language and ideas.

I choose to employ feminist and queer ethics of research. The most important guiding principle derived from these disciplines is the constant reflection of the researcher’s positioning related to gender, class, race, etc., motivations, and the way the research is designed and conducted. Moreover, I adhere to the idea of making social sciences “more inclusive” (Rosenberg, 2015: 294), and in this sense I draw part of my sensitivity on how power relations influence and shape theories, methodologies and epistemologies from the feminist perspectives. Nevertheless, the researchers’ identities are fluid and associated with some communities or categories more than with others. This relationship between researchers and “the researched” is important to be problematized, rather than just to be assumed (Preissle & Han, 2012). However, the present study is aimed at how two categories of persons are shaped in the public discourse, independently of their own will and opinions, and to some extent independent of the researcher’s values and ethical system, as the focus is on the oppressing political actors rather than on the oppressed persons’ experiences.

4.5 Framework of analysis

As the relationship between LGBT+ persons and migrants and their portrayal in connection to citizenship are central to this study, using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis allows me to comparatively study these two categories at a deeper level. This is done based on the context and on how different concepts presented in the theoretical section operate and help in identifying not only descriptive elements of that relationship, but also causes and interpretations of different effects and their corresponding settings (Chambliss & Schutt, 2019).

The process of developing the categories for analysis is concept-driven. This means that the categories of analysis are derived from the relevant discussed literature as well as from the research questions (Kuckartz, 2014). The research questions play a central role in the rationale
for choosing this method combination, as each of the analysis phases bears a strong reference to
the initial research questions (Kuckartz, 2014).

This chapter outlined the methods employed in the current analysis. It also offered a
rationale for choosing the methods at work and highlighted their main advantages for this study.
Furthermore, it offered details on how the data was selected as well as on matters of reliability
and validity, while also addressing the ethical and reflexive components.
Chapter II

5. Research findings and analysis

5.1 Context and background

The intricacies of the two countries’ relationship, common history and the contemporary negotiations with the European Union while also under the influence of Russia in the Republic of Moldova’s case are the most prevalent themes in the dedicated literature. Describing the context in which different approaches to migrants and LGBT+ rights are recorded is part of the following section.

5.1.1 Republic of Moldova

Between 2005 and 2010, the number of migrants in the Republic of Moldova has gradually increased (Moşneaga, 2013). By 2010, the number of foreign nationals living in the Republic of Moldova doubled, with a large share consisting of citizens of Ukraine (35.4%) and Russia (24.9%) (International Organization for Migration, 2012). Between 2010 and 2015, the immigration continued to increase, with Ukraine (32.4%) and Russia (22.7%) still leading and with the addition of 0.8% Syrian citizens out of the 21,876 total foreigners living in the Republic of Moldova at the end of 2015 (International Organization for Migration, 2017). As the media and politicians often highlight “Syrian refugees” as being a threat, these numbers are important in clarifying the facts and real context of the migratory trends in this particular case.

At the same time, the Republic of Moldova remains mainly an emigration country, with over a quarter of its total population living abroad (Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2020). Both “the East” and “the West” are seen by Moldovan citizens as possible directions when it comes to emigration. The image of EU as being difficult to enter and marked by xenophobia and discrimination toward foreigners is not too disconnected to the one related to Russia where the same type of discrimination is felt by Moldovan citizens (Stoleriu et. al., 2011). At the same time, Romania is seen as more of an intermediary step in entering the European Union and it is
usually not regarded as a final destination by migrants, including Moldovan emigrants (Stoleriu et. al., 2011).

While the numbers are still low compared to other European countries, there is an increased discussion in the public sphere on matters of migration, firstly because the Republic of Moldova started the negotiations to become an EU member; secondly, because of its proximity to a member state such as Romania, the Black Sea which facilitates the access to Turkey, and Ukraine (Bloch, 2014). The legacy of the Soviet period is vital in understanding the perspective on citizenship within the Moldovan context. The Soviet vision was that of “friendship of peoples”, which was both regarded as “empty ideology” by intellectuals and hope of inclusion by different ethnic minorities (Gagauz, Tajiks, etc.) (Bloch, 2014: 449-452). This transnational aspect of citizenship that the Soviet regimes employed bares striking similarities with the one proposed by the EU, and this might be interesting to address especially in relation to how post-Soviet countries relate to the promised belonging to a larger “European family”. Although the Republic of Moldova has the legal framework concerning the mechanisms and authorities that deal with matters of migration, it lacks a clear unified strategy of integration and addressing necessary aspects related to migrants’ rights to education, protection, insertion on the labour market, etc. (Ciumas, 2013).

At the same time, as it was also the case of Romania, the EU poses a number of conditions for aspiring states; one of them is connected to advancement in human rights and protection of LGBT+ individuals (Axyonova et. al., 2020). This is an interesting aspect of how minority rights intersect with the right of a state to access the so called “European citizenship”. But advancements in connection to anti-discrimination policies in the Republic of Moldova are often met with opposition from various societal groups – from the Orthodox Church, to different civil society members, NGOs and politicians. At the same time, LGBT+ persons are equated with Muslim persons by radical groups (Lutsevyych, 2013), in a clear effort of defining the national Moldavian state as opposed to undesired “external” categories of persons.

The stigma towards LGBT+ persons is manifested both offline through protests, attacks, and online through hate speech; studies show that over 35% of Moldovan citizens are supportive of criminalization of same sex relationship, while 84% would not accept LGBT+ persons residing in the Republic of Moldova (Nyman & Provozin, 2019). The attitudes of rejection of this category from the national idea of citizenship are also common in press releases. However,
there is an important distinction to be made based on the language and political affinities of the media sources in the Republic of Moldova. This leads to a strong polarity on the content of the articles. In the Russian-language media, Romania, the EU and, consequently, minority rights are seen as a threat to the state’s sovereignty and portrayed as agents of the Occident, which is not the case of the Romanian-language mass-media (Enachi, 2014). The clash between “the European path” and “the Orthodox land” between different political formations contributed to the rise of radical Orthodoxy which became an important influence over the government and the legislation (Mitrofanova, 2020). Thus the Orthodox, “traditional values” are usually incompatible with the concept of human rights law and the intersection between the dominant religion and politics results in strong anti-EU and anti-LGBT+ rights lobbying (Andersson, 2019).

As media is politicized and polarized, there is a major difference of approach between independent media generally favourable to presenting LGBT+ issues in an objective way and the politicized one often biased and presenting stereotypes in connection to the sexual minorities (Article19.org report, 2018). This polarization also functions at society level, as Moldova is a ground of opposing opinions: some related to unionist demands – unification with Romania and thus accessing the EU, other of pro-European nature, and a strong pro-Russia trend opposed to the European values. These main themes are often conveyed using populist strategies and contribute to the efforts of the country in finding its national and political identity (Allin & Garbu, 2017).

An aspect that hinders the application of the law with regards to hate speech (discriminatory discourses concerning gender identity and sexuality) is the fact that the Republic of Moldova lacks laws that recognize these two categories as bases for offence (Article19.org report, 2018). This leads to physical and verbal violence towards LGBT+ persons, institutionalized homophobia, police and justice’s reluctance to intervene in crimes motivated by hate on these grounds, etc. One of the contributing factors to this situation is that the idea of human rights itself seems poorly addressed, since the population of Moldova scores low on the level of information concerning human rights issues, awareness of their rights and forms of protection (People’s Advocate Office & OHCHR, 2016).
5.1.2 Romania

It is only in the last ten years that the discourses on contemporary immigration have gained momentum in Romania and common attitudes and preconceptions related to migrants were transferred from the “Western” media. According to World Values Survey in 2018, 23% of the Romanians would not want to be neighbours with migrants; this percent is close to the EU average (Burean, 2020). However, given the fact that Romania has lower levels of immigration than most of the European countries included in the statistics, this is a high percent. It can also be considered a paradox, as both Romania and the Republic of Moldova are emigration countries, with over 20% of their total population being migrants in different other countries (Migration Data Portal, 2020).

The relatively low number of asylum seekers in Romania is explained by a series of factors: the country is not part of Schengen nor it is placed on any of the major, established transit migratory routes; furthermore, the socio-economical situation is one of the worst in the EU countries and all these reasons make Romania an unattractive destination (Mihai, 2016). Moreover, the general attitude against migrants is fuelled by populist discourses and the Romanian leaders have been constantly opposing the immigrant quotas proposed by the EU. Given this background, it is interesting to reflect on how do nationalist and populist strategies manage to influence the public opinion in its negative attitudes towards migrants. A possible reason is the lack of serious debates on the subject of migration (Mihai, 2016) and the fact that the Romanian media usually portrays migrants as a problem of “the West”.

In a study from 2015, Veronica Mohamed-Salih shows that the number of Muslim persons who immigrated to Romania has decreased in the 2011 census as compared to the 2002 one (Mohamed-Salih, 2015). The author analyzes a series of stereotypes concerning the minority’s access to education as well as stereotypes related to the level of education, the way its members are perceived as Others and as “threats to national security” (Mohamed-Salih, 2015: 105).

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5 According to Migration Data Portal, the international migrant stock as a percentage of the total population at mid-year 2020 was 3.7% (around 700,000 persons), with a net migration of -370,000.
6 Similar to other languages such as Swedish, the word “immigrant” has a somehow negative connotation in Romanian.
Similarly to the Republic of Moldova, Romanian authorities lack proper institutions that can address migrant’s needs and implement measures of integration (Burean, 2020). There are also several issues in terms of access to education, health and bank services, living conditions and access to the labour market. These range from illegalities concerning work contracts, the refusal of access to the rental market on basis of race or ethnicity, lack of transparency in banking related issues – banks refusing offering services to migrants due to the opacity of the law that leaves room for discriminatory decisions, institutional discrimination of migrants facing the Romanian bureaucracy and lack of foreign language abilities of the administrative personnel, etc. (Lăzărescu, 2015).

An interesting point with regards to both Romania and the Republic of Moldova current political developments concerns the opposed tendencies the two countries face. In November 2020, the Republic of Moldova elected its first woman president, pro-European Maia Sandu, thus marking an important turn in its advancements towards EU cooperation. On the other hand, Romania has seen a growth in right-wing political forces during the past years, that recently culminated with the populist and nationalist party AUR (*The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians*) entering the Parliament in December 2020. AUR was founded one year before the elections and managed to gain almost 10% of the votes, securing 47 seats in the Romanian Parliament. An interesting fact is that AUR received a majority of votes from the Romania diaspora – in some electoral constituencies in Spain and Italy they were placed first. During the previous elections, such ascension of a right-wing populist party was regarded with scepticism, given the resilient and effective political infrastructure of the main political force (Social Democrats – *PSD*) (Ban, 2016). The previous nationalist parties were mainly concerned with presenting EU and other international bodies as foreign agents that try to have access to the national resources, often portraying Romania as a victim of foreign forces and interests (Florian & Climescu, 2012).

However, the corruption present in both the Liberal Party and the Socialist one, and the weak response to the social and economic crisis triggered by the pandemic might have played an important role in the rapid ascension of AUR. The radicalization of Romanian parties is not new, another example is the success of USR (*Uniunea Salvați România / The Save Romania Union*) in 2016; USR was built as an alternative to the main liberal party and was specifically targeting political elites, recombining different populist themes and setting the tone for other
right-wing parties (Dragoman, 2020). With opaque and often divergent views (at party members level) on matters of migration and LGBT+ rights, USR was more focused on attacks against the more robust and established parties than on attacks concerning civil society issues. In an attempt to counter the general anti-human rights direction, the political party Demos was formed and, in its incipient stages, tried to attract voters by offering the possibility for some members of marginalized categories such as Roma or LGBT+ individuals to run for office on the party’s lists (Gherghina & Stoiciu, 2020). However, this remained only at the intention level in some cases.

The evolution of different themes in the populist strategies employed by the Romanian parties after the fall of the communist regime can be resumed to the fact that, in the ‘90s, while the nationalist right-wing forces were often relating to national identity in close connection to religion and thus opening for stigmatizing different categories, LGBT+ persons included, the left wing’s incipient strategies did not make reference to religious values, following the legacy of the Romanian Communist Party (Gherghina & Mişcoiu, 2010). This gradually changed, as the confusion between nationality and citizenship, as well as the one concerning the relationship between citizenship, ethnicity and religion became more prevalent (Ibid.).

While media is a tool in propagating populist message, a nuance concerning the types of media and the effectiveness of transmitting radical right-wing messages is necessary; Szabó, Norocel & Bene argue that Romanian radical media is placed at the margins of media networks, thus diminishing the potency of message dissemination in these cases (Szabó et. al. 2019). However, the study does not take into the account social media and online platforms as agents facilitating right-wing discourses transmission; the intensive online communication was one of the strategies that made possible the rapid rise of right-wing parties such as AUR.

A measure of the level of democratization is how different democracies handle human rights issue (Cărstocea, 2006). In the specific case of Romania and its LGBT+ minority, this translates into the existence of effective institutions and legislation that protect the rights of the citizens regardless of gender identity or sexuality. Although having a more solid legislation than the Republic of Moldova and more resources allocated to the civil society involved in anti-

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7 When Antonella Lerca Duda, a Roma transgender activist involved in sex worker’s rights NGOs and advocacy, attempted to run for the local elections in 2017 (in District 2, Bucharest), Demos withdrawn its support. Duda came back to the political scene and ran as an independent for the 2020 local elections.
discrimination programs, Romanian’s attitudes towards LGBT+ persons remain conservative, with more than 70% opposing same-sex civil unions (Institutul Român pentru Evaluare și Strategie - IRES, 2019). The same survey shows that the most discriminated categories are LGBT+ persons (78%), Roma persons (72%), migrants (69%) and persons of Muslim religion (68%) (Idem).

This condensed context-based overview on the political realities and the relevant aspects in contemporary Romania and the Republic of Moldova relates to the literature on othering which is part of the theoretical chapter. Facilitated by the confusion of nationality with citizenship, the strategies for exclusion and othering are intertwined with certain societal aspects (ethnicity, religion) that contribute to the shaping of a national identity which excludes certain categories.

As shown, there are similarities between the two countries in terms of the levels of discrimination of LGBT+ persons and migrants, although Romania has better policies in place, mostly as a consequence of its membership in the EU. However, the radical right-wing trends in relation to politics in Romania seem to surpass the ones in the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, attitudes towards migrants continue to be influenced by various populist messages and the national identities continue to be strongly connected to the dominant religion and “traditional values”.

5.2 The migrants and the queers as non-citizens

The analysis was strategically constructed to show how othering processes function towards the exclusion of the two categories but the discussion on LGBT+ persons is more extensive than the one concerning the migrants. Since the purpose of this thesis is to examine how exclusion in political communications is unravelled, it is less important to focus on the proportion of these two categories reflected in the analysed material, and more important to focus on the discursive practices that address themes related to the two categories’ exclusions.

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8 According to the “Rainbow Europe 2021” annual report the index concerning LGBT+ rights is currently slightly higher in the Republic of Moldova (20/100) than in Romania (19/100) (ILGA Europe, 2021).
5.2.1 Othering strategies for non-citizenship

“I’ve never promised to be the gays’ President” ([a.t.] Stirileprotv.ro, online; interview with Igor Dodon, May 2017)

Igor Dodon served as the President of the Republic of Moldova between December 2016 and December 2020. He is the former leader of the Party of Socialists of Republic of Moldova and made the above mentioned statement while he was still in office, as a reaction to the LGBT+ community’s march that took place in Chișinău in 2017. While being interviewed by the reporters, he added that “they [the “gays”] missed the chance to have a president of their own”, alluding to the pro-European Maia Sandu⁹ who ran against him in the 2016 elections and lost by 47.89% to 52.11% ([a.t.] Stirileprotv.ro, online, 2017). There were several reactions to this statement, one of them belonging to Viorica Dăncilă (PSD), Romania’s PM at that time, who expressed her disagreement: “I believe that a president must be the president of all citizens, including those who believe in something else, have other aspirations” ([a.t.] Hotnews.ro, 2018). Although Dăncilă avoided to explicitly refer to the category in question, that of LGBT+ persons, the message was clear and connected to the othering strategies of placing a part of citizens outside of the citizenship sphere.

The othering strategy in place is thus twofold: first, it positions LGBT+ as second rank citizens, and secondly it frames the opposition represented by Maia Sandu and her party as Others, outside of the Presidential sphere. More precisely, a President of a state who declares that he is not the president of all citizens explicitly excludes parts of those citizens, in this case, the LGBT+ persons. Moreover, by referring to the opposition as being dedicated to the excluded category, Dodon extends this exclusion at the political level. The statement also has a background, as it is based on a previous reiteration of it issued by Dodon during the 2016 Presidential elections, in the night following the official results:

“I promise you, dear fellow citizens, that I will be the president of all: both of the ones who consider themselves to be right-wing, and of the left-wing ones, both of the ones who want to enter the EU and the ones who want to be close to Russia.

⁹ Former leader of PAS (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - Action and Solidarity Party), a center-right liberal party.
Esteemed citizens who voted for Maia Sandu, I will take into consideration all your wishes, all that you plead for, all that you believe in. I will listen to everybody.” ([a.t.] TVR, Youtube, 2016).

The contrast between this apparently inclusive discourse and the declaration from 2017 is important. It shows how the othering strategies are employed at the right moment, to enhance the political communication depending on the context. By analyzing the former President’s latter statement, it can be concluded that the LGBT+ persons are outside the interest and protection of the state’s policies and are seen as Others, aliens, while still retaining certain rights, as the one to vote.

The Moldovan opposition also used the idea of “a president of all citizens” in different public communications. One example comes from the statements of Dorin Chirtoacă (PL, Partidul liberal – the Liberal Party), Mayor of Chişinău between 2007 and 2018, who ran for Presidency in the 2020 elections. In an interview concerning his position regarding LGBT+ citizens, Chirtoacă stated:

“We cannot be more Catholic than the Pope, we are liberals and we also understand this situation and that is why we follow what the European and American authorities have already decided, including what Pope Francis said the other day” ([a.t] TV8.MD Facebook Page, 2020).

In a similar manner to Dăncilă, Chirtoacă avoids an explicit statement about LGBT+ persons but takes into consideration the liberal ideology of his party and defends his position by referring to Western authorities and how the “situation” is seen by them.

But the same liberal ideology was not a strong argument in favour of LGBT+ persons in 2011 when, invited to a TV show on Publika.md, Chirtoacă stated that:

“From the point of view of the Liberal Party, it is good for them [a.n. “the LGBT+ persons”] to stay at home. We are liberals, but I think it's better for a boy to be with a girl and a girl to be with a boy, give birth to children. After all, each one with
their rights, but in my opinion, the private life must remain private” ([a.t.] Ziaristi online, 2011).

As an additional note, the current Mayor of Chișinău, Ion Ceban (PSRM) has been constantly opposing the organization of LGBT+ marches in the city, while paraphrasing Dodon’s slogan and promising that he will be “the Mayor of everyone” (PRO TV.md, 2019). Moreover, after being asked how these two different stances over LGBT+ issues come together, he briefly responded that “It is important that the majority’s position is also accepted” (PRO TV.md, 2019). This is a traditional tactic of othering (Poteat & Mereish 2012; Haslop & O’Rourke 2020) that seeks to exploit the dichotomy “minority / majority” and places “the majority” as the one in need to assert its rights and, in some cases, to have its rights “defended”.

One step further is the discursive shift of a “majority” framed as “minority”, a common practice in right-wing communications:

“Suddenly, whoever does not belong to a minority group is stigmatized and accused of being a hater, a radical or worse, even a Nazi. […] Are we getting to the point where a minority discriminates the majority? […] We live in a time where it is almost impossible to defend a traditional family, to be pro life, and stand publicly on these beliefs without being accused of hate speech. […] I wish for my three children, and three grandchildren, and the fourth who is on the way to live in a world where they can be Christian, have families and children, speak freely about their beliefs” (Valeriu Ghilețchi’s speech in original, Facebook page, 2019).

Ghilețchi is a member of Alianța pentru Integrare Europeană, AIE (Alliance for European Integration) party in the Republic of Moldova and between 2018 and 2019 was the Chairperson of the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights. Transforming the Christian “majority” into a victim, the usual rhetoric around the stigmatization of minorities is reversed. Another example is the framing of a minority as standing on equal grounds with the “majority” thus eliminating its need for rights affirmation and freedom of expression, as it is the case pointed out in Marian Lupu’s\(^{10}\) statement: “I am

\(^{10}\) President of the Parliament of Moldova (2010 and 2013).
heterosexual. As long as I don't take the streets to shout my sexual orientation, why would it be discriminatory to ban gay parades?” (Publika.md, 2011).

What can be drawn from these positions is the distancing concerning a part of the electorate, namely the LGBT+ citizens of the Republic of Moldova, which functions at different levels, even when some of the statements seem to be favourable to the inclusion of this category within the national ideas of citizenship.

The examples discussed above bring together multiple forms of imposed passivity, where “the minority” is seen either as an alien element that a state has to interact with, or as not being part of the citizenship sphere and the rights entitled by it, and thus with less power to take decisions. LGBT+ individuals are portrayed in a passive manner, in permanent dichotomy to the “majority” who is entitled to take decisions for the Others and is in need of protection from “outside” factors such as the so called “gender ideology” or the “threat of migrants”. This nuance is more prominent in the way politicians refer to issues of migration.

I now turn to how this othering strategy is employed in relation to migrant issues, drawing a parallel between the imposed passivity of LGBT+ persons and that of migrants in the political communications. For example, Traian Băsescu\textsuperscript{11}, the President of Romania between 2004 and 2014 stated that Romania should refuse to receive migrants, as it is “not our problem”:

“When you have accepted them on your territory, you must provide education, Romanian language lessons, and access to the health system, preserve their culture and customs. (...) And that they will be accommodated in Romania for only 2 years must be forgotten. I know how nicely EU lies. They will attract their large families from their home countries” (Mediafax.ro, 2015).

This message is of populist nature: it suggests that Romanians have to be in focus when it comes to the state’s resources; moreover, engaging with the Others, such as migrants, is seen as an invitation for more persons to migrate. This statement was used in an attempt to gain public popularity. Furthermore, this strategy was also used in gaining popularity with regards to

\textsuperscript{11} Current political affiliation: European People's Party. Former member of Partidul Mișcarea Populară (People's Movement Party) and of Partidul Democrat Liberal (The Democratic Liberal Party).
Romania’s external politics. In 2011, the same Traian Băsescu made a “symbolic” offer to the Italian PM at that time, Silvio Berlusconi. In the context of more than 2,000 North-African refugees reaching Italy’s shores, Băsescu used this situation to make a populist gesture and stated that Romania can take 200 of these persons, in solidarity with Italy and with its efforts to convince other EU countries to also take part in this process (Dinu, 2011).

These examples suggest an imposed passivity and the objectification of the migrant as being a mere category that “the majority” has to decide on and has to assume responsibility of. The idea of responsibility of the Romanian state is reiterated by another former PM, Dacian Cioloș who favored the idea of managing the migrant “influx”, seeing Romania as a partner of the EU in the efforts of transfer and relocation of migrants (Pecheanu, 2016). Romanian President Klaus Iohannis considered these efforts as being voluntary while opposing the refugee quotas; he brought into the discussion what is considered to be the capacity of the Romanian state that accepted 1,785 refugees by September 2015 (Hotnews.ro, 2015). The President argued that making the quota mandatory has no effect in solving the problem of migration (Hotnews.ro, 2015). One could note that there is an important disparity when it comes to the number of potential refugees Romania should have received in 2015 (around 4,000) that triggered these statements, and the number of Romanian citizens who emigrated from Romania in 2015: around 187,000 persons (Mihai, A., Ziarul Financiar.ro, 2017).

Another matter worth reflecting on is that of visibility. In other words, which kinds of groups are granted access to visibility in public space? While an important part of political othering strategies vis-à-vis LGBT+ persons concerns their visibility or negation of it in public, as an often employed argument is that private matters such as sexuality have no place into the public sphere, a similar viewpoint concerns migrants as well. An example is the one of Liviu Dragnea (PSD), the former President of the Chamber of Deputies (2016-2019) who, after visiting one of the refugee camps in Budapest in 2015, considered that the refugees acted “strangely”:

“I saw how, in a matter of minutes, several thousands of people organized and decided to march from there on the streets of Budapest and I do not want to see thousands of immigrants on the streets of Bucharest” ([a.t.] Ziare.com, 2015).

12 Founder and member of PLUS (The Party of Liberty, Unity and Solidarity).
If paired with arguments in a similar vein about LGBT+ persons who should not be marching through the streets of Romanian or Moldovan cities\(^\text{13}\), the othering strategies concerning the two categories become clearer. It is not the minority’s right or place to take the public scene and issue questions related to rights, discrimination and other matters. If, however, such manifestations become possible, it is only with the approval of certain authorities (city halls, parliaments, etc.) and within the terms and conditions set by the “majority”.

5.2.2 Tradition and religion as othering grounds

Another theme highlighted by the analysis is that of traditional and religious values. This subchapter is dedicated to the analysis of othering strategies in connection to these themes that are brought into the discussion as reasons against both LGBT+ individuals and migrant persons – often in connection to their different religion or religious views.

While participating in the Pride march and events is conditioned by the authorities, the act in itself is often condemned as anti-Christian and seen as against the family values and traditions of a state. An example is Igor Dodon’s “attacks” against Maia Sandu: “The traditions, values and faith are crucial for the state. I do not participate in gay marches in Chișinău, as Maia Sandu has done in the recent years” ([a.t.] Jurnal.md, 2020). Being a politician that supports LGBT+ and human rights is seen, in this context, as blamable and in contradiction with state leadership. By attaching right-wing and conservative ideas of what family, moral values and traditions mean to the idea of a state, Dodon suggests that a political leader with more liberal views on matters of LGBT+ rights is incompatible with their position. Moreover, according to Dodon, the LGBT+ marches should not take place in the Republic of Moldova because “it is a country with traditions, a Christian country where we plea for traditional families” ([a.t.] Protv.md, 2019).

There is also the discussion around the concept of “family” that is often central in this kind of statements. While some politicians, parties, LGBT+ persons, NGOs and allies all over the world are promoting equal rights for LGBT+ families, the conservative voices consider a limited definition of a family: that of heterosexual couples with offspring.

While the demographics in both Romania and the Republic of Moldova are marked by a strong population decline also connected to high levels emigration, the populist and conservative politicians seek to oppose legal recognition of LGBT+ families or the idea of family reunification of migrants (see, for example, Băsescu’s statement, Mediafax.ro 2015). The fact that the former President of Romania positioned the possible trend of migrants to also bring their “numerous” families (Mediafax.ro, 2015) as a threat, shows how this category is seen as undesirable when it comes to the demographics.

A further step is already seen in countries such as Poland where reproductive rights are increasingly limited and LGBT+ persons face constant backlash from authorities (Żuk et. al., 2021). Along with proposals concerning the illegalization of abortion, there are also proposals that limit sexual minorities’ rights; both issues are treated as questions of morality and it is often the case that morality is brought as an argument by populist leaders: “Organizing sexual minorities’ festivals and other manifestations that promote immoral principles should be condemned and maybe made illegal”, Dodon argued ([a.t.] Protv.md 2018). The idea of morality in politics is often reiterated, especially in populist statements that shape morality as a one side matter, promoting conservative views on family and the composition of a nation. Moreover, some politicians believe that questions of morality are deeply embedded in politics. One example is that of Monica Macovei14 who stated that “politics cannot be done without moral values” and that she believes in “family, life […] and parents’ liberty to decide what kind of education their offspring receive” ([a.t.] George, 2014). The context in which this statement was issued was that of the negative vote the former MEP expressed in connection to The Estrela report (Report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights – A7-0306/2013).

The othering strategies in place here are more subtle: while the liberty to decide is invoked, there is a thin line between what is considered to be immoral or moral. More specifically, populist leaders holding conservative views invoke morality and aim to “protect the

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14 Member of the European Parliament (MEP) between 2009 and 2019 and former Minister of Justice, Romania (2004-2007).
“We, as statesmen, are obliged to keep under observation that public morale is uphold. Demonstrations of this type, as the one that took place the other day in the center of the capital city, ignore public morality and the law” ([a.t.] Motroi, 2011: 41).

This is a clear example of a populist message that targets a category, that of LGBT+ persons, and negates the right of protest or manifestation of certain groups of citizens, while arguing that the liberty of expression in this case contradicts unclear “moral values” that the “public”, or the “majority” might share.

Issues of family, religion and tradition are interwoven in Romanian and the Republic of Moldova political communications and scene. In some cases, they are also embedded in political parties’ programs, as it is the case of AUR. The party’s political program sees national minorities as “extremists” who do not represent the interests of the Romanian “brothers” ([a.t.] Pavel, 2020). These “national minorities” are in no way autonomous and do not only concern the religious aspect, but also the ethnicity of the persons that are part of them. The right-wing arguments often include sexual minorities under this umbrella, especially as opposed to the Romanian, “traditional” values. One way of counteracting this “extremism” is, as the AUR program states, to oppose “the persecution campaign led against Christianity in the last decades” ([a.t.] Partidulaur.ro, 2019). This leap from “national minorities”, which are also mostly Christian, to non-Christianity is usually made by right-wing parties in Romania with the aim of attacking persons of Muslim faith.

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15 The President of Partidul Popular Creștin Democrat (Christian-Democratic People's Party) in the Republic of Moldova.
Moreover, one of the party’s aims is to “defend the Christians who have the courage to publicly admit their Christianity” ([a.t.] Partidulaur.ro, 2019). In absence of a context, these statements might seem bizarre, especially considering that the main religion in Romania is Christian, with over 85% of persons declaring themselves Orthodox (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2013). Taking one step further in the analysis and considering that migrants are mainly portrayed as being of another religion (mostly Muslim) the above statements begin to shape as another othering strategy, namely: Christians are in danger and need to be protected of non-Christians, such as Muslims. This reference to migrants is not explicitly stated, but it is reinforced in the following excerpt:

“We are an organic whole within a matrix in which the main binders are the language, faith, and ethnicity. When these three features are called into question, the Romanian nation loses its meaning” ([a.t.] Partidulaur.ro, 2019).

What is interesting here is the use of the term “ethnicity”. In the further points of AUR’s program, ethnicity is brought into discussion when referring to persons of Hungarian origins and some of the territorial conflicts arising in different regions of Romania where these persons form a majority.

Another point is the distinction made by AUR between Romanian emigrants throughout the EU and migrants to Romania. In the party’s view, these Romanian citizens are not immigrants to other EU countries, but “European citizens with full rights” ([a.t.] Partidulaur.ro, 2019). In contrast to the migrants to Romania, the Romanian migrants’ cultural and linguistic identity must be protected by the EU (Partidulaur.ro, 2019). This shows how the hierarchic types of citizenship and rights are seen to function. While technically and legally migrants (regardless of citizenship) are not on par with the citizens of the country of migration, this populist strategy frames Romanians as European citizens who as opposed to non-EU citizens, should have full rights in their countries of migration. This exclusion strategy based on double standards is often employed in relation to LGBT+ Romanian citizens, as they are also, technically, granted fewer rights than the heterosexual ones in the hierarchical stream of citizenship.
The Romanian public sphere also hosts more straightforward anti-immigration and anti-Muslim political communications. Following the 2016 attack in Nice, Clotilde Armand\(^\text{16}\) made her position clear and condemned “the wave of Islamic terrorism” (Stirilekanal.ro, 2016). On her Facebook page, she stated that:

“I personally support the deportation of all those who are responsible for spreading Islamic terrorist propaganda and are thus found guilty by the European courts. Mosques with radical Islamist clerics should also be closed. Religious freedom must no longer be abused to instigate to such atrocities. It is time to openly say that Muslims who have come to Europe, recent immigrants or even second or third generation, must respect the values of European civilization, tolerance, respect for the rights and freedoms of others, including women's rights, or if not, they may consider moving to the Middle East” ([a.t] Clotilde Armand, Facebook Page post, 2016).

Firstly, the statement implies that all the persons in question are migrants and are not citizens of the countries in which the “Islamist propaganda” is spread. For example, a French citizen could not be deported from France unless in a rare case and only if that person is a “naturalized” citizen. By framing “terror attacks” as being exclusively led by foreigners and including second and third generation migrants among them, this populist strategy reinforces the idea that European countries and values must be protected from “foreign threats”. Secondly, Armand openly attacks the principle of religious freedom and freedom of assembly when she states that some mosques should not be kept open. Consequently, religious freedom is seen as an Achilles’ heel in relation to the constructed dichotomy Christian / Muslim, where people of Muslim faith are portrayed as instigators of violence under the protection of such freedoms. Moreover, this politician also brings into the discussion the “European values” trope which, she implies, is incompatible with Muslim religion and with the whole Middle East.

In line with populist right-wing feminist discourses taking roots especially in Western Europe, Clotilde Armand also uses the argument of gender equality in building up her stance against what it is generally perceived by right-wing politicians as oppressing cultures in relation

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\(^{16}\) Currently the Mayor of District 1, Bucharest, former MEP (2019-2020) and member of USR.
to women’s rights. This type of discourse is rare in both Romania’s and the Republic of Moldova’s politics, as politicians avoid using feminist arguments of any nature or political origin in their discourses. As a French-born politician, Armand brings into the public sphere a sample of right-wing neo-liberal feminism which is quite established in other countries such as e.g. France and the UK.

I will now come back to the idea of mosques framed as an epicenter for these “attacks”. Instead of proposing measures against what Armand calls “radical Islamist clerics”, she focuses on the closure of the religious establishments. This opposition to a building or institution related to Muslim faith reminded me of Cătălin Berenghi (President of the Dacian Party in Romania) and his “protest” from 2015, during the discussions of a possible mosque being constructed in Bucharest. The peak of his anti-Muslim and anti-mosque campaign took the following form:

“Muslim customs say that if the land on which the mosque is to be built has been tainted by pigs or pig remains, it is no longer good for it. I had the idea of ordering seven milk piglets, painted them and let them run there. I painted five of them red, yellow and blue [a.n.: the colors of the Romanian flag], and two of them I painted pink [a.t.: color often associated with LGBT+ persons, for example during the Holocaust]. The pink ones are considered traitors of the country. Then I bought pork from the supermarket and buried it there.” ([a.t.] Cătălin Berenghi cited by Răduţă, 2015).

Berenghi is a right-wing extremist who, although positioned at the fringe of the Romanian political spectrum, managed to obtain national visibility through his actions. Furthermore, this influenced the mainstream opinions about Muslim persons to a great extent, as it can be seen from observing the impact of his communications on social media. Through his use of Facebook as main communication mean, Berenghi brought together persons with extremist or conservative views who became his supporters. The example above is another way the othering strategies and the exclusions of migrant persons manifest in the Romanian public space. The institution related to a religion, be it Muslim, Christian or another is brought into attention by populist leaders in their attempts of either excluding a category or further defining what national culture and, more specifically, faith should be.
The following example concerns the institution of the Christian Church and has to do, as well, with the idea of closing a religious space. During the Moldovan Presidential campaign, Igor Dodon “accused” Maia Sandu of planning to bring “Syrian immigrants” to the Republic of Moldova, to legalize same-sex marriages and to close down the churches (Timpul.md, 2016). All these three ideas are seen as negative and threatening to the integrity of the Moldovan nation. It is one of the few examples that directly bring together the two categories in focus: that of migrants and LGBT+ persons and frames them as detrimental to the state. Sandu’s response is nonetheless ambiguous and her pro-European views in relation to equal rights are missing:

“These are blatant lies from Dodon. I will not do any of these things. How could I close the churches if I myself am a churchgoer? The difference is that I don't take pictures in church for PR, like Dodon does. A faithful person does not come to church in order to take pictures. I've never seen a bigger liar than Dodon” ([a.t.] Timpul.md, 2016).

The mere idea of granting migrants access to the Republic of Moldova or that of equating LGBT+ citizens’ rights to the existing ones for heterosexual couples are dismissed as inappropriate and thus off the President’s agenda. Moreover, the focus is moved on the degree of faith and the (im)morality of abusing the idea of faith as a political leader, while failing to mention the other topics, such as LGBT+ rights and migrant issues, touched by Dodon’s declaration. This avoidance of talking about certain issues is part of the ambiguity progressive political leaders sometimes choose when they need to respond to matters concerning LGBT+ rights.

Other political actors have clearly stated their anti-immigration and anti-LGBT+ position. One such case is the Romanian far right-wing New Right Party (Partidul Noua Dreaptă). Referring to the third Article in the Romanian Constitution that reads “Foreign populations cannot be displaced or colonized on the territory of the Romanian state” ([a.t.] Constitutiaromaniei.ro), the New Right Party organized in 2015 a protest in front of the European Commission’s headquarters in Bucharest against the refugee quotas (Ziare.com, 2015). Invoking the threat of terrorist attacks as a consequence of the acceptance of migrants, the party stated that allowing migrants on the territory of the EU will increase the incentives for larger numbers to migrate to Europe (Ziare.com, 2015). In an online article signed by Alexandru
Năstase, the party’s Vice-president at that time, the idea of multiculturalism is associated with the ones regarding tolerance and “political correctness”. The latter two are, as the New Right party also has strong anti-LGBT+ views, more associated with sexual minorities:

“The Western political elite, by imposing the dogmas of tolerance, multiculturalism and political correctness on the native Europeans, has de facto encouraged the extremist manifestations of Muslim immigrants” ([a.t.] Năstase, 2016).

This is a traditional stance of far-right parties: to construct a dichotomy in which “common people” are the upholders of traditions, while “political correctness” is not a matter of Europe-wide legislation on equal rights, but just ideas promoted by hyper intellectualized, rich and entitled elites. These dichotomies are then used as means of communicating the politicians’ conservative stances on a large array of topics such as immigration, integration, human rights, gender related issues, etc. Keeping in mind the complicated history of the Romanian territories and the succession of different empires and foreign rulers, this strategy of othering the “West” and shaping it as a driving force for unwanted (or “imported”) values is commonly employed by nationalist and populist political forces. In an interview after the Justice and Home Affairs Council in 2015, Gabriel Oprea, the Romanian Minister of Internal Affairs and Justice of that time, summed up the conclusions for the reporters: “Romania is defending very well its 2070 km of European border” ([a.t.] Stiripesurse Youtube channel, 2015).

For some right-wing, neo-Orthodox intellectuals, as it is the case of the Romanian politician Iulian Capsali, Christian values include tolerance for refugees. This view is an exception regarding populist communications in the Romanian public space that usually oppose Christianity to the idea of accepting migrants. In 2015, Capsali rejected the association of refugees with terrorists and gave the example of Serbia and its way of handling the refugees, shaping it as an example of Orthodoxy that cares for the ones in need (Capsali, Facebook page, 2015). However, his humanitarian views are not consistent, as it is shown in one of his Facebook posts from 2017 where Capsali references an article in which the rate of criminality in Sweden is associated with the migrant influx, especially with focus on Muslim migrants (Alianța Familiilor din România webpage, 2017).
This subchapter focuses on political communications that concern LGBT+ persons and migrants in relation to their rights, be it in relation to the absence of rights, possible directions for rights development or the direct negation of certain rights.

As a reaction to Poland’s “LGBT-free zones” that are increasing in number throughout the country, the EU voted a resolution and declared itself a “LGBT freedom zone”, in an attempt to strengthen its support for LGBT+ rights throughout the EU (BBC.com, 2021). Although the Socialist group in the European Parliament voted in favor of this resolution, the leader of Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSD)17 Marcel Ciolacu stated than he is against same-sex partnership and marriage. As this party is traditionally against LGBT+ rights, this decision to vote in favor at the European level was questioned. Ciolacu argued that:

“When you are part of a European family [a.n. the European Socialists], if that group has made a certain decision, I think it is right to respect the decision and vote accordingly. It is a resolution that concerns the whole of Europe. […] It is not a law that is imposed in Romania. I repeat, I respect the traditions and specifics of Romania. Romania is a Christian country and, more explicitly, I do not agree with same-sex marriages. […] It is normal to respect minorities and their rights, but this does that not mean that you force me... or certain minorities to have more rights than... right? There are social issues, the European minimum wage, equality between men and women, birth rates, these are also social democratic issues” ([a.t.] Marcel Ciolacu interviewed by Tăpălagă, 2021).

This type of inconsistency is a characteristic of the main Romanian socialist party. The strategy of accepting anti-discrimination measures at EU level which does not transfer to the internal politics sphere is one way this and the other main Romanian parties which are part of the EU Parliament manage to dissociate from their conservative views depending on the circumstances.

What happens when LGBT+ rights and more specifically, the law proposal that offers an opportunity for LGBT+ persons to form civil partnerships is brought into the discussion in the

17 part of the European Socialists
Romanian Chamber of Deputies? Analyzing the transcripts of the Parliamentary debates in Romania in 2015 on the matter of civil partnership regulation is necessary for deepening the understanding on how othering strategies function at high political level and how individual rights are affected. This proposal advanced by Remus Cernea, an independent deputy, met the negative vote of all commissions (including the Human Rights and the Equal Opportunities Commissions) but one: “The Labor Committee made an exception and gave a favorable opinion, perhaps by mistake”, as PSD Deputy Sorin Constantin Stragea commented (Cdep.ro, 2015). This debate is an example of how the rights of a certain group are decided on the basis of what is considered to be moral, in line with the Romanian traditions and Christian values. For example:

“It has always been known that the family was composed of a female part and a male part. OK, maybe now we are witnessing a modernization of this conception, of this morality. But let's not forget the Nordic countries, where the concept of family almost no longer exists. In the Nordic countries, men take their children out on weekends, and women go to clubs, these are cases I have encountered” ([a.t.] Ovidiu-Cristian Iane, PSD, Cdep.ro, 2015).

Iane continues his reasoning pointing out that legalizing civil partnership for same-sex persons leads to children adoption, which he considers to be “dangerous” (Cdep.ro, 2015). Another Deputy, Traian Dobrinescu (PNL) pushed forward on the same line and identified another danger:

“[in] the Proto-Sumerian period, human problems also arose: zoophilia and partnership between men […] But I know, when I was working in education, I had a colleague haunted by – how can I call it: such freedom, such disease? – which ended in a noose” […] I remember another initiative, with the dolphin as a non-human person, if we would have had passed this initiative, we would probably have witnessed, the same as with this civil partnership, a marriage, in the near future, between a person of either sex and a dolphin” ([a.t.] Cdep.ro, 2015).

This is a classic example of paternalist attitudes employed by conservative politicians that bring into question unrelated topics such as zoophilia in an attempt to limit LGBT+ rights.
Politician Adrian Papaghi, founder of PMP equates the European values with accepting future marches of “sadomasochists, zoophiles, onanists, impotents and, when the world is open-minded enough, the pedophiles’ festival” ([a.t.] Matei, 2005). The friction between the “traditional/national values” and the “European” ones places LGBT+ persons at its core. In an attempt to organize an anti-LGBT+ referendum in the Republic of Moldova\textsuperscript{18}, triggered by the adoption of the Equal opportunities Law, President Vladimir Voronin declared that:

“For the sake of grants, these people from the government are licking the Europeans’ and other’s hands. May this European integration burn a thousand times if it comes with such a price. When they came to power, the Alliance [a.n. AIE, The Alliance for European Integration] did not say they would give rights to lesbians and pederasts” ([a.t.] Vladimir Voronin, point.md, 2012).

In this political communication, rights are not dependant on citizenship, but granted or refused by politicians on the basis of particular values. This represents a clear stance on how different categories of citizens are deprived of some of the majority’s rights and thus placed outside of the full citizenship sphere. Moreover, the legislators and persons holding highest Justice positions tend to refer to their personal and religious points of view whenever the issue of civil partnership arises. Such case is the one of Augustin Zegrean, the President of the Romanian Constitutional Court between 2010 and 2016 who sees the 10 Commandments as part of laws Romanians must abide to:

“[…] the Decalogue represents the first great attempt to legislate, to codify the legislation of mankind. [...]What if your father is a man and your mother also a man? <Thou shall not commit adultery> is the seventh commandment. Well today,

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\textsuperscript{18} In 2018, the Coalition for Family in Romania organised a referendum for changing the definition of marriage in the Romanian Constitution that currently refers to “spouses”. The aim was to specifically state that only “a man and a woman” could form a family and be married (Redacția Adevărul, 2020). The referendum did not meet the quorum, therefore the proposal was dismissed. In 2020, the initiative was brought back into the public sphere in a new attempt to modify the Romanian Constitution. In May 2021, a similar initiative appeared in the Republic of Moldova. The Socialist party proposed to explicitly forbid same-sex marriages in the Moldovan Constitution, as well as to add that a “father is only male” and “a mother is only female” ([a.t.] Diez.md, 2021). The Moldovan Constitution already states that the family is formed based on the relationship between a man and a woman (Diez.md, 2021).
Mr. Zgonea\textsuperscript{19}, the countries are forced to adopt laws of lust because there are more and more discussions about the law of prostitution” ([a.t.] B1.ro, 2015).

The matter of laws is also related to their applicability and willingness of the politicians to apply the law. In an article published by Libertatea.ro online newspaper in 2006, the reporters interviewed the Mayors of the six Bucharest districts in connection to a possible law of same-sex civil partnerships and the way they would implement it. Some of them were adamant and clearly opposed the idea of officiating a same sex civil partnership: “I? Marry them? […] Those who wish that can go to Congo”, Marian Vanghelie, District 5; “I will not marry them, not for the death of me. Not even if there is a law in this regard”, Cristian Poteraş, District 6; “Personally, I wouldn't do that”, Adrian Inimăroiu, District 4 ([a.t.] Libertatea.ro, 2006). The other Mayors stated that it is their obligation to respect the law but mentioned the fact that they do not agree with these types of partnerships (Libertatea.ro, 2006). More than ten years have passed from these examples and there is still no law in Romania regulating civil partnership that includes same-sex persons. This demonstrates that the possibility of same-sex partnership is not a priority for the Romanian legislators. One of the most recent arguments brought forward by the Government mentions the fact that the regulation of civil partnerships is not a requirement from the EU and it is strictly under the Member States’ national regulations (Dancu, 2019).

While civil partnership regulations were not a condition for Romania’s acceptance in the EU, the legislative basis concerning anti-discrimination is. In the Republic of Moldova, the discussions about partnership in connection to LGBT+ rights are less frequent. Some populist politicians strongly reacted when the Moldovan law on equality was ratified, as only one of its articles referred to sexual minorities and stated their protection against discrimination at the work place (Euractiv.ro, 2019). GENDERDOC-M, a Moldovan NGO specialized in human rights and LGBT+ issues monitored the opinions published around this legislative ratification.

As it is shown by the analysis, many of them related to the opening up for “amoral” persons to organize and promote “amorality”, as well as an opportunity for LGBT+ community to “automatically receive the full set of rights” (Motroi, 2011: 20-21). In the following year’s report Iurie Roșca’s (PPCD) statement is mentioned along with other similar reactions: the intention is framed as “an aggressive and insulting against the dignity of the absolute majority”

\textsuperscript{19} Valeriu Zgonea, President of the Chamber of Deputies (2012 – 2016).
Furthermore, one of the reports shows examples of politicians from a varied range of political spectrums that often bring into the discussion religion, public morale and their strong opposition towards civil partnership or adoption rights for LGBT+ persons (Motroi, 2011). An exception is Dumitru Braghiș (PDSM), former Moldovan PM between 1999 and 2001 and currently the Republic of Moldova Ambassador in China. Braghiș’s views are inclusive in the sense that he argues that LGBT+ persons are also citizens and that “a party is supported by the Republic of Moldova citizens” who represent different minorities, be it “religious, sexual or national” ([a.t.] Motroi, 2011:51).

Migrants and LGBT+ persons are usually compared in public opinion surveys that reflect the sample’s attitudes towards the two categories. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, a recent survey on 815 inhabitants of Chișinău showed that, when it comes to the degree of discrimination, LGBT+ individuals are seen to be more frequently discriminated against than asylum seekers (71% vs 57%) (Magenta Consulting, 2020).

A case documented by GENDERDOC-M brings into attention the realities of LGBT+ asylum seekers. This is the only example I could find that concerns the rights of LGBT+ migrants. By briefly documenting the story of C.A., a queer asylum seeker who experienced assaults and discrimination from institutions such as medical centers and abuse from different individuals, GENDERDOC-M highlights the different intersecting elements of double discrimination. C.A. refrained from calling the police in a few situations of assault because he signed “not to enter into conflict with the local population” as instructed by the Migration and Asylum Bureau (Frolov, 2015:8). Another example of how migrants are treated, this time by the Romanian authorities, was recently a subject of news. The article describes the inhumane conditions in Timișoara’s refugee centre, how the Afghan refugees who recently arrived through Serbia are treated and abused by the Romanian Police, and the lack of basic support for these persons, who are often forced to live on the streets. One of the interviewed refugees speaks about how the guards often make racist comments. As he is also gay, he also mentions the insecurity feeling he had as the policemen asked him if he “likes boys” (Barbu, 2021). The authorities focus on the fact that in 2020 the number of asylum requests in Romania tripled, as it was the year with the most such requests: 6,158; 2,381 of the asylum seekers were Afghans and

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20 Available at: https://romania.europalibera.org/a/31231490.html?fclid=IwAR1g-vCue73OJ07-vBHNO8fe1KucSrv7a-YYWUMSYzaEh4IxXq7Yf
21 The third largest city in Romania and the largest in the Western part of the country.
only 42 of them received protection from the state (Barbu, 2021). The rise in asylum requests is used as an argument for the lack of conditions and support. Timișoara’s Mayor, Dominic Fritz (USR), asked the national authorities for help, as he sees the matter of migration as a „national issue”. President Klaus Iohannis reacted stating that he is waiting for a detailed report and that “Timișoara will not be left alone” (Barbu, 2021). This is in line with moving the focus from the persons in need for help and decent living conditions, to a part of the administration which is mandated to offer this support.

Migrants are usually portrayed as liabilities that have to be accommodated, that can be displaced, moved to other dedicated locations, deported and shared between countries. When The Guardian22 mentioned the plans of the UK government of building asylum centers in the Republic of Moldova, Morocco and Papua New Guinea, the Moldovan authorities reacted and dismissed any possibility for this (Primul.md, 2021). The news refer to a Facebook post authored by Deputy Grigore Novac (PSRM):

“TERRIBLE! Someone plans to transform our country in a “triage” area for foreign migrants. I reassure you: as long as we, the socialists, will be part of the Government and Igor Dodon will be President, we will NOT allow the Republic of Moldova to be transformed in a reservation for foreign migrants23. I will also not allow our country to become the Europe’s landfill, where toxic waste would be transported to and stored. We need external aid, but definitely not at any price, we do not want to be transformed into a colony” ([a.t.] Novac, 2020).

In this example, the anti-migrant othering strategies are intertwined with the blatant association of persons with toxic waste. Freedom of movement (mobility rights) is compared here with economical aspects related to landfill displacement. This is an extreme example on how politicians choose to refer to issues of policy and dismiss a category of persons at the margins of society through de-humanizing them while building an anti-EU discourse. This anti-EU and anti-foreigners line is strictly connected to the nationalist aspect of the particular political opinion above. By equating a category of persons with waste and by suggesting that

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22Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/oct/01/government-offshore-asylum-idea-attacked-as-morally-bankrupt.
23This wording is a clarification of the fact that the migrants in question are asylum seekers or refugees and not Moldovan migrants returning home, for example.
both are imposed to the sovereign state of Moldova by external forces such as the EU, there is a clear negation of the agency and humanity of migrants.

If we look at other arguments brought into the discussion when framing migrants as Others, we can find that the position and relations between Romania and the EU play an important role. More specifically, former Romanian President Traian Băsescu argues that Eastern Europeans are othered by the EU as lesser EU citizens and gives the example of how Romania’s requests to enter the Schengen Area have been constantly refused, one of the main reasons being that the country cannot properly protect the EU borders (B1 TV Youtube channel, 2015). This is why many politicians keep referring to how good and efficient is Romania at “defending” the borders, as opposed to the Schengen states failing to do so (B1 TV Youtube channel, 2015). This is also related to

This argument is also connected to the fact that, for Băsescu, as Romania is not in Schengen, there is no pressure to also accept the “immigrant quotas”. Asked what he, as a President, would say to his EU colleagues concerning the quotas, Băsescu replied: “I have Article 3\textsuperscript{24} from the Romanian Constitution, I am not in Schengen, right now I do not even ask to enter Schengen too soon, so leave me alone” ([a.t.] B1 TV Youtube channel, 2015). Another example in the same vein is that of Laurențiu Rebega, MEP (2014-2019) who also brings into the discussion how other EU states refuse Romania’s access to Schengen while imposing refugee quotas and this is seen as an inequality between the member states (Rebega, 2016). The number of the refugees that might be “imposed” to Romania is often referred to and in some instances this is seen as a threat to the national security, as Clotilde Armand states:

“[…] for this integration we must be sure that they will not come in larger and larger numbers, because the more they are, the more difficult their integration is. We must not jeopardize national security. There is no point in helping some people by endangering all our citizens. A state prioritizes the safety of its citizens before dealing with the rest of the world” ([a.t.] Pora & Culcer, 2016).

\textsuperscript{24} “Foreign populations cannot be displaced or colonized on the territory of the Romanian state” ([a.t.] Constitutiaromaniei.ro).
Another aspect mentioned by Băsescu is the mandatory returns of Romanian citizens of Roma ethnicity who, in his opinion, as EU citizens and “our Roma”, were treated unfair in comparison to the refugees, thus bringing up the matter of rights and how different categories can be seen as benefiting of fewer rights than others (B1 TV Youtube channel, 2015). However, it is important to be noted that this apparent inclusion of Roma persons by the former President in a non-discriminative manner is employed in the specific case mentioned above and it is not part of his usual communications. One instance that made the headlines was President Băsescu naming a journalist “stinking Gypsy” in 2007. The High Court of Cassation and Justice’s verdict was that although discriminatory, this statement is not a contravention (Neagu, 2008). This is a clear example of how a minority can be used depending on the purpose of the communication and how good it serves to different arguments.

Coming back to the TV show on B1 TV, it is interesting to note another element of the othering strategies concerning migrants. Referring to persons of Islamic religion, the former President frames them as incompatible with the European culture and values. Moreover, Băsescu asks: “Brothers, what are you looking for in Europe?” since he considers that a more compatible culture in “stable” and “rich” states such as the UEA and Iran are a better option ([a.t.] B1 TV Youtube channel, 2015).

The lack of agency of certain categories of people such as migrants and LGBT+ persons, and the way the authorities empower themselves to decide for those categories, also functions in relation to asylum seekers and refugees. While discussing about how countries are supposed to deal with the refugees, in terms of returning these persons to the entry points, selecting the ones to be granted asylum, etc., Băsescu argues:

“When you wake up with thousands, hundreds of thousands [a.n. of migrants] coming on the territorial waters, what do you do, sink those ships? You don't sink them. Because then you enter under the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea ([a.n.] SOLAS, in 1974) which does not allow you to sink passenger ships. We have witnessed... we were powerless” ([a.t.] B1 TV Youtube channel, 2015).

25 “Roma deportations by France a disgrace, says EU”. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/14/roma-deportations-france-eu-disgrace
Another take on the issue of migration in Romania is of liberal nature and relies on a merit-based immigration system, in place in countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia. In an interview for Europa FM, Leonard Orban (PNL) states that Romania is “totally unprepared for migrant integration” as it lacks a strong health system, housing policies, adequate schooling system, and brings up examples from other countries where the migrants’ access to the labor market is poor, and integration on several levels is considered difficult (Europa FM, 2015). Orban proposes a “selective” migration policy, as he agrees that given the current demographic decline in Romania, the country will need work force to fill the gaps: “We have to attract migrants to Romania, preferably the ones with higher education who can be integrated into the society, in the economy and in the Romanian business sphere” ([a.t.] Europa FM, 2015). This possible direction emphasizes the education, i.e. class as being a decisive factor in the decision of granting asylum rights to certain persons.

As the public Romanian sphere witnessed an increase of communications on the theme of migration in 2015, this also contributed to how different authorities and institutions reacted to this influx of news and statements. One example is that of Sorin Câmpeanu who ordered an assessment to see if the student accommodation provided by the universities is adequate for hosting the eventual incoming migrants (Ziare.com, 2015). This idea made the Liviu Dragnea (PSD) to react:

”I don’t know what the Minister of Education was thinking, but I consider that he should be more balanced [...] Romanians are very worried and any uncoordinated communication on the subject is only increasing the concerns among Romanians” ([a.t.] Europa FM, 2015).

When discussing solutions for a situation that was unclear to the Romanian authorities (i.e. the actual number of refugees that will arrive at the borders), it is interesting to note how different politicians try to frame migrants as a threat, in this case by stating that the Romanian people is worried and implying that migrants are at the core of this insecurity.

The idea of “bringing” foreign workers was also discussed in the Republic of Moldova which faces a rapid demographic decline as well. The debates on a law proposal entailing

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simplifying the bureaucratic procedures for migrants who want to work in the Republic of Moldova facilitated the idea that the project will lead to salary stagnation, since the employers will prefer to pay the minimum salary or even lower to migrants (Protv.md, 2020). Another argument was that of Moldovan citizens who work abroad but would want to return and work in the Republic of Moldova will not do so, since the salaries would still be stagnating (Protv.md, 2020). The right to work and to be integrated in the labor market is thus questioned with the help of economic arguments that do not seek to resolve the inequalities on the labor market and regulate how employers set the pay levels, but focus instead on how migrants may be a driving force for this stagnation and economic precarity.

The economical aspect is usually brought into the discussion related to the states’ resources and capacity for integration. In both Romania and the Republic of Moldova there is no formal political discussion on the “social benefits” some anti-immigration politicians refer to. The right to life with dignity\(^{27}\) is not connected, in the political communications analyzed here, to how low the state aid for asylum seekers amounts to in these countries. For example, in Romania, the \textit{per diem} sum for a person who has accommodation and meals in a refugee center is of 0.6 RON/day (Dumitrescu, 2021) or ca. 0.12 EUR/day, while the gross minimum wage in Romania is of 470 EUR/month. In comparison, Sweden, has also set low limits of \textit{per diem} for asylum seekers and refugees; these vary between 12 – 24 SEK/day (1.19 EUR to 2.37 EUR/day) (Migrationsverket, 2021, web page in the reference list). These amounts can be considered as far from a decent standard of living and might affect the persons’ right to life with dignity.

The following chapter develops on how the strategies of othering work across these two different categories of migrants and LGBT+ persons framed in populist communications. The aim is that of bringing together the different results of the analysis and relating them to the theoretical framework described earlier in this thesis.

\(^{27}\) See The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).
6. Discussion

Different hierarchies and power relationships between politicians and citizens and non-citizens unravel through the analyzed material. The strategies used in the political communications contribute to this process on an ideological level in the case of LGBT+ citizens and on a formal one in the case of the migrants in Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

The analysis was strategically constructed to show how othering processes function towards the exclusion of the two categories. This means that the two categories were consistently discussed in close connection with each other, in a comparative manner, as opposed to the usual tendencies in migration studies that only focus on the migrants and separately deal with specific issues concerning them, with no reference or comparison to other categories that construct the general population (Dahinden, 2016).

By exploring citizenship and how this is related to the two categories, the analysis has shown that the multiple aspects of citizenship, especially the social one is a key factor in framing a category of citizens as not belonging in the framework of a nation state (Aavik, 2020).

In line with the exclusion faced by formal citizens, such as LGBT+ persons, the analysis shows how this category is placed outside of the “national identity” construction (Bosniak, 2006). However, while Bosniak (2006) only refers to how “normative nationalism” opens the possibility of placing the citizens of a state on a higher position in the rights hierarchy as compared to non-citizens such as migrants, the analysis shows that this process is also functioning very well within the category of citizens, as LGBT+ individuals along with other categories such as migrants, Roma persons, etc. are considered outsiders in the analysed political communications.

Since the purpose of this thesis is to examine how exclusion in political communications is unravelled, it is of less importance to focus the proportion of these two categories in relation to the analysed material, and more important to focus on the discursive practices that address themes related to the two categories’ exclusions.

It is equally important to note that, as the analysis shows, these communications do not come from politicians placed at the margins of the political spectrum anymore, as it was, for example, with different political entities with far-right discourses that were once placed at the margins of the political sphere. The mainstreaming of far right communications, regardless of
the actual name or ideology of a party – see the socialist parties in both country contexts, for example – is transparent throughout the entire analysis. This means that the populist communications in question are not mainly attached to the right-wing ideology and parties. Furthermore, most of the initiators of these messages are persons with important positions in the state: Presidents, Prime Ministers, members of the European Parliament, Ministers, etc.

As migrants and LGBT+ are among most discriminated against categories in opinion polls, they are frequently used by politicians in order to frame their anti-Western and populist communications. The exclusion of LGBT+ persons from citizenship is more obvious in the context of the Republic of Moldova and its former President but it is also often present in the debates and communications regarding legal partnerships or marriage in Romania. However, in Romania, the focus is moved on the different rights this category should or should not have under Romanian legislation and against the inclusive tendency proposed by the EU. Regarding the EU and its standards of inclusions and exclusion, the discussions are more focused on how Eastern European citizens are framed as lesser European citizens than their Western counterparts. The focus in the Republic of Moldova and Romania is thus less on how non-EU migrants burden these two countries’ social systems. This is interesting, as many exclusionary discourses in Western countries have to do with other Eastern European migrants benefiting from the social security systems of the countries they choose to emigrate in (Fielder & Catalano, 2017).

The larger proportion of communications regarding LGBT+ persons than the one concerning migrants shows that the politicians focus their attention more on the first category, as it seems easier to frame as against the “traditional” values and “family values”. A possible explanation for LGBT+ persons being framed as “enemies” of the nation is that this traditional view on what family means and should be composed of are at the core of the social policies in the two country context. This is in concordance with what Conncannon (2008) suggests, as the politicians often use this argument in discriminating against sexual minorities when building their policies. While LGBT+ persons are seen as “enemies”, migrants are seen as “threats” to the national identity and security (Mohamed-Salih, 2015: 105).

Framing migrants and LGBT+ persons as “threats” is a common trope that brings together the two categories. The areas they are considered to threaten vary from the realm of Christian values – a predominant trope in the analysed material – to the traditional values of the
Romanian and Moldovan people, and to national integrity. By framing the two categories as outsiders and, moreover, as dangerous Others, the populist strategies in place deal with some of the most discussed topics in the two country contexts. In line with the argument advanced by Grove and Zwi (2006), Romania, for example, is often seen as a defender of the EU borders, while politicians praise themselves for their efficient way of dealing with the migrants who want to cross the border to EU. As the continuous demographic decline is one of these issues, the populist politicians manage to divert the focus from the different levels of corruption, EU funding mishandling, poor social, educational and health systems and to reorient it towards the two analysed categories.

Another interesting observation derived from the analysis is that both categories are seen as lacking agency. Most of the analysed material is based on the dichotomies “us/them”, “majority/minority”, where the majority has the power to decide and agency, while the minority lacks agency and it is framed as an object that is subjected to change on different levels, such as the legal one (by granting or limiting their rights). Both migrants and LGBT+ persons are placed outside of the national sphere, where the majority has the right to act to preserve its values, fight against “gender ideology” and “the national threat” these two categories pose, regardless of the dominant views different bodies such as the EU hold and recommend. The comparison of these two country contexts with “the West” is often brought into discussion as a reminder that the progressive values interfere with the morality and beliefs of the Romanian and Moldovan nations and populist politicians frame themselves as defenders of such values.

The analyzed material also suggested that the inequalities between the two categories and the “majority” are actually underlined and explicitly stated in political communications, which deny that these categories belong to the idea of nation. This contributes to the lack of access to belonging, due to the inequalities and marginalization of different stigmatized categories (Lähdesmäki, et al., 2016). Belonging and exclusion have been two of the main points followed throughout the analysis, as they were useful concepts in establishing a connection between how the two different categories are framed in populist communications.

These results are also relevant in relation to the larger context of SEE and dedicated literature, as they complement other studies with similar results from the region. The originality of this study lies in how I chose to approach the two categories (LGBT+ persons and migrants)
within the study of how nationalist and populist frameworks use these categories to influence the public opinion in the two country contexts.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Concluding remarks

This study surpassed the “migrant/native” dichotomy and highlighted how these categories can be merged through populist and nationalist strategies. It showed how a group of natives are othered in similar ways as it is done with the migrants. Given the rapid rise of nationalist and right-wing forces in Romania and the Republic of Moldova the study contributed to the understanding of the political shifts and ideologies that affect migration and human rights policies in these two country contexts but also in the SEE region. This contributed to the originality of the approach, especially when combined with the fact that there is very little literature on the topic focusing on these two countries in particular.

The analysis showed that strategies of exclusion through othering and by means of using populist messages are equally employed by centre, right, far-right or left-oriented party members and formations, regardless of their de facto status or political colour. Consequently, the analysis included, for example, socialist as well as liberal communications which placed LGBT+ individuals and migrants at the core of the threat to the nation. Traditionally, socialist and liberal parties are considered to be holding more progressive values, at least in the case of most Western European parties. Following from the analysis, this is less the case in the two country contexts.

7.2 Directions for further research

Several directions for further research can be envisaged on the basis of the results of this study. An interesting take would be to also consider the experiences of different other minority categories excluded by populist discourses such as Roma persons, or LGBT+ migrants or refugees and their own positionalities and identifications in relation to citizenship and national
identity. For example, it may be that in some cases these members might refuse to be included in such nationally constructed frames, as they position themselves outside the national identity frame. Further research could explore if the reason for this would be the exclusions, stereotypes, denial of human rights, etc. advanced by populist and nationalist politicians and state structures and which shape the national identity.

Moreover, it would be interesting to take into account the way the communications analysed in this study were employed during Romania’s negotiations to enter the EU as well as after, in a comparative framework. The same could be applied to the Republic of Moldova and its negotiations with the EU, for a comprehensive comparison with Romania. It would also be interesting to compare the two countries with other SEE countries, as the anti-gender and anti-immigration trends are currently taking similar forms across the region.

Another possible research direction would concern the motives and explanations of framing different categories, especially that of LGBT+ persons, as dangers to the ideas of nation and national integrity, as well as exploring how populist politicians choose to position these minorities as the main category to blame in their anti-gender and nationalist rhetoric.
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Migrationsverket website. “Financial support for asylum seekers”. Available at: https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/While-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision/Financial-support.html


Appendix 1:
List of analyzed materials


Constitutiaromaniei.ro. Constituția României. Available at: https://www.constitutiaromaniei.ro/art-3-teritoriul/.


Migrationsverket website. “Financial support for asylum seekers”. Available at: https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/While-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision/Financial-support.html


### Appendix 2: THEMATIC ANALYSIS CODING SCHEME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>SUBTHEME</th>
<th>CODES (BASIC THEMES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Defining the nation</td>
<td>“Majority” seen as endangered or oppressed by the “minority”</td>
<td>Religious/moral values of the “majority” and clashes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Political perceptions on the “majority” constructed in relation to the rights and duties</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Traditions and rights</td>
<td>Rights as nationals</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Religious/moral values and their superposition with legal rights</td>
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<td>Nations defined through traditions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>EU as enemy of national traditions and morality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Othering</td>
<td>Othering of citizens</td>
<td>Religious/moral values of citizens</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Populist perceptions on citizenship</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rights and responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classes of citizenship</td>
<td>Grounds of exclusion of the two categories</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classes of citizenship</td>
<td>Hierarchies between categories of citizens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classes of citizenship</td>
<td>Political stances on hierarchies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Othering of non-citizens</td>
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<td>Othering of non-citizens</td>
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<td>Othering of non-citizens</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Othering of non-citizens</td>
<td>Rights under EU and states’ legislations</td>
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### Appendix 3:
**QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING SCHEME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>Politicians excluding LGBT+ in relation to citizenship and rights</td>
<td>“I’ve never promised to be the gays’ President” (Strileprotv.ro, interview with Igor Dodon, 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>Politicians excluding migrants in relation to their rights</td>
<td>“TERrible! Someone plans to transform our country in a &quot;triage&quot; area for foreign migrants. I reassure you: as long as we, the socialists, will be part of the Government and Igor Dodon will be President, we will NOT allow the Republic of Moldova to be transformed in a reservation for foreign migrants” (Novac, 2020).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ideology and personal views</td>
<td>Views expressed by politicians in relation to the two categories</td>
<td>“From the point of view of the Liberal Party, it is good for them [a.n. &quot;the LGBT+ persons&quot;] to stay at home. We are liberals, but I think it’s better for a boy to be with a girl and a girl to be with a boy, give birth to children” (Ziaristi online, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Majority&quot; as &quot;minority&quot;</td>
<td>Tropes concerning the limitation of &quot;majority's rights&quot; in relation to different &quot;minorities&quot;</td>
<td>“Suddenly, whoever does not belong to a minority group is stigmatized and accused of being a hater, a radical or worse, even a Nazi” (Valeriu Ghițeșchi, Facebook page, 2019).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to the nation</td>
<td>Statements on the way the minorities threaten the nation</td>
<td>“They will attract their large families from their home countries” (Mediafax.ro, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to the nation</td>
<td>Statements on the way the minorities threaten the nation</td>
<td>“I do not want to see thousands of immigrants on the streets of Bucharest” (Ziare.com, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion in politics</td>
<td>Statements referring to the &quot;traditional values&quot; as opposed to LGBT+ and migrants</td>
<td>“The traditions, values and faith are crucial for the state. I do not participate in gay marches in Chișinău, as Maia Sandu has done in the recent years” (Jurnal.md, 2020).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion in politics</td>
<td>Statements referring to the &quot;traditional values&quot; as opposed to LGBT+ and migrants</td>
<td>“It is time to openly say that Muslims who have come to Europe, recent immigrants or even second or third generation, must respect the values of European...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Civilization, tolerance, respect for the rights and freedoms of others, including women's rights, or if not, they may consider moving to the Middle East** | (Clotilde Armand, Facebook Page post, 2016).
| **"the persecution campaign led against Christianity in the last decades** | (Partidulaur.ro, 2019).

| **Nation and morality** | Morality as a nation-building trope |
| **"Demonstrations of this type, as the one that took place the other day in the center of the capital city, ignore public morality and the law"** | (Motroi, 2011: 41).

| **National values vs. EU values** | On "national" values and traditions in contrast with EU values |
| **"The Western political elite, by imposing the dogmas of tolerance, multiculturalism and political correctness on the native Europeans, has de facto encouraged the extremist manifestations of Muslim immigrants!"** | (Nästase, 2016).

| **Passivization of minorities** | Politicians using othering as a strategy of exclusion to render passive migrants and LGBT+ persons |
| **"When you wake up with thousands, hundreds of thousands [a.n. of migrants] coming on the territorial waters, what do you do, sink those ships? You don't sink them. Because then you enter into the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea"** | (B1 TV Youtube channel, 2015).

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**Author’s bio**

Ramona moved to Malmö, Sweden in 2018 after obtaining her PhD in cultural studies from the University of Bucharest. Together with her life and work partner, curator Simona Dumitriu, she is involved in different artistic and independent research projects. Ramona’s publications and topics of interests include queer literature, sexuality and migration, LGBT+ activism, and anti-gender politics in Europe.

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