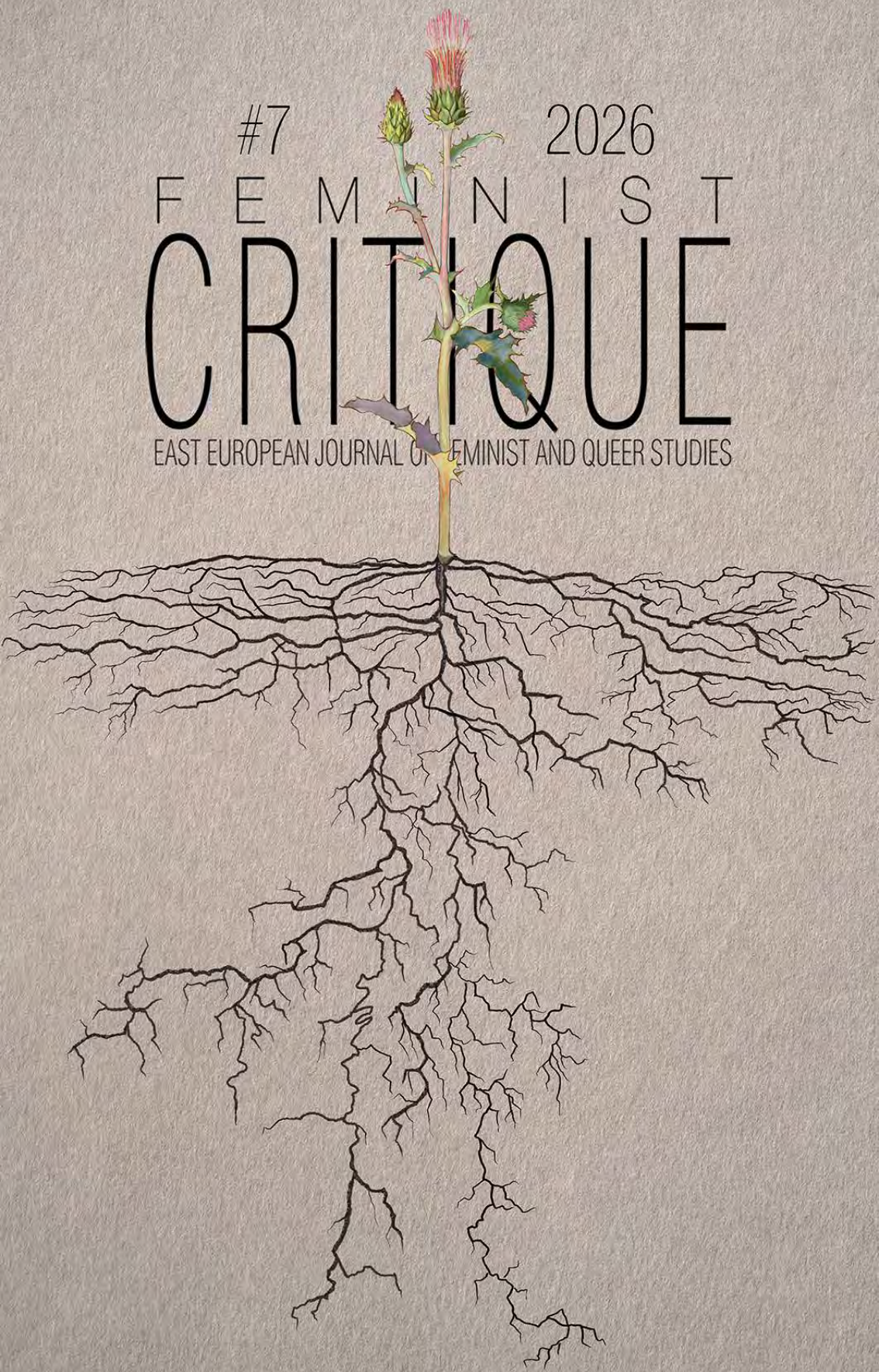


#7

2026

F E M I N I S T  
CRITIQUE

EAST EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF FEMINIST AND QUEER STUDIES



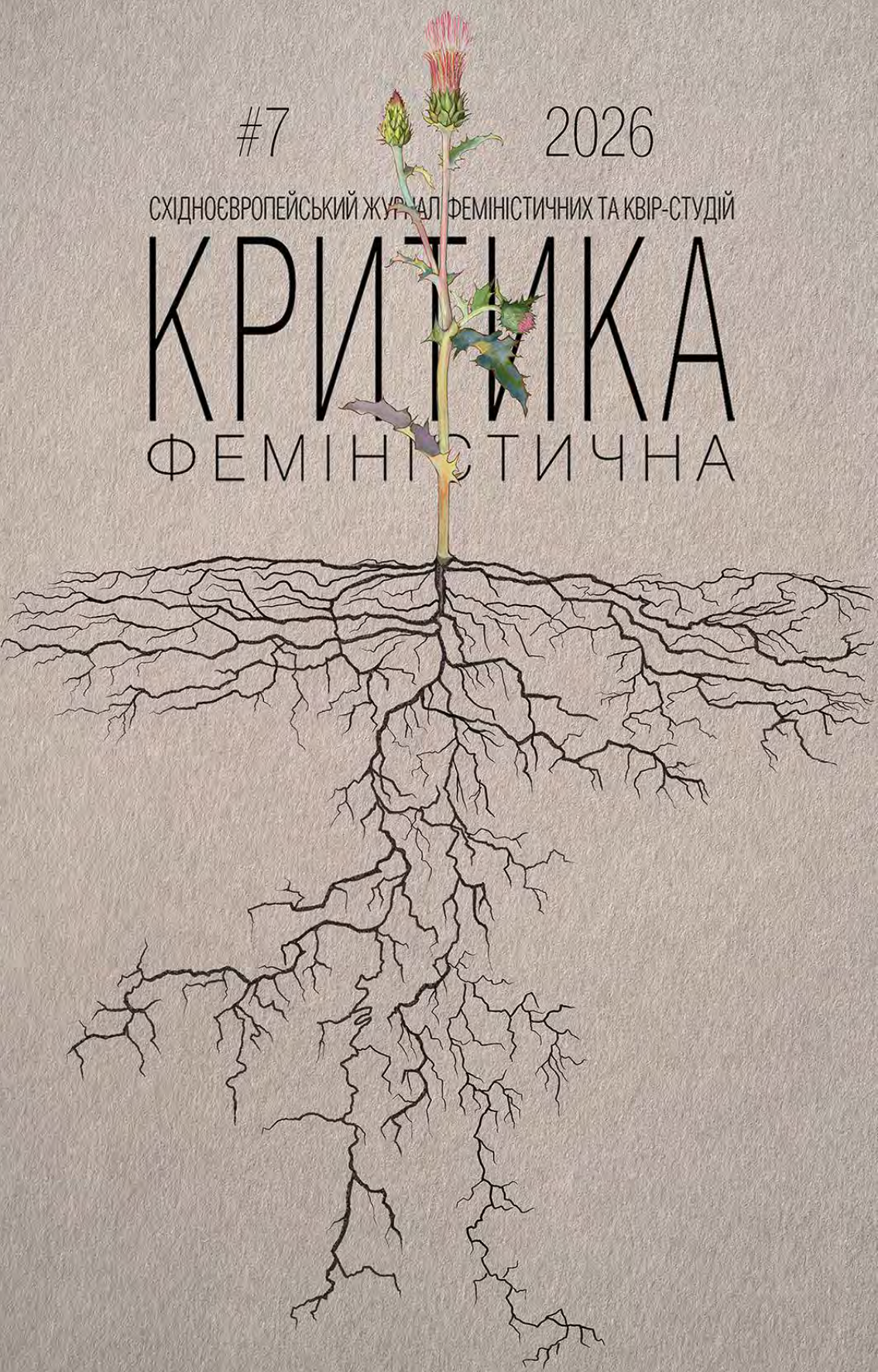
#7

2026

СХІДНОЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИЙ ЖУРНАЛ ФЕМІНІСТИЧНИХ ТА КВІР-СТУДІЙ

# КРИТИКА

## ФЕМІНІСТИЧНА



F E M I N I S T  
CRITIQUE  
EAST EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF FEMINIST AND QUEER STUDIES

**Editors-in-chief**

Maria Mayerchyk & Olga Plakhotnik

**Editorial board**

Masha Beketova, Ramona Dima, Olena S. Dmytryk,  
Oleh Kotsyuba & Anna Stepanova

**In collaboration with**

Alena Minchenia, Irina Redkina, Galina Yarmanova

7<sup>20</sup>  
26

ISSN 2524-2733

**Критика феміністична: східноєвропейський журнал феміністичних та квір-студій** – науковий рецензований багатомовний онлайн-журнал вільного доступу.

**Feminist Critique: East European Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies** is a peer-reviewed, multilingual, open-access academic online journal.

При покликанні на статі журналу вказуйте DOI статті.  
When citing an article, please include the article's DOI.

Website: <http://feminist.krytyka.com>

Email address: [feminist@krytyka.com](mailto:feminist@krytyka.com)

Editorial mailing address: P.O. Box 225, 01001 Kyiv, Ukraine

**Cover Design:** Valentina Petrova / Валентина Петрова

**Layout Setting:** Oleksandr Boiko

The preparation of the issue in its early stages also benefited from the editorial work of Dovainė Buschmann & Anikó Gregor.

The distribution of publications from the website and the journal *Feminist Critique* is permitted provided proper attribution to *Feminist Critique* and only for non-commercial purposes. Any commercial use of the texts or their parts is strictly prohibited.

Поширення публікацій сайту та журналу *Критика феміністична* дозволено за умови покликання на *Критику феміністичну* і тільки з некомерційною метою. Будь-які комерційні дії з текстами чи їх частинами заборонено.

## Table of Contents

### • Article •

Alexandra Ana Decolonizing Feminism: the NGO-ization Paradigm between the Global Circuits of Neoliberal Power and the Politics of Location. The Case of Romania .....	7
--	---

### • Interview •

Vasiliki (Bessy) Polykarpu Worldmaking through Dissonance: A Discussion with Françoise Vergès .....	33
---	----

### • Feminist collective •

After August 2020: Stories of LGBT+ People in Belarus.....	49
---	----

Юлія Сорока Втікаючи від окупації Маріуполя.....	73
---	----

Маріам Агамян, Дмитрій Єрмолович - Дащинський Своїм і чужим голосом.....	91
--	----

### • Reviews •

Andreja Mesarič A Decade after “Theorizing NGOs”: The Entanglement of State, Feminism, and Neoliberalism .....	100
--	-----

Jelena Košinaga Borderlands in European Gender Studies: Feminisms of Postsocialist Europe.....	103
--	-----

Alexandria Wilson-McDonald A Queer History of Communism: Navigating Sexuality and Gender in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1989.....	105
--	-----



# Decolonizing Feminism: the NGO-ization Paradigm between the Global Circuits of Neoliberal Power and the Politics of Location. The Case of Romania

## Abstract

While the NGO-ization paradigm helped explain the institutionalization, professionalization, and bureaucratization of feminist movements around the world, from the late 80s and early 90s on, by focusing on the most visible actors, it often concealed the multiplicity of feminisms and their internal heterogeneity. By looking at the institutionalization of feminism in Romania through decolonial lenses, this essay aims to understand some of the transnational processes that have been overlooked or curtailed within the NGO-ization literature, the mechanisms through which certain forms of feminist knowledge and practice became hegemonic and institutionalized, and some of their consequences. The essay argues that the travelling and crossings, initiated by those excluded through these processes and who inhabit liminal, in-between spaces, contributed to making visible multiple worlds of sense towards a pluralist feminism, opening the possibility to build deep coalitions by engaging in complex communication.

## Introduction

After feminist activists gained access to politics through official channels, scholars argued that there was a shift in movements' organization and tactics, from horizontal autonomous collectives engaging in disruptive actions to professional NGOs advancing the movement's goals through lobby and advocacy. The emergence of a global gender equality regime, under the influence of supranational institutions, supported the consolidation of state feminism as a new mode of governance based on the alliance between gender policy agencies and feminist movement activists. Due to demanding accountability mechanisms, the financial costs to build up professional organizations to become stable dialogue partners of the state or international organizations entailed donor dependency and increased bureaucratization. These transformations have been theoretically discussed and empirically analysed under the NGO-ization paradigm. As a process, NGO-ization has been negatively evalu-

ated as entailing depoliticization, demobilization, and co-optation of feminist movements. Although NGO-ization as a process has been identified in different parts of the world, as part of global neoliberal governance, in the European semi-periphery, it was associated with *transition* and sometimes EU accession and, in the Global South, with development and structural adjustment programmes. In Eastern Europe, scholars claimed that social movements underwent an early institutionalization within the democratization process and under the influence of funds available to NGOs (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 246).

A polarized scholarly debate emerged, with normative conceptualizations of NGOs, between the neoliberal imperial evil and the savers of humanity (Grewal in Roy 2017). While the NGO-ization theory helped explain the widespread adoption of the NGO as the common organizational form within feminist movements or the latter's institutionalization, professionalization, and bureaucratisation, by focusing on the most visible actors, it often equated feminist movements with NGOs for equality between men and women. This concealed the multiplicity of actors and feminisms and their internal heterogeneity, who sometimes co-exist at ease, sometimes in tension, at times collaborating through coalitions, at others pursuing disjoint strategies. Furthermore, enclosed in the post-Cold War hegemonic discourse, the NGO-ization paradigm discarded the contributions of left-wing and state-socialist women's organizations acting internationally to the institutionalization of a transnational feminism and gender equality regime. In post-socialist countries, this overlapped with the anti-communist backlash in public discourses, enhancing the view of progressive neoliberalism (Fraser 2016) as the only option. In this context, I argue that a decolonial analytic helps rectify the existing knowledge about the last decades' transformations of feminist movements, concerning their institutionalization and NGO-ization, by acknowledging and understanding some transnational processes that have been overlooked or curtailed within the NGO-ization literature and the mechanisms through which it has been possible to do so. By investigating the institutionalization of feminism in Romania – an empirical case study, this paper seeks to disentangle the processes through which certain forms of feminist knowledge and practice became hegemonic and institutionalized. What role did the imperial and colonial differences play in shaping feminism in Romania after 1989? What were the bases for the constitution of a hegemonic feminist subject rendered universal? What were the gendered consequences, tensions, exclusions, and resistances of this process? What challenges did this pose in terms of coalitional politics? How can they be overcome?

In what follows, after providing a brief overview of the NGO-ization narrative, I will explain how decolonial theories can help to fill in some gaps in the feminist movement literature. Subsequently, I will analyse the institutionalization of feminism in Romania and the development of a “catching-up” with modernity and the lost feminist wave narrative that paved the way for the consolidation of liberal feminism as the mainstream form. Further on, I will explore what was overlooked through the constitution of a hegemonic form

of feminism. Lastly, I will investigate the processes of travelling and crossings between different actors, feminisms, and across movements and the way they contributed to shattering the hegemony of universalist forms of feminism, paving the way towards deep coalitions.

### How can a decolonial feminist perspective help?

Decolonial theories question the global hegemonic model of knowledge based on the European historical experience (Escobar 2007, 218), allowing to bring forward illegitimate knowledge by delinking from racist epistemology, locating theory in the geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge (Tlostanova 2010, 35; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2009). While its development was most often linked with Latin American scholars, decolonial theories were embraced by other academics at the (semi)-periphery as a response to the violence of the imperial/territorial epistemology and the rhetoric of salvation and to the colonial and imperial differences that imposed hegemonic discourses on people classified as inferior, whose knowledge was rejected (Tlostanova 2010, 26). Accordingly, contributions from Eastern European (Țichindeleanu 2010; Boatcă 2010) and decolonial feminist scholars (Lugones 2007; Marcos 2006; Schiwy 2007) allowed us to move beyond the totalizing frameworks that characterized foundational decolonial authors (Karkov and Valiavicharska 2018).

A decolonial perspective on the institutionalization of feminism in Romania aims to de-link from the post-Cold War hegemonic discourse that articulated a symbiotic relationship between free-market capitalism and liberal democracy, channeling the public reflection in terms of transition, democratization, and the build-up of civil society. This imaginary allowed post-socialist states to be included in the linear history paradigms and epistemes and “catch up” with the progress towards modernity – *interrupted* by state-socialist regimes, marked as a history’s deviance. The consolidation of such an imaginary is related to the external imperial difference established by the West, vis-a-vis Eastern Europe – as an aspirant and mere reproducer of Europe’s modernity’s stages (Boatcă 2015, 136–137) and the internal colonial difference, established within the nation states, by Romania, vis-à-vis the internal Other, the Romani people.

The interplay between the post-Cold War hegemonic discourse and the imperial and colonial difference had at least two consequences in terms of discursive opportunities in Romania: (1) the constitution of an anti-communist backlash (Ban 2015) and the discursive privatization of social restructuring and displacement (Hemment 2014: 139) that depoliticized the economic and (2) the attribution – through (institutionalized) racism, of the socio-economic disadvantages to the Roma minority, further depoliticizing the economic aspects their oppression (Vincze 2016). These shaped the conditions for the kind of feminism that became institutionalized after 1989.

Catching up with modernity reverberated in catching up with the “lost” feminist wave – the second wave in Europe, “interrupted” by the state-so-

cialist regime. Facilitated by the Cold War legacy, the international feminist contributions from the European East, the newly independent states of Asia and Africa, after World War II until the fall of the state socialist regimes, were boxed as highly politicized – meaning communist, instrumentalizing women’s issues to serve the Communist Party (Popa 2009), opposed to the presumed political neutrality of their western counterparts and discarded in the literature (De Haan 2010). Similarly, Romanian historiography ignores, for example, that the proposal made to the UN Commission on the Status of Women to organize a WCW came from a delegate from state-socialist Romania (Fraser 1987, 17) and described the state-socialist period as lacking feminism.

These historical omissions inform about the mechanisms through which the Western feminist subject was rendered universal, but also for the subjects who were excluded and the historical experiences that were erased or rendered invisible (Vergès 2017; De Haan 2010). De-centering from the hegemonic history and knowledge, decolonial feminist scholars challenged the universality of the white feminist subject based on a presumed commonality of women’s experiences. They showed how the production of race is integral to the production of gender – the gender system being racially differentiated (Lugones 2010, 748). As the Western heterosexist dimorphous gender construction only applied to humans, and since the colonized and the enslaved peoples were denied humanity, they were also denied gender (Lugones 2010). Analysing gender as a principle of organization of societies is not the object of this paper, but rather understanding how this conception of gender brought by the modern/colonial capitalist system – the coloniality of gender, made gender a sign of belonging to humanity, echoing Sojourner Truth’s 1851 speech – “Ain’t I a woman?”, at Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. What one could take from Lugones’ claim that “gender is irrevocably white, European, and modern” (2020, 45) is not the denial of gender as an organising principle of societies<sup>1</sup> but a focus on the exclusions and erasures based on which it was built.

The centuries of Romani slavery and the Romani Holocaust – Porajmos, their absence from the history and collective memory reinforce the processes of universalization and homogenization within nation-states, along with today’s marginalization through racialization processes that associate “the Romani with the “East-European poverty” and patriarchal ideologies (Vincze 2019) and the perpetuation of stereotypes that exoticize and dehumanize them (Costache 2019). As Vincze (2019, 128) argued, today’s racism against the Roma “has the role to protect an authentic Europe from the ‘invasion’ of poor populations, symbols of primitivism, from second-hand Europe”. As a gendered phenomenon, racism manifested and still does today through forced sterilization and hate speech inciting it (Gheorghe 2019).

<sup>1</sup> Lugones argues that gender as an organising principle of societies should be investigated rather than taken for granted in research.

Lastly, decolonial feminism moves beyond critiquing unitary homogeneous feminism that consolidated the white middle-class woman subject. It gives some keys to understanding how people have been constructed as separate and argues that engaging in coalitional crossings might foster new resistant practices, echoing Johnson Reagon's (1983) imperative of coalitions as a question of survival of those at the margins. Against an abstract unitary self and cohesive feminist movement, Western and white, decolonial feminism reveals multiplicities and erasures, not fragmentation, arguing for pluriversality – not additive, but conflictual, posing contested narratives and imagining new liberatory paths, epistemologically and in practice, through deep coalitions. Liberation can be radically imagined from the fractured locus (multiple and contradictory) outside the hegemonic single world of sense that conceals the others (Alcoff 2020, 208).

Decolonial feminism opens the possibility to imagine different worlds from the fractured locus of coloniality<sup>2</sup> by cultivating sensibilities, imaginaries, and desires that would reveal multiple worlds of sense, not in the additive logic of sharing – making space within the single hegemonic framework, but conflictual pluralities, outside the dominant worlds of sense. Its liberatory prospect is to be found in the shift from the harmful effects of the modern/colonial capitalist system to potentialities nurtured through decolonial imaginaries that change the way liberation can be defined (Alcoff 2020, 208). Working against homogenizing tendencies and universalisms by giving up the quest for grand narratives, decolonial feminism argues that deep coalitions among those excluded from the mainstream power and status can be achieved by crossing to other worlds and engaging in complex communication with Others with responsibility and humility.

Engaging in crossings and complex communication does not guarantee the success of creating deep coalitions, as they are difficult practices that might involve painful confrontations, rejections, losses and discomfort (Roshanravan 2020), sadness, and anger when acknowledging the difficulties of working across oppressions as “we are separate in difficult-to-overcome ways” (Lugones 2003, 115), but it contains the possibility. The unwillingness to give up and the motivation to engage with others to explore non-dominant differences stems from “the possibility for the broken or betrayed relation to transforming into a loving connection that motivates the tremendous efforts to resist coloniality's ingrained epistemological habits that erase or distort that which exceeds dominant cultural logics” (Roshanravan 2020, 130).

## The institutionalisation of feminism in Romania

In post-socialist Romania, the institutionalization of feminism was related to three developments. First, the build-up of an institutional architecture for gender equality and non-discrimination was linked to Romania's acces-

<sup>2</sup> The fractured locus of coloniality is not a singular place but a multiple locus.

sion to the European Union (EU) in 2007<sup>3</sup>. Non-discrimination, domestic violence, and gender equality laws and policies were drafted and implemented through a top-down process to comply with the EU law. Public entities were created, amongst others, the National Council for Combating Discrimination in 2001, the National Agency for Equality between Women and Men in 2004, and Equal Opportunities Commissions at the Senate in 2003 and at the Chamber of Deputies in 2004. Defined as *room-service feminism* to describe the import character of laws and policies, Miroiu (2004b), who coined this term, argued that the consolidation of an international political agenda for women's rights drove conservative countries, such as Romania, to adopt legislation and policies for the protection of women's rights.

Second, the institutionalisation of gender studies at the university took place through the creation and consolidation of specialized postgraduate master's degrees in Bucharest, Cluj, and Timisoara. The Master's Programme in Gender Studies at the Bucharest National School of Political Science and Public Administration (SNSPA), consolidated with a World Bank grant (Vlad 2013, 36), has subsisted until today. The programme adopted a liberal perspective on gender studies and a universalist approach to women's rights, which became mainstream in the public sphere<sup>4</sup>, failing initially to integrate class and anti-racist perspectives (Gheorghe in Gheorghe, Mark, and Vincze 2019, 116). The programme in Cluj adopted an intersectional approach, which became more visible during the second half of the 2010s, when class was rediscovered (Ana 2020).

Third, institutionalization was related to creating women and gender equality NGOs, as formalized civil society that collaborated with the newly created governmental agencies for equality between men and women. Some distinguished between Phoenix organizations (Fabian 2007) – new entities ingrained in the old state-socialist system through their membership, and new NGOs focused on emancipation and democracy (Moloea 2015). As scholars emphasized the pre-Cold-War synchronicity and convergence of the Romanian feminist movements with their Western counterparts (Miroiu 2006, 21), consolidating the idea of a geographical and temporal lag, the aim was to recover the gap between the East and the West by breaking with previous (women's) structures, including the so-called Phoenix organizations, and consolidating the new gender equality NGOs with the help of international funds that supported collaboration and the creation of networks and coalitions<sup>5</sup>.

While in Romania, the transition towards democracy and the free market became an endpoint in the liberal temporality, at the international level, states reconfigured through the intensification of neoliberal governance (Kantola and Squires, 2012), dismantling of the welfare apparatus and the

<sup>3</sup> Interview I.C., Filia; Interview M.C., ANES; see Massino and Popa (2015), Frunză (2004).

<sup>4</sup> as far as possible in a conservative society with public intellectuals practicing what Miroiu (2009) calls "preventive anti-feminism".

<sup>5</sup> M.P. from CPE; B.M. from Filia.

increased in the importance of NPM. Consequently, governing activities were framed as non-political and non-ideological problems that needed technical solutions (Ong 2006, 3), laying down the conditions for the proliferation of NGOs to fill the welfare gaps and ensure opposition (Harvey 2005, 78), but also of norms and practices stemming from the market to the functioning of the state, universities, and civil society (Hibou 2012).

### Modernity and “catching up” with the *lost* feminist wave

The “room-service” feminism at the level of state infrastructure for gender equality, the consolidation of gender studies in academia, and the *development* of civil society organizations with the support of international funds recall both the rhetoric of salvation and the technologies of imperial-colonial mimicry. With the *help of advanced* democratic states, through international entities and their *development* programs, the long-standing aspirations of the Romanian democratic elite to “feminism and Western-style modernity, which has always been a target” (Mudure 2004), could be achieved by ‘catching up’ with progress, while ‘retrieving’ some of the accomplishments of the second wave of feminism. Miroiu (2010, 576) argued that Romania lacked the experience of the second wave of feminism – an aspect thought to matter considerably in terms of “continuity, coherence, and a sense of the history of women’s rights”. She maintains that “the post-communist era must recover the feminism of affirmative action and equal opportunities” in order to resist the modern patriarchy, the rebirth of traditional patriarchy, the post-feminism in the media, and the “room-service” feminism – as a form of EU paternalism (Miroiu 2010, 576). In the same vein, Băluță (2010), gender studies academic, explains in the weekly magazine *Dilema Veche* that:

*Romanian feminism, both theoretically and practically, had to cover a gap created by communism to recover a huge difference compared to its evolutions in Western Europe and the United States, an evolution that, starting from the feminist manifestations of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, would have characterized Romania.*

According to this perspective – widespread at the time, the synchronicity of Romania’s first wave of feminism with its counterpart in the West would suggest that Romanian feminism would have continued with its “natural” evolution if it had not been interrupted by communism. While both scholars explain that filling this gap is not simply cultural or political mimicry (Băluță 2010), denouncing the paternalism of the EU (Miroiu 2010), they seem to show enchantment with modernity and its “linear and univocal sense of social space and time” (Schutte 2020, 111), adopting the naturalized division of feminism into three waves, which claimed universal status while being a product of a “Western-centric and evolutionary ideology of modernity” (Tlostanova 2010: 31).

Reiterating the critical contributions of the second wave feminism (Miroiu 2010, 576), without engaging with its critiques, scholars and public intellectuals considered that post-1989 feminism was facing a dilemma between an “unreserved embrace” of “the third wave of multiple differences between women, which divides women into various groups without having a second wave that draws attention to the fact that women share common problems?” (Băluță 2010). This account starts from the assumption that all women share *some* common experiences as women, which are universal. Numerous criticized the second wave’s hegemonic tendencies to universalize the white heterosexual middle-class women’s experiences of oppression, excluding many other peoples (Martinez 2011; Thompson 2002).

Engrained in the modern/colonial system, as the heterosexual white man were chosen to represent the face of humanity, so were the heterosexual white women to represent the face of feminism and women’s emancipation. Universalizing these experiences was possible by erasing and denying humanity – hierarchic and dichotomously gendered, to working-class women, poor, ethnicized and racialized women, queer, trans and LGBTI, older women, migrants, and sex-workers, among others.

To understand the consequences, the examples of the Western second-wave framing of domestic violence (Crenshaw 1990) or reproductive rights are enlightening. The latter is a direct target of today’s anti-gender mobilizations (Verloo and Paternotte 2018; Avanza 2018). The second wave’s framing of reproductive rights gave a central position to abortion claims, ignoring the experiences of women of colour that have had little control over their reproductive freedom, being the target of coercive sterilization. The birth control discourses and policies in the US, based on racist eugenic theories, made the African-American (Flores 2014, 1–3), American Indian, Mexican, and Puerto Rican women’s experiences of birth control genocidal and racist through coerced sterilization, unlike white women’s experiences of liberation through access to family planning. Similarly, during the 1960s and 1970s, the French state forbade abortion and contraception in mainland France and supported anti-natalist policies in overseas regions and departments (Vergès 2021). From the 1970s, Roma women experienced forced sterilization in back then Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Sweden, and Norway (Gheorghe 2010, 60). After the 1990s, Roma women were forcibly or coercively sterilized in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia (Brooks 2009; Kovács 2009). In Romania, in 2013, an far-right organisation, made a public call, writing they offer money to Romani women who can prove they have undergone voluntary sterilization (Red Network 2013) and the leader of the National Liberal Youth organization of Alba County proposed the sterilization of Romani women on his Facebook page (United States Department of State 2014). Previous research already showed that women from marginal groups do not have the rights and opportunities to make a free choice regarding reproduction; their choices are affected by the living conditions, institutionalized racism at the level of health system and pressures from

family members stemming from cultural and social norms (Magyari-Vincze 2006, 78–79).

Thus, the *common* experience regarding access to reproductive rights and abortion was not common at all.

By accounting for the experiences of those omitted within the mainstream feminist literature and for the processes of exclusion, scholars demystified the *universality* of the heterosexual white middle-class women's experiences. Chicana produced their historical analysis of events and organisations, to shed light on *Chicana movidas*, whose histories have been exiled "to spaces of extra-institutional memory" (Cotera, Blackwell, Espinoza 2018, 3). Similarly, Romani scholars and feminists pleaded for a comprehensive history that would explain, rather than just mention (Furtuna 2019, 26), the colonial practices – genocide and slavery, to which the Romani have been subjected (Iancu 2019). As Costache affirms about Romani history: "We must face the palimpsest of written histories that erase and deny, that reinvent the past to make the contemporary vision of racial harmony and pluralism seem more plausible" (Costache 2019, 19). Blackwell (2011) pleads for a "retrofitted memory", to reclaim the erased histories of feminist engagement. Gheorghe (2019) explains how Romani women's gesture of lifting up the skirt, as a claim against the instigation of racial hatred, through sterilization proposals from public officials, was generated by the anger and helplessness in front of injustices (from authorities, police, and others).

Despite these critiques, the framework of universal claims, based on presumed common experiences, was justified as a chronologically necessary step in Romania that *missed* the second wave, discarding the multiplicity of women's experiences shaped by class, ethnicity, and race, sexuality, on the grounds that they divide.

Asking what kind of feminism activists and scholars opt for: between synchronization with the Western third wave or diachrony, because "the linearity of the transformations in "western feminism" highlighted changes that you cannot skip?", Băluță (2010) argued that taking into account the local heritage, the third wave is challenging in Romania, appearing as a cultural mirage for many feminists, insisting that one should recall the shared experiences. The myth of linear, successive, homogenous development at the basis of the modern construction of the history of humanity and the violence of this imperial/territorial epistemology (Tlostanova 2010, 21) made it seem imperative to follow similar pathways and catch up with the *lost* second wave, aspiring to reach modernity, becoming "*almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha 1984, 126).

### How and why did liberal feminism become the mainstream form?

Nation-building and value-based cleavages translated into the ambivalence between the desire to enter the cohort of modern democratic states and reinforcing national sovereignty, in front of international institutions' pater-

nalism and imperialism. While institutionalized racism and the suppression of inter-ethnic conflicts through repression played a role in the re-construction of a homogenous nation, opposition to “gender ideology” was ensured by framing it as the new Marxism (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017) or as part of the Western imperial tendencies to impose values and norms (Graff and Korolczuk 2018), as in the Global South.

In this context, the most influential feminist theorising during the 1990s, taking the example of Miroiu’s work, framed democratization as inseparable from massive privatization and insertion into the global economy (Vlad 2013; Mihai 2021). This perspective favoured “self-assertion as central to an emancipatory political project, emphasizing the need to focus more on liberty and equality than on material, economic principles” (Vlad 2013, 47; Miroiu 1999). This view was enhanced by the left-wing conservatism that delegitimized the redistributive claims of workers affected by the economic restructuring (Vlad 2013, 43), deterring subversive movements, such as the feminist one, from engaging with a structural critique, not just of welfare state retrenchment, but also of global capitalism and welfare chauvinism that divided people between worthy contributors and non-worthy Others, based on xenophobic, racist and anti-poor attitudes (Ana 2020).

Adding to the anti-communist backlash, the process of national construction was built on ethnic marginalization and racism, reflected in the interplay between the internal colonial difference and the external imperial difference, visible when the increased negative media coverage of Romanian migrants in Italy and Spain prompted violence against Romanian and Roma. To sort this out, the Italian government adopted an emergency decree that facilitated the removal of EU citizens (Armillei 2018, 80). Simultaneously, the Romanian government launched an expensive national branding campaign at home and abroad, based on racism and the racialized construction of Romanian alterity, to prevent the othering of non-Roma Romanians – thought to successfully adapt to the Euro-capitalist values (Kaneva and Popescu 2014). Becoming modern, overcoming their inferior status stemming from the imperial difference, the efforts to construct Romanianness were based on internal colonial difference.

In post-socialism, the entwinement between class and ethnicity, between the internal colonial and external imperial differences, shaped the form of feminism that became mainstream. Liberal feminism reposed not only on the total equivalence between state socialisms and patriarchal oppression in a self-colonizing quest to recover the gap with Western modernity (Sandu 2021) but also on universalisms and the *common* experiences of women, excluding claims stemming from intersectional positions considered divisive and enhancing the gap between feminist activists and ordinary women.

Emphasizing the import of liberal Western theories, a former member of a feminist organization that initially functioned as a research centre to support the gender studies MA at SNSPA discusses the gap between the develop-

ment of a Western-style feminist activism and women's issues in Romanian society:

*(...) it is very interesting because we are feminists, but we are western feminists. I mean, we learn Western theories because we do not have theories about our Romanian women. We do not know who the women in Romania are. We do not know what their needs are. (...)*

*I know about working-class women because my mother is a worker, so I have direct experience.*

*My feminism was like after the transition: liberalism, democracy ... it took me several years to say that I am on the left. I was so... what do you mean not to be liberal? Especially since my mentor was a liberal. A simple psychological click, I just couldn't say it, I couldn't.*

*We come up with these theories from the West, Western activism, activism done elsewhere and we put them here and we act like monkeys (...) But where is our Romanian feminism as nationalism but nationalism not necessarily in the pure sense but 'don't we know our Romanian women?' we do events that seem cool to us.<sup>6</sup>*

The testimony informs about the proliferation of liberal Western feminist theories in post-socialist spaces that rely on the critique of the paternalism of socialist states. It also tells about the personal mechanisms of struggle with assimilation and rejection of the universalized imperial-colonial epistemological habits. The gap between feminists – trained and educated in a Western liberal tradition of universal feminism and other women, whose experiences were neglected, through the exclusionary effects contained in this universality, translated into a divide regarding claims and issues at stake<sup>7</sup>. but also modes of action, between feminist raising-awareness and women's workers' strike<sup>8</sup>. Inquiring about the realities of Romanian and working-class women, the interviewee seems to call for delinking from the thinking programs, which were imposed by culture, education, and environment, marked by imperial reason (Tlostanova 2010, 26–27). Nevertheless, when re(making) communities, one might ask who is left out. A call for Romanian working-class women and their needs might reproduce the salvation logic applied to less privileged women and render invisible the ethnically heterogeneity in Romania and the histories of violence against and the resistance of Roma Romanians – the internal Other, against which genocide and eugenic policies were committed.

Similarly, referring to the proliferation of liberal Western feminism, not just in activist spaces but also in academia, Gheorghe (2019), founder in 2013 of the Roma feminist organization E-Romnja, explains how she could not find herself in the feminist space of the SNSPA Gender studies programme, where they read Western American literature, learned about white women's femi-

<sup>6</sup> C.T. from Filia.

<sup>7</sup> M.R. 1 from Front; C.T. from Filia; M.M. 2 from CPE; C.B. from Filia.

<sup>8</sup> C.B. from Filia.

nism and the second wave, coming from spaces and problems different than those of Roma women. She explains that while Roma women talked about access to essential utilities, feminist colleagues talked about gender quotas and political representation. She asks herself: “Where do all these leave me as a Roma woman? Where are we Roma women, in this story? And the feeling that I am partly in one world and partly in another started to increasingly capture my attention” (Gheorghe in Gheorghe, Mark, Vincze 2019, 115–116). These insights recall Vincze’s argument that racism depoliticized the socioeconomic dimensions of Roma marginalization (Vincze in Gheorghe, Mark, Vincze 2019), making political representation a principal concern while downgrading the economic. While acknowledging and criticizing the gender division of labour, the unequal burden of care work, or women’s exploitation in the private sector (Vlad 2013), there was a presumed belief that privatization and opening to the global market would improve the economic situation of many people. A critique of the “liberal-conservative politics” of this period, defined as free-market economics with conservative national affinities, started to coagulate during and after the economic (Ban 2015) and the so-called migrants’ crisis as an opposition to the neoliberal consensus (Ana 2020).

### **Who was left behind, outside, overflowing, erased, ignored, neglected, or stepped on?**

The feminist movement after the 1990s developed as an intellectualist-elitist endeavour within a liberal framework, paying little attention to class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity (Moloea 2015). Drawing its legitimacy on lived experiences and the studies conducted by Western researchers in Eastern Europe (Sandu 2021), the liberal feminist framework was anti-communist and universalist, based on the indivisibility between the free-market and democracy and concerned with catching up with the West and the second wave of feminism. Nevertheless, mainstream liberal feminism was paralleled by the development of other feminisms that remained more marginal in the public sphere due to the anti-left backlash, threats from the extreme-right, police repression<sup>9</sup>, and racism.

Roma women activists organized since the 1990s, alone or together with men, related to racist violence, hate speech, and discrimination against Roma in employment, education, health care, administration, and other public services. To contextualize, numerous bodies documented and reported the abuses, violence, the use of excessive force against Roma, by law enforcement officials (Szente 1996; United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2010; United Nations Committee against Torture 2015) or the racism in public discourses that develops unabated, in a climate of impunity

<sup>9</sup> C.L.1 from Dysnomia, Claca, Biblioteca Alternativa <https://activewatch.ro/ro/freeex/reactie-rapida/6-ani-de-la-summit-ul-nato-la-bucuresti-jandarmeria-gasita-vinovata-pentru-abuzuri-asupra-cetatenilor-dar-lasata-nepedepsita> accessed July 14, 2019.

for hate-speech, stigmatisation and discrimination (ECRI 2014). The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) condemned Romania innumerable times, for police violence and abuses<sup>10</sup>. In one of its last cases – *Lingurar vs. Romania*, the Court found that the national authorities targeted the Roma because of their ethnicity (ethnic profiling) (ECHR 2019).

The work of Roma women activists, within Roma communities, in the context of institutionalized violence and interethnic conflicts, occasioned a process of reflection regarding the difficulties and oppression they faced inside and outside their communities (Vlad 2013, 98). In 1997, Letitia Mark founded the Association of Gypsy Women “For Our Children” out of a need “to support Roma children from marginalized communities and their mothers in their efforts to go through school education” (Mark in Gheorghe, Mark, Vincze 2019). She enrolled in the gender studies MA at Babeş-Bolyai University, coordinated by Eniko Vincze, and together launched in 2009 the Roma women’s journal, *Nevi Sara Kali* – “a crucial reference in the history of Romani feminism” (Ibidem). In a recently edited volume, “Problema românească: o analiză a rasismului românesc” Romani and non-Romani authors address the question of racism in Romanian society, to bring new knowledge perspectives and open potential pathways for communication (Drăgan and Dobanțu 2019, 8). In one of its chapters, Popa (2019) explores the possibilities of resistance to the hegemonic norm of Romanian ethnicity and relates the anti-racist politics to resistance to capitalism, through the performance of Romani music.

Through institutions and discourses, one is taught during their lifetime to define their identity in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or status. Also, one learns to select among them and hierarchize them (Magyari-Vincze 2009, 14). Roma women activists faced various tensions: with the Roma rights movement, non-Roma women activists, and between two generations of Roma women activists (Vlad 2013, 99–104). In times of racist violence and hatred, Oprea (2012, 14–15) shows how it becomes difficult to speak about harmful practices or the specificities of Roma women’s oppression in their communities when these are used to legitimize racist sentiments. Roma feminist activists felt their issues were also rejected from the agenda of the feminist movement (Vlad 2013, 100).

As the Romani women’s movement started to coagulate, the Soros Roma Women’s Initiative was established in 1999, within the Network Women’s Programme, with activist Nicolata Bițu playing a leading role (OSI, 2002). Though paying off in the long run, Bițu recalls the Network’s meeting in Budapest and the disturbing interaction with mainstream women’s organizations, when asked about palm reading (Vlad 2013, 100), illustrating the denial of subjectivity and treatment “as exotic others, useful objects of derision and desire, as problems to be solved” (Brooks 2009, 21). These tensions were slowly mitigated through crossings and encounters between mainstream

<sup>10</sup> Case of *Boacă and others v. Romania*; Case of *Ciorcan and others v. Romania*.

feminist organizations and Romani feminists (Ana 2020). E-Romnja became a leading actor in gender equality and non-discrimination coalitions, leader and partner in various projects with other feminist organizations and grassroots movements. Their role in the reproductive rights struggle contributed to decentre the heterosexual white middle-class women as principal subjects, whose experiences were generalized, and to show the entanglements between racism and gender (Gheorghe 2019). On the art scene, *Giuvlipen*, the Roma queer feminist theatre company, was founded in 2014; while valuing Roma belonging, it also addresses issues such as arranged under-age marriages, lack of access to education, mental illness, and Roma LGBTQIA issues through their plays<sup>11</sup>.

Other feminism that initially remained underground were the anarchist and queer self-managed collectives associated with the anarcho-punk scene. They started to organize during the second half of the 1990s in Timisoara, Iasi, Craiova, Cluj, and Bucharest. They build-up alternative spaces to commercial society, created feminist zines, organized festivals, feminist reading groups, and political art projects (Ana 2019). LoveKills, the first anarcho-feminist collective in Romania, active between 2003 and 2009, defined themselves more as part of the Do It Yourself (DIY) movement rather than the feminist one, considered liberal feminism (Marincea 2021). In 2005, Ladyfest Timisoara described itself as a “positive outlet for our anger in response to cowardly and insidious sexism that exists in our everyday life”<sup>12</sup>. The following years, at Ladyact Bucharest, Crina Morteau – Roma feminist activist, and Florentina Ionescu – psychologist and LGBTQIA activist, held workshops about non-dominant differences, addressing gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Out of the Ladyfest collective, the F.I.A. group (‘girls/women/feminism in action/activism’) was created in 2008 to foster collaboration and support among more significant initiatives on social justice. Some members of F.I.A. got actively involved in *Alternative Library (BA)* created in 2010, which hosted a library considered richer and more diverse ideologically compared to Filia’s gender studies library, becoming one of the few alternatives to mainstream liberal feminism<sup>13</sup>. They organized a feminist reading group, integrating an intersectional approach to social justice and a sustained critique of capitalism, imperialism, racism, and heterosexism<sup>14</sup>. Together with the feminist association Front that manages feminism-romania.ro, they organized Slutwalk Bucharest in 2011<sup>15</sup>. Understanding feminism in interaction and co-created with other social movements, self-managed queer feminist collectives were engaged in anti-militarist and anti-imperialist actions, such as the anti-NATO protests in 2008, several occupations, the anti-austerity protest in 2012 or later, the housing movement in Cluj and Bucharest. In 2016, Macaz: Bar Teat-

<sup>11</sup> <https://giuvlipen.com/en/> accessed 29 April 2020.

<sup>12</sup> <https://fia.pimienta.org/05/index-en.php>, accessed February 8th, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> M.R. 1 from Front.

<sup>14</sup> M.R. 1 from Front.

<sup>15</sup> B.T. from Biblioteca Alternativa.

ru Coop was created, comprising some of the members of previous self-managed collectives, and which played a crucial role in bridge-building between movements and collectives (Ana 2020).

### Travelling, crossings, and encounters: between strategic and deep coalitions

If during the first two decades of post-state-socialism, liberal feminism was the mainstream form, after 2007-2008 financial and the 2015 European refugee crisis, processes of bridge-building, at the level of discourses – between class, gender ethnicity, and at the level of movements, between white liberal feminist organizations, Roma feminist NGOs and groups, queer informal collectives, and also with the housing and LGBTQI movements, fostered a move towards a more intersectional politics of hope (Ana 2020).

In these processes, the role of travelling and encounters, initiated especially by those in liminal, in-between spaces, played a crucial role to “drop [her] enchantment with ‘woman,’ the universal, and begins to learn about other resisters at the colonial difference” (Lugones 2010, 753). They revealed border places and epistemologies – as borderlands inhabited by those “who cross over the confines of the normal (*atravezados/as*)” (Anzaldúa 1987). In this sense, Gheorghe (2019: 116) explains what it means to exist in the fractured locus/cracks of colonial difference: “The theory of intersectionality does not satisfy me completely in saying that yes, I have several identities, and I come with all of them into a feminist space and find myself complete. I do not think a place or space exists where this can happen. This is why intersectionality does not seem to be complete for me.” In Lugones’ (2003) terms, Gheorghe seemed to explore and feel around – *tantea*, for a place where she would fit, in between academia and grassroots activism, Roma and non-Roma:

*Practically, all these years I had been in organizational environments, I worked in many types of organizations, from left to right and from academic to grassroots, Roma and non-Roma. I tried to enter each environment to learn something, take it from there and bring it to another environment. In fact, this is my way to test and see where I fit best. I asked myself all the time: where am I, where does it leave me? (Gheorghe in Gheorghe, Mark, Vincze 2019)*

Travelling across different worlds, and exploring non-dominant differences, through tensions, cracks, and openings that make up the social (Lugones 2003, 5), Gheorghe contributed to making multiple worlds of sense visible, towards a more pluralist feminism. By opening discussions about structural differences, inequality, power, and privilege at the SNSPA gender studies MA she challenged the way Muslim and Roma women were spoken about – as distant, alien, and altered the mainstream feminist discourse (Gheorghe in Gheorghe, Mark, Vincze 2019). Another example is Andreea Braga, from Filia Center and Carmen Gheorghe, from E-Romnja who met while working at “Împreună” (Together) – an organization that focused on developing Roma

communities. After they left “Împreună”, they continued a close collaboration and joint programmes with Roma and non-Roma women communities<sup>16</sup>.

Over the years, organizations fighting for gender equality and non-discrimination engaged in strategic coalitions to respond to threats concerning attempts at restricting the right to abortion<sup>17</sup>, the inclusion of rape in the mediation law<sup>18</sup>, to advocate for the introduction of healthy reproduction and sexuality in schools or to condemn various forms of discrimination<sup>19</sup>. However, it seems that strategic coalitions might leave those participating, their subjectivities intact if they do not address underlying tensions by engaging in complex communication. Lugones’ (2007) deep coalitions involve mutually transformative subjectivities and the creation of new meanings (Medina 2020). Compared to strategic coalitions, often directed at the oppressor, deep coalitions are oriented towards connecting multiple liminal subjects onto shattering hegemonic worlds of sense and creating new ones from multiple liminal locations, cementing relational identities (Medina 2020, 219–221). World-travelling might foster the willingness, of those who encounter each other to engage in complex communication, to create new resistant worlds of sense and deep coalitions “to combat the monologisms and false universalisms that are the ruse of coloniality” (Velez and Tuana 2020, 12). But “how do you cross over without taking over?” (Lugones 2010, 755). Coalitional crossings “inevitably produce states of affective dis-ease” (Roshanravan 2020, 126) in which one feels “threatened”, “incompetent”, and “tolerated” – an “unwanted outsider” (Roshanravan 2020, 121). They might involve painful confrontations and losses, rejections, and being summoned for acting in complicity with the very oppressions one may have believed to be against (Roshanravan 2020).

The PolFem campaign is an example of rather failed communication. A 2014 project promoting women’s participation in politics, PolFem was part of a larger campaign financed by the European Commission, in which other organizations in Europe participated<sup>20</sup>. In PolFem, feminist activists from different NGOs dressed in men’s suits and wore moustaches to draw attention to women’s challenges and low representation in politics. Some queer feminist activists criticized this mode of action as a form of appropriation of drag by non-queer persons, who take advantage of their privileges as heterosexuals, adopting normative femininity (Ruxi 2014). When the tensions escalated, PolFem campaigners consulted members of the LGBT association, ACCEPT, who seemed to confirm their framing while not taking an official position. Some queer activists considered this was an instrumentalization of a “pro-LGBT” discourse while closing off contact with offended people. The feminists

<sup>16</sup> A.F. 2 from Filia.

<sup>17</sup> M.R. 1 from Front; A.T. from Filia.

<sup>18</sup> C.S. 2 from Front; A.F. 2 from Filia.

<sup>19</sup> A.T. from Filia.

<sup>20</sup> PolFem Facebook Page [https://www.facebook.com/pg/polfem/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/polfem/about/?ref=page_internal).

working in PolFem denounced the latter's aggressivity and blocked them on the campaign's Facebook page (Ruxi 2014).

Another example of difficult communication concerns the edited volume "Problema romaneasca: o analiza a rasismului romanesc" (2019). In the preface of the book, Mihaela Drăgan and Oana Dorobanțu (2019, 8–9) recount that one of the conditions for realisation of the book project was to have parity between Romani and non-Romani authors and coordinators. This demand faced opposition from two non-Romani authors who, "because of their own strongly internalized racism", did not publish with them (Ibidem).

These examples illustrate the challenges when engaging in complex communication. However, from a decolonial feminist standpoint, it seems imperative to do so to avoid becoming complicit with and reproducing coloniality's hierarchical dichotomous categorial logics of erasure (Roshanravan 2020, 121). Responsibility and love should guide those who reside in these worlds with "a maximum sense of ease" (Lugones 2003, 90), but also that yearn recognition to master performance, master resistance, claim center-stage, and "become the best at best practices" (Roshanravan 2020, 127).

In recent years, the consolidation of the anti-gender mobilisations reinforced the necessity of engaging in complex communications towards building deeper alliances. The specific framing against the "gender ideology" started with the 2015 citizens' initiative and the subsequent constitutional referendum to change the definition of the family, to prevent the legalization of same-sex marriage. It continued in 2020, with initiatives aiming to restrict sexual education in schools and to forbid references to gender. Resistance to anti-gender campaigns was organized by larger groups of actors through formal entities, such as the *Coalition for Gender Equality* and the *Antidiscrimination Coalition*, composed of LGBTQI, Romani, feminist, and human rights organizations or punctual informal cooperation, as was the case in 2020, against the adoption of the law proposal that aimed to forbid any discussion about gender in schools and universities. In this latter case, feminist, Romani feminist, LGBTQI, and sex-workers organizations mobilized a protest in front of the Presidential Palace, despite Covid19 restrictions.

Though this organised opposition might be understood as strategic coalitions oriented towards the oppressor, the fact that anti-gender campaigners expressly target contentious issues among feminists, such as transgender or sex-workers' rights, rather than dividing this might open the possibility for addressing tensions and divisions within and among movements, by engaging in complex communication, paving the way towards deeper alliances.

While crossings and travelling contributed to the coagulation of more intersectional politics, accounting for gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, feminist activists' relation with trade unions or groups defending workers' rights has been very weak until now (Mihai 2021). The Covid19 health crisis engendered a transformation by making precarious working conditions in care domains more visible. Politicizing women's work and the double burden, shaped by class, gender, and ethno-racial differences, but also by the inter-

national division of labour, activists, and representatives from trade unions (Cartel Alfa and Impact trade unions), migrant carers groups (DREPT pentru îngrijire), Romani feminist groups (E-Romnja), housing rights movement (FCDL), sex-workers organizations (Sex Work Call) and workers in the arts and culture industry, debates, among others) organized a debate in March 2021, within the campaign #MisoginieCealaltăPandemie (#MisogynyTheOtherPandemic)<sup>21</sup>. Unprecedented communication between trade unions and migrant workers' groups brought to the forefront the rights of migrant carers and the working conditions of social workers. These groups collaborated through protests, petitions, manifestos, and debates, during and after the campaign, engaging in crossings towards each other's worlds of sense, furthering communication between precarious women workers and activists.

## Conclusions

While unravelling significant civil society transformations, at the end of the XXst and beginning of the XXIst century, the NGO-ization theory proved its limits in accounting, both for the geopolitical power relations that shape(d) feminist movements and their institutionalization and for the diversity of feminisms and the exclusions operated through the institutionalization of specific forms that became mainstream, hegemonic. A decolonial analytic helped explore these confines precisely because it served to understand the role of the imperial and colonial differences in the build-up of feminist movements in post-socialist spaces, specifically in Romania, and to account for the role played by the Cold War legacy in the historiographic reports about the transnationalisation and institutionalization of feminisms at global level, as well as in shaping the discursive structure of opportunity at a national level.

A decolonial analysis allowed to explore the exclusions engendered by the abovementioned processes and the resulting tensions that shape movements for justice, such as the feminist one, the LGBTI and queer movements, the Romani movements, the housing justice, and the precarious workers. It also helped understand the bridge-building processes beyond the build-up of strategic coalitions, when faced with threats, towards consolidating deeper coalitions, through crossings and travelling and engagement in complex communication with others.

Activists who found themselves in-between movements, those who did not fit within the mainstream liberal framework, built their agenda at times separately, sometimes in the underground, and, at other times, engaged in travelling and crossings, studded with tensions and deceptions but also with joy, stemming from the creation of bridges and solidarities.

<sup>21</sup> Dezbateri: Munca femeilor și dubla exploatare (Debate: Women's work and the double exploitation) moderated by Oana Uiorean, 20 March 2021; available at: <https://www.facebook.com/TaraMunciiLeftine/videos/1173597223084119>.

While awfully hard, engaging in complex communication, seems to contain the potential to overcome the isolation and separation of different struggles and resistance movements towards consolidating relational identities. Far more than an intellectual endeavour that would remain abstract, decolonial feminist analytic urges to relate lived experiences “to an awareness of what lies hidden, unseen, or unmentioned in the sociocultural worlds we inhabit” (Schutte 2020: 107). It urges not to stop at the creation of affinity-resistant communities nor to see them as an end in themselves, as safe spaces and gated communities, within the oppressive hegemonic order, or as “additive pluralities that cohabit spaces without friction”, but to travel and cross towards “conflictual pluralities that pose contested narratives” (Alcoff 2020), because inhabiting the limen it is not revolutionary in itself, but rather a “creative preparation” (Lugones 2006, 79).

## ANNEX

## Interview list

Name-unrelated acronyms	Organization/ collective	Place	Date	Duration of the interview
I.C.	Filia	Bucharest	25.06.2015	60:04
M.C.	ANES	Bucharest	19.02.2016	62:41
M.P.	CPE	Bucharest	29.06.2016	32:19
B.M.	Filia	Bucharest	27.01.2016	67:44
C.T.	Filia	Skype	27.02.2016	131:10
M.R. 1	Front	Bucharest	7.07.2016	60:23
M.M. 2	CPE	Bucharest	4.02.2016	107:23
C.B.	Filia	Bucharest	25.06.2015	163:37
C.L.1	Dysnomia, Claca, Biblioteca Alternativa	Bucharest	25.06.2015	111:39
B.T.	Biblioteca Alternativa	Bucharest	26.06.2015	68:26
A.F. 2	Filia	Bucharest	26.01.2016	84:58
C.S. 2	Front	Bucharest	3.07.2016	36:19
A.T.	Filia	Bucharest	1.02.2016	94:55

## References

- Alcoff, Linda Martín. 2020. “Lugones’s World-Making.” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8 (1–2): 199–211.
- Aldawood, Danielle. 2018. *Decolonizing Human Rights Education*. Arizona State University, PhD thesis.
- Alvarez, Sonia E. 1999. “Advocating Feminism: the Latin American Feminist NGO ‘Boom,’” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1 (2): 181–209.
- Ana, Alexandra. 2019. *The NGO-ization of Social Movements in Neoliberal Times: Contemporary Feminisms in Romania and Belgium*. Scuola Normale Superiore, PhD thesis.

- Ana, Alexandra. 2020. "Hope as Master Frame in Feminist Mobilization: Between Liberal NGO-ization and Radical-Intersectional Street Politics." *Hope and Nostalgia at the Intersection between Welfare and Culture*, ed. by A. Hellström, Ov. C. Norocel, and M. Bak Jørgensen, 185–202. Amsterdam: Springer.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: The Aunt Lute Books.
- Armillei, Riccardo. 2018. *The 'Camps System' in Italy: Corruption, Inefficiencies and Practices of Resistance*. Amsterdam: Springer.
- Avanza, Martina. 2018. "Plea for an Emic Approach Towards 'Ugly Movements': Lessons from the Divisions within the Italian Pro-life Movement." *Politics and Governance* 6 (3): 112–125.
- Ban, Cornel. 2015. "Beyond Anticommunism: The Fragility of Class Analysis in Romania." *East European Politics and Societies* 29 (3): 640–650.
- Banaszak, Lee Ann, Karen Beckwith, and Dieter Rucht, eds. 2003. *Women's Movements Facing the Reconfigured State*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Banaszak, Lee Ann. 2010. *The Women's Movement Inside and Outside the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Băluță, Oana. 2010. "Cui îi mai e Frică de Feminism ? Feminismul Romanesc si Valul Sau," *Dilema Veche*, <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-saptamanii/articol/feminismul-romanesc-si-valul-sau>
- Bernal, Victoria. 2001. "Equality to Die For?: Women Guerrilla Fighters and Eritrea's Cultural Revolution," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 23 (2): 61–76.
- Bernal, Victoria, and Inderpal Grewal. 2014. "The NGO Form: Feminist Struggles, States, and Neoliberalism." *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism*, ed. by V. Bernal and G. Inderpal, 1–18. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1984. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October* 28: 125–133.
- Blackwell, Maylei. 2011. *Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Boatcă, Manuela. 2010. "Multiple Europes and the Politics of Difference Within." *The Study of Europe*, ed. by H. Brunkhorst, G. Grözinger, 51–66. Nomos, Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG.
- Boatcă, Manuela. 2015. "The Quasi-Europes: World Regions in Light of the Imperial Difference." *Global Crises and the Challenges of the 21st Century*, ed. by T. Reifer, 132–154. Oxon: Routledge.
- Brooks, Ethel. 2009. "(Mis)recognitions: Romanies, Sexualities, Sincerities." *Nevi Sara Kali, Revista femeilor rome*, ed. by L. Mark and E. Magyari-Vincze, 21–29. Cluj: Editura Fundatiei Desire.
- Čisáň, Ondřej. 2010. "Externally Sponsored Contention: the Channelling of Environmental Movement Organisations in the Czech Republic after the Fall of Communism," *Environmental Politics* 19 (5): 736–755
- Cîrstoceana, Ioana. 2008. "Between the Past and the West: Le Dilemme du Féminisme en Europe de l'Est Postcommuniste." *Sociétés contemporaines* 3: 7–27.
- Coalitia pentru Egalitate de Gen, 2019. "Scrisoare Deschisa către Guvern Privind Accesul Elevilor și Tinerilor la Informații Privind Egalitatea de Gen și Sănătatea Reprodusei", 20 November, <https://ongen.ro/scrisoare-deschisa-catre-guvern-privind-accesul-elevilor-si-tinerilor-la-informatii-privind-egalitatea-de-gen-si-sanatarea-reproducerii/>

- Costache, Ioanida. 2019. "Politica Diferențelor: Romii ca Homo Sacer în Discursul Public Naționalist și Rasist sau de ce Materializarea Stereotipurilor Este Dăunătoare," *Problema Românească: O Analiză a Rasismului Românesc*, ed. by M. Drăgan and O. Dorbobanțu, 13–23. București: Hecate.
- Cotera, Maria, Maylei Blackwell, and Dionne Espinoza. 2018. "Introduction: Movements, Movimientos, and Movidas." *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era*, ed. by D. Espinoza, and M. Blackwell, 1–30. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Coy, Patrick G., and Timothy Hedeem. 2005. "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-optation: Community Mediation in the United States," *The Sociological Quarterly* 46 (3): 405–435.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1990. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–1299.
- De Haan, Francisca. 2010. "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation." *Women's History Review* 19 (4): 547–573.
- Della Porta, Donatella, and Mario Diani. 2006. *Social Movements: An Introduction*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Drăgan, Mihaela, and Oana Dorobanțu. 2019. "Prefata," *Problema Românească: O Analiză a Rasismului Românesc*, ed. by M. Drăgan and O. Dorbobanțu, 7–11. București: Hecate.
- Escobar, Arturo. 2007. "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program." *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3): 179–210.
- European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). 2014. "Fourth Report on Romania", 3 June, <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-romania/168094d771>
- European Court of Human Rights. 2016. Case of Boatcă and others v. Romania, no. 40355/11, January 12, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%22itemid%22:%22001-159914%22>
- European Court of Human Rights. 2017. Case of Ciorcan and others v. Romania, no. 29414/09 and 44841/09, January 17.
- European Court of Human Rights. 2019. Case of Lingurar v. Romania, no. 48474/14, April 16, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%22itemid%22:%22001-192466%22>
- Fábíán, Katalin. 2007. "Making an Appearance: The Formation of Women's Groups in Hungary." *Aspasia* 1 (1): 103–127.
- Fagan, Adam, and Indraneel Sircar. 2013. "Environmental Movement Activism in the Western Balkans: Evidence from Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Beyond NGO-ization. The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by S. Saxonberg and K. Jacobsson, 213–236. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52 (4): 887–917.
- Flores, Stephanie. 2014. "Redefining Reproductive Rights in an Age of Cultural Revolution." *On Our Terms: The Undergraduate Journal of the Athena Center for Leadership Studies at Barnard College* 2 (1): 1–32.
- Fraser, Arvonne S. 1987. *The U.N. Decade for Women: Documents and Dialogue*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Fraser, Nancy. 2013. *Fortunes of Feminism. From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*. London: Verso
- Fraser, Nancy. 2016. "Progressive Neoliberalism versus Reactionary Populism: A Choice that Feminists Should Refuse." *NORA-Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 24 (4): 281–284.

- Frunză, Mihaela. 2004. "Equal Chances? The Ambiguity of the Romanian Liberal Feminist Discourse." *Gender and the (Post)'East'/'West' Divide*, ed. by M. Frunză, and Th.-E. Văcărescu, 97–110. Cluj-Napoca: Limes.
- Furtună, Adrian-Nicolae. 2019. "O Istorie a Rușinii. Discurs Ideologizant între Robia Țiganilor în Moldova și Țara Românească și Sclavia Romilor în Spațiul Românesc." *Problema Românească: O Analiză a Rasismului Românesc*, ed. by M. Drăgan and O. Dorbobanțu, 24–36. București: Hecate.
- Georghe, Carmen. 2010. "Privește-mă Așa Cum Sunt. Cuvinte și Imagini ale Femeilor Rome." *h. arta*.
- Georghe, Carmen. 2019. "Cu Fustele-n Cap pentru Feminismul Rom" *Problema Românească: O Analiză a Rasismului Românesc* ed. by M. Drăgan and O. Dorbobanțu, 135–148. București: Hecate.
- Georghe, Carmen, and Letitia Mark, Eniko Vincze. 2019. "Towards an Anti-Racist Feminism for Social Justice in Romania." *The Romani Women's Movement: Struggles and Debates in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by A. Kóczé, V. Zentai, J. Jovanović, and E. Vincze, 111–134. Oxon: Routledge.
- Gomez-Barris, Macarena. 2017. *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Gradskova, Yulia. 2020. Women's International Democratic Federation, the 'Third World' and the Global Cold War from the Late-1950s to the Mid-1960s. *Women's History Review* 29 (2): 270–288.
- Grosfoguel, Ramon. 2000. "Developmentalism, Modernity, and Dependency Theory in Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1 (2): 347–374.
- Grunberg, Laura. 2000. "Women's NGOs in Romania." *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism*, ed. by S. Gal and G. Kligman, 307–336. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Halley, Janet. 2006. *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Harvey, David. 2007. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Helms, Elissa. 2014. "The Movementization of NGOs? Women's Organizing in Postwar Bosnia- Herzegovina." *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminism, and Neoliberalism*, ed. by V. Bernal and I. Grewal, 21–49. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hemment, Julie. 2014. "Global Civil Society and the Local Costs of Belonging: Defining Violence against Women in Russia." *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminism, and Neoliberalism*, ed. by V. Bernal and I. Grewal, 815–840. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hibou, Beatrice. 2012. *La Bureaucratization du Monde à l'Ère Néolibérale*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Hoagland, Sara Lucia. 2020. "Aspects of the Coloniality of Knowledge." *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8 (1–2): 48–60.
- Hodžić, Saida. 2014. "Feminist Bastards: Toward a Posthumanist Critique of NGOization." *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminism, and Neoliberalism*, ed. by V. Bernal and I. Grewal, 221–247. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Iancu, Valentina. 2019. "Contribuția Artelor Vizuale la Definirea Rasismului Românesc în Perioada Formării Statului-Națiune." *Problema Românească: O Analiză a Rasismului Românesc*, ed. by M. Drăgan and O. Dorbobanțu, 37–53. București: Hecate.
- Jacobsson, Kerstin. 2013. "Channeling and Enrollment: The Institutional Shaping of Animal Rights Activism in Poland." *Beyond NGO-ization. The Development of*

*Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by S. Saxonberg and K. Jacobsson, 27–49. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

- Jacobsson, Kerstin and Steven Saxonberg. 2013. "The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe." *Beyond NGO-ization. The development of social movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by K. Jacobsson and S. Saxonberg, 1–25. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.
- Kaneva, Nadia, and Delia Popescu. 2014. "We are Romanian, not Roma: Nation Branding and Postsocialist Discourses of Alterity." *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 7 (4): 506–523.
- Kantola, Johanna, and Judith Squires. 2012. "From State Feminism to Market Feminism?." *International Political Science Review* 33 (4): 382–400.
- Kardam, Nüket. 2007. "The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Turkey Experience." *Cairo: EUROMED Project on Role of Women in Economic Life*.
- Karkov, Nikolay R., and Zhivka Valiavicharska. 2018. «Rethinking East-European Socialism: Notes toward an Anti-capitalist Decolonial Methodology.» *Interventions* 20 (6): 785–813.
- Korolczuk, Elżbieta, and Agnieszka Graff. 2018. "Gender as 'Ebola from Brussels': The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 43 (4): 797–821.
- Kovács, Éva. 2009. "The 'Fact' of Gypsiness. A Case from Hungary." *Nevi Sara Kali. Roma Women's Journal* 1: 30–44.
- Kuhar, Roman, and David Paternotte, eds. 2017. *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Laforest, Rachel, and Michael Orsini. 2005. "Evidence-based Engagement in the Voluntary Sector: Lessons from Canada." *Social Policy & Administration* 39 (5): 481–497.
- Lang, Sabine. 1997. "The NGOization of Feminism. Institutionalization and Institution Building within the German Women's Movements." *Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminism in International Politics*, ed. by C. Kaplan, J. Scott, and D. Keates, 101–120. New York: Routledge.
- Lugones, María. 2003. *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Lugones, María. 2007. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System." *Hypatia* 22 (1): 186–219.
- Lugones, María. 2010. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia* 25 (4): 742–759.
- Lugones, María. 2014. "Indigenous Movements and Decolonial Feminism." *Seminario de Grado y Posgrado, Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, The Ohio State University*, 21<sup>st</sup> March, <https://wgss.osu.edu/sites/wgss.osu.edu/files/LugonesSeminarReadings.pdf>50
- Lugones, Maria. 2020. "Gender and Universality in Colonial Methodology." *Critical philosophy of Race* 8 (1–2): 25–47.
- Massino, Jill, and Raluca Maria Popa. 2015. "The Good, the Bad, and the Ambiguous: Women and the Transition from Communism to Pluralism in Romania." *Gender (In) Equality and Gender Politics in Southeastern Europe: A Question of Justice*, ed. by C. Hassenstab, and S. Ramet, 171–191. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Magyari-Vincze, Eniko. 2006. *Excluderea Socială la Intersecția dintre Gen, Etnicitate și Clasă*. Cluj: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene.
- Magyari-Vincze, Eniko, 2009. "Cine Suntem?" *Nevi Sara Kali, Revista femeilor rome*, ed. by L. Mark and E. Magyari-Vincze, 13–20. Cluj: Editura Fundatiei Desire.

- Marcos, Sylvia. 2006. *Taken from the Lips: Gender and Eros in Mesoamerican Religions*. Leiden: Brill Academic Pub.
- Marincea, Adina. 2021. *AstA (nu) e o Poveste de DrAgoste! LoveKills, Punk și Primii 20 de Ani de Anarcha-feminism în România*. Pagini Libere.
- Martinez, Pilar Rodriguez. 2011. "Feminism and Violence: The Hegemonic Second Wave's Encounter with Rape and Domestic Abuse in USA (1970–1985)." *Cultural Dynamics* 23 (3): 147–172.
- Medina, José, 2020. "Complex Communication and Decolonial Struggles: The Forging of Deep Coalitions through Emotional Echoing and Resistant Imaginations." *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 8 (1–2): 212–236.
- Meier, Petra, and David Paternotte. 2017. "La Professionnalisation des Luttes pour L'Égalité de Genre: les enjeux." *La Professionnalisation des Luttes pour L'Égalité: Enjeux Théoriques et Politiques*, ed. by D. Paternotte and P. Meier. Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia/L'Harmattan.
- Meyer, David, and Sydeny Tarrow. 1998. "A Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century." *The Social Movements Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century*, ed. by D. Meyer and S. Tarrow. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2002. "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101 (1): 57–96.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2011. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mihai, Tudorina. 2021. "Acțiuni Civice Feministe din România. O Cartografiere din Perspectiva Relației cu Critica de Clasă." *Critica Socială și Artistică a Capitalismului Românesc*, ed. by S. Gog, M. Braniște, and C. Turcuș, 121–138. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană.
- Miroiu, Mihaela. 1994. "From Pseudo-power to Lack of Power." *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 1 (1): 107–110.
- Miroiu, Mihaela. 1999. *Societatea Retro*. Bucharest: Editura Trei.
- Miroiu, Mihaela. 2004a. *Drumul catre Autonomie. Teorii Politice Feministe*. Iasi: Polirom.
- Miroiu, Mihaela. 2004b. "State Men, Market Women. The Effects of Left Conservatism on Gender Politics in Romanian Transition." *Feminismo/s* 3: 207–234.
- Miroiu, Mihaela. 2006. *Nepretutele Femei. Publicistică feministă*. Iasi: Polirom.
- Miroiu, Mihaela. 2009. "An Exotic Island: Feminist Philosophy in Romania." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 34 (2): 233–239.
- Miroiu, Mihaela. 2010. "'Not the right moment!' Women and the politics of endless delay in Romania." *Women's History Review* 19 (4): 575–593.
- Moloea, Andreea. 2015. "(Re)constructia Feminismului Romanesc in cadrul Miscarii de Femei (1990-2000)." *Mișcări Feministe și Ecologiste în România (1990–2014)*, ed. by M. Miroiu. Iasi: Polirom.
- Mudure, Mihaela. 2004. "A Zeugmatic Space: East/ Central European Feminisms." *Gender and the (Post) 'East' / 'West' European Divide*, ed. by M. Frunză, and T. Văcărescu, 1–10. Cluj-Napoca: Limes.
- O'Reilly, Kathleen. 2014. "Resolving a Gendered Paradox: Women's Participation and the NGO Boom in North India." *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism*, ed. by V. Bernal, and G. Inderpal, 143–166. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Open Society Institute. 2020. *Bending the Bow: Targeting Women's Rights and Opportunities*. Network Women's Program.

- Ong, Aihwa. 2006. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Oprea, Alexandra. 2004. "Re-envisioning Social Justice from the Ground up: Including the Experiences of Romani Women." *Essex human rights review* 1 (1): 29–39.
- Oprea, Alexandra. 2012. "Romani Feminism in Reactionary Times." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 38 (1): 11–21.
- Paternotte, David. 2016. "The NGOization of LGBT Activism: ILGA-Europe and the Treaty of Amsterdam." *Social Movement Studies* 15 (4): 388–402.
- Petrova, Tsveta, and Sidney Tarrow. 2007. "Transactional and Participatory Activism in the Emerging European Polity: The Puzzle of East-Central Europe." *Comparative political studies* 40 (1): 74–94.
- Popa, Raluca Maria. 2009. "Translating Equality between Women and Men across Cold War Divides: Women Activists from Hungary and Romania and the Creation of International Women's Year." *Gender politics and everyday life in state socialist Eastern and Central Europe*, 59–74. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Popa, Bogdan. 2019. "Antirasismul și Politica Frecvențelor Joase." *Problema românească: o analiză a rasismului românesc*, ed. by M. Drăgan and O. Dorboanțu, 98–111. București: Hecate.
- Quijano, Anibal. 2000. "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." *International Sociology* 15 (2): 215–232.
- Reagon, Johnson. [1983] 2000. "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century." *Home Girls: a Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. by B. Smith, 343–356. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Red Network. 2013. "Extremist Group Proposes to Pay Roma Women Who Get Sterilized," 10 January, <http://www.red-network.eu/?i=red-network.en.items&id=1015>
- Richardson, Troy. 2012. "Disrupting the Coloniality of Being: Toward De-colonial Ontologies in Philosophy of Education." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 31 (6): 539–551.
- Roshanravan, Shireen. 2020. "Compelled to Cross, Tempted to Master: Affective Challenges in Lugones's Decolonial Feminist Methodology." *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8 (1–2): 119–133.
- Roy, Arundhati. 2004. "The NGO-ization of Resistance," 16 August <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgYaZAUzwuY>
- Roy, Arundhati. 2014. *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Roy, Srila. 2017. "The Positive Side of Co-optation? Intersectionality: A Conversation between Inderpal Grewal and Srila Roy," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 19 (2): 254–262.
- Ruxi. 2014. "Feminisme si Delimitari", Blog F.I.A., 11 February, <https://fia.pimienta.org/weblog/?p=2571>
- Sandu, Laura. 2021. "Spații Feministe de Stânga: Dinamici Formatoare," *Critica Socială și Artistică a Capitalismului Românesc*, ed. by S. Gog, M. Braniște, and C. Turcus, 139–156. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană.
- Schiwy, Freya. 2007. «Decolonization and the Question of Subjectivity: Gender, Race, and Binary Thinking.» *Cultural studies* 21 (2–3): 271–294.
- Schutte, Ofelia. 2020. «Border Zones, In-Between Spaces, and Turns: On Lugones, the Coloniality of Gender, and the Diasporic Peregrina.» *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8 (1–2): 102–118.

- Sloat, Amanda. 2005. "The Rebirth of Civil Society. The Growth of Women's NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 12 (4): 437–452.
- Szente, Veronika Leila. 1996. "Sudden Rage at Dawn: Violence against Roma in Romania." *A Report by European Roma Rights Center*.
- Thompson, Becky. 2002. "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 28 (2): 337–60.
- Tlostanova, Madina. 2010. *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tlostanova, Madina, and Walter Mignolo. 2009. "Global Coloniality and the Decolonial option." *Kult* 6: 130–147.
- Țichindeleanu, Ovidiu. 2010. "Where Are We When We Think in Eastern Europe?" *Art Always Has Its Consequences*, 85–91. Zagreb: WHW/Tranzit/kuda/ Muzeum Stzuki.
- Velez, Emma. and Nancy Tuana. 2020. "Editors' Introduction Tango Dancing with María Lugones: Toward Decolonial Feminisms." *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 8 (1): 1–24.
- Vergès, Françoise. 2017. *Le Ventre des Femmes: Capitalisme, Racialisation, Féminisme*. Paris: Albin Michel.
- Verloo, Mieke, and David Paternotte. 2018. "The Feminist Project under Threat in Europe." *Politics and Governance* 6 (3): 1–5.
- Vincze, Enikő. 2016. "The Racialization of Roma in the 'New' Europe and the Political Potential of Romani Women." *AnALize: Revista de studii feministe* 7 (21): 60–66.
- Vincze Eniko. 2019. Rasializarea Romilor în Noua Europă și Potențialul Politic al Femeilor Rome in *Problema Românească: O Analiză a Rasismului Românesc*, 121–135. București: Hecate.
- Vlad, Ioana. 2013. *Women's Rights Activism in Romania after 2000. Studies on the Forms of Organization, cooperation, action and influence*, Doctoral thesis.
- United Nations, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. 2010. Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Supplement 18 (A/65/18).
- United Nations, Committee against Torture. 2015. Concluding Observations on the Second Periodic Report of Romania <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/815802?ln=en>
- United States Department of State. 2014. "2013 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Romania", 27 February <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53284a82b.html>

## Worldmaking through Dissonance: A Discussion with Françoise Vergès

This interview with Françoise Vergès was conducted on June 28, 2025, at the café *Au soleil d'Austerlitz* in Paris, during the Historical Materialism Paris Conference<sup>1</sup>. The conversation unfolded amidst a convergence of the recent Greek translation of *A Feminist Theory of Violence* and urgent political contexts: the ongoing genocide in Palestine and a controversy surrounding censorship<sup>2</sup> during the conference's organization. These events shaped the dialogue, which extended beyond the immediate circumstances to engage with broader theoretical and political concerns.

Currently engaged in pro-Palestine solidarity, Françoise Vergès is a decolonial feminist intellectual whose work spans political theory, cultural criticism, curatorial practice, and activist engagement. Vergès's scholarship critically interrogates racial capitalism, patriarchal violence, and the enduring legacies of colonialism, while public interventions across media, institutions, and grassroots collectives contribute to a broader project of emancipatory worldmaking. This interdisciplinary approach bridges academic inquiry and militant activism, the local and the transnational, as well as historical analysis and urgent political realities.

Critical perspectives of her/their work on white carceral feminism and racial capitalism (2020; 2021; 2022) have been consistently foregrounded, alongside sustained engagement with the memory and afterlives of slavery and colonialism (1999; 2010; 2015). These contributions continue to shape contemporary debates in feminist theory, decolonial critique, and global solidarity movements. The conversation that follows reflects on present-day social struggles as both sites of inspiration and as grounds for incisive critique

---

<sup>1</sup> The Historical Materialism (HM) conference series is an academic and activist forum rooted in critical Marxist theory. Each year, various events are held in different parts of the world, including Paris, London, Athens, Istanbul, New Delhi, New York, Sydney, and Toronto. For more information about HM Paris, see <https://hmparis.org>.

<sup>2</sup> Statement by the editorial team of HM Paris 2025 addressing the censorship incident during the conference. For more details, see: <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/statement-by-the-editorial-board-of-historical-materialism/>

of authoritarian formations within the French state, the European Union, and the United States.

**VP: In June 2025, you were scheduled to participate in a panel at the HM Paris 2025 conference. During the event, a case of censorship emerged involving Dauphine University, alongside external pressures targeting Houria Bouteldja<sup>3</sup> and the collectives Earth Uprisings<sup>4</sup> and Antifascist Action Paris-Banlieue<sup>5</sup>. What are your thoughts on this case?**

**FV:** On my way to a public meeting in Brussels on Thursday, 26 June 2025, I read online that Houria Bouteldja was no longer welcome at a HM panel. Initially, Houria was scheduled to speak on a panel at Paris Dauphine University, alongside other panels, but the university opposed her presence. The organisers then asked the Bourse du Travail to host these panels, and it agreed. However, the Bourse du Travail later refused to allow Houria to be present. I immediately wrote on my social media accounts that, in solidarity, I would not be joining the scheduled panel. I also refused to go in order to take the opportunity to talk about censorship, as some had suggested. But I did not call for a boycott; I simply said that I would not go in solidarity with Houria. This was my own decision; I did not consult anyone. It was a matter of principle for me. I categorically reject the demonisation of Houria.

I wrote to Sebastian Bugden<sup>6</sup>, who is a comrade and very active in HM, to inform him that I would not be coming. One or two days later, Mathieu Rigouste, whose book we were going to discuss at the panel<sup>7</sup>, announced that he would not be attending, followed by the third panelist. Although I am not a member of French academia, I have noticed that there are no postcolonial,

<sup>3</sup> Houria Bouteldja is a Franco-Algerian political activist and author involved in decolonial struggles in France. For a representative sample of her writing in English, see Bouteldja 2017. Her views on race and colonialism, which challenge established leftist and academic orthodoxies, are linked to the censorship that occurred during the organization of the HM Paris Conference.

<sup>4</sup> Earth Uprisings (Les Soulèvements de la Terre) is a radical environmental collective founded in January 2021 within the former ZAD (Zone à Défendre) of Notre-Dame-des-Landes (France).

<sup>5</sup> Antifascist Action Paris-Banlieu (Action Antifasciste Paris-Banlieue, also known as AF-APB) is an autonomous antifascist organization that emerged in the 2010s and gained national media attention in 2013 during the Clément Méric affair. On June 5, 2013, Clément Méric, a young left-wing antifascist activist, died following a violent altercation with far-right skinheads in Paris. Méric was an 18-year-old student, a member of AFAPB and was closely associated with radical left and antifascist circles. The incident prompted a government crackdown on violent extremist groups, and the far-right organization Troisième Voie was dissolved shortly afterward.

<sup>6</sup> Sebastian Bugden is a British Marxist editor and scholar, serving as a Senior Editor at the radical publishing house Verso Books, a contributing editor for Jacobin magazine, and a member of the editorial board of the HM journal and conference series.

<sup>7</sup> The reference concerns Mathieu Rigouste's book "The Global War Against the People: Imperial Mechanics of the Security Order" ("La guerre globale contre les peuples: Mécanique impériale de l'ordre sécuritaire"), originally published in French in April 2025 by La Fabrique éditions.

African studies, or decolonial theory departments in universities. It is up to individual professors to teach postcolonial or decolonial theory, and some are doing so, supervising PhDs and Master's degrees on these topics.

**VP: Who are those collectives and individuals involved in these actions? Do they also identify with or belong to the political Left?**

**FV:** There are different forces at play within the Left and within the CGT<sup>8</sup>, the union that manages the Bourse du Travail. The members of the CGT who refused Houria's presence may have thought she was too radical. Within unions, there is often a rejection of the decolonial movement, and within the institutional Left, we see the weaponization of antisemitism. We are accused of being pro-Hamas or anti-Semitic, we supposedly reject the notion of class, we are said to be class blind, focusing only on racialization and racism. *They don't understand that it's not one or the other. Class is informed by race. In Europe, the working class has, of course, been affected by racism.* France was a major colonial empire, which means racism permeated the whole of society, including the working class. Racism has historically existed even when workers came from Italy or Spain. But it has been much stronger against workers from the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa; the anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, and anti-Black racism is very strong. Migrant workers fought to have their specific struggles recognized and in the 1960s and 1970s they led formidable and radical movements, supported by leftist organizations. However, it took time for the leadership of the major unions to acknowledge their presence and their contributions to the broader working-class struggle. In her latest book, *Beaufs et barbares*, Houria argues for the formation of a coalition between poor white people (the *Beaufs*) and the non-white, racialized poor (the *Barbares*), as they share comparable experiences of humiliation and exploitation.

For me, coming from Réunion Island and having grown up within the anti-colonial communist struggle, where my father and mother were very active, *I must say that I have too often witnessed the betrayal of the colonized by the Left. It still does not fully get what is colonization, it still believes that the French Republic, once reformed, offers the best social/political organization for all.* We have to understand that it is not enough to be against slavery, imperialism. Whites could be against slavery, but they were not truly anti-racist; they could be anti-colonialist but not spontaneously anti-racist. They could support Algeria's independence but could not accept full Algerian sovereignty and believed they could dictate how the struggle should be fought. There is often a hint of white savior syndrome. In his 1956 letter of resignation to Maurice Thorez<sup>9</sup>, leader of the French Communist Party, Aimé Césaire wrote

<sup>8</sup> The CGT, or General Confederation of Labour (Confédération Générale du Travail), established in 1895, is one of the oldest and most prominent trade union confederations in France. It has played a central role in representing workers across various sectors and shaping labor movements throughout the country's modern history.

<sup>9</sup> For the full version of this foundational text of decolonial and radical left thought, see Césaire (2010).

that while French communists could accept his communism, they could not accept that he was a Black man and that he belonged to a Blackness constructed by colonial racist slavery.

He wrote, in essence, that he had been made “Black” by Europe, by the West. He added that Black peoples have the right to decide for themselves how they will fight and what their liberation will be. “You speak of fraternity,” he said (I paraphrase), “but as long as you remain the big brother, that is not fraternity.” His letter was one of the earliest decolonial critiques of the French Communist Left, at a time when the French Communist Party was very strong. However, it was ignored for a long time.

My father, who was a communist anti-colonial leader, and the Communist Party of Réunion had to constantly assert their autonomy from the French Left. It is important to insist on the fact that *we, in the former French colonies, in the Global South, must do our own analyses. Speaking of Réunion: it is a tropical island in the southwest Indian Ocean, where the French State established slavery and colonization, and we are still under French power. But we are not merely a region of France like Brittany or Limousin. We have our own history, culture, and language that cannot be reduced to mere folklore. Within the French Left, many believed in the colonial civilizing mission. Of course, there were exceptions, French anticolonial activists who fully embraced the anticolonial, antiracist struggle for liberation. But the sense of superiority that Césaire and Fanon denounced, and was present even in moments of solidarity, has not entirely disappeared.* The decolonization of the French Left is still to be done, especially when it concerns the so-called French overseas territories: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Mayotte, Guiana, La Réunion, Kanaky–New Caledonia, and the Pacific islands. Anti-imperialism must be revived.

**VP: Your scholarship is often situated within the framework of decolonial feminist thought, engaging substantively with both decolonial and feminist theoretical paradigms. In addition, you have made some references to Marxism. To what extent would you characterize your work as being aligned with, or shaped by, the Marxist tradition?**

**FV:** I have nothing against Marx, and I would certainly never say, “I don’t read Marx because he was a white man.” No piece of writing should be forbidden. However, I learned quite early on that one should not have a master – any master of any kind. It’s like having one book and considering it the only book. The world is too diverse and rich to be reduced to just one text. I read Fanon alongside Césaire, Césaire alongside Marx, Lenin alongside Angela Davis, Gramsci alongside Malcolm X, and so on.

I grew up with a deep understanding that Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas matter. I realised quite early on, through what I heard and read at home, that the struggle is international. Internationalism, solidarity, and transnational coalitions have always been very important to me. I grew up with that awareness. You have to learn from people how they are fighting and if they ask for your solidarity, you must offer it on their terms. If

they make mistakes, they will learn from them. We learn through setbacks, errors, and defeats. It is through practice that we learn. Practice makes a difference. I acknowledge the power of words like “liberty,” “dignity,” and “equality”, words for which people rise up and are willing to die. When you engage in practice, you confront difference, and you are transformed by it.

**VP: Earlier, you mentioned, “*I refuse to have one master,*” which I believe touches on a crucial point. While Marxist thought has often operated within structured hierarchies of theoretical authority, radical feminisms and decolonial theory tend to embrace multiplicity and decentralised knowledge production. Your work, which could be seen as a form of *travelling theory*, is currently being translated into multiple languages, including Greek. I’m curious – do you see your work within this framework of *travelling theories*, and what significance does this dimension hold for you?**

**FV:** How do you make a local issue resonate with people elsewhere? When I wrote about cleaning women and their struggles in France, I knew it could resonate with cleaners in Beirut, Johannesburg, Mexico City, New York, Athens, and Rome, because they experience a similar economy of exhaustion and similar processes of racialisation and exploitation. Critical thinking and analysis involve studying a situation to understand how it is shaped by social forces that are not purely local. Situations rooted in specific places and anchored in local conditions are also shaped by external factors, such as the IMF<sup>10</sup>, the World Bank, armed interventions, sanctions, and blockades.

Starting with the question, “Why is it like this?”, I trace the threads that connect the situation to the history of local social forces and struggles. Then I follow other threads to see how it is linked to multinationals, the Western banking system, and the global politics of extraction. I observe the presence of various actors: experts in PR, economics, banking, and academia, all bringing with them their ideological formation and the vocabulary of development, democracy, and voting. You can trace a cartography of all the actors conspiring together to create that situation: secret service agents, journalists, photographers and soldiers. And everywhere, I find practices of resistance. Everywhere, and every day.

**VP: You have mentioned in the past that since a young age you have been denying to follow the educational system that was implied to you and began to read about the struggles in Latin America, in Asia or elsewhere. You also define yourself as a public educator. How do you imagine this knowledge production that comes out of the traditional hegemonic**

<sup>10</sup> The International Monetary Fund (IMF), headquartered in Washington, D.C., is a global financial institution established in 1944 to promote international monetary cooperation and financial stability. In decolonial critiques, the IMF is frequently regarded as an instrument of neocolonial influence, implementing economic policies – such as structural adjustment and austerity – that perpetuate financial dependence and undermine the autonomy of postcolonial states.

**institutions and how can we build spaces that radicalize our knowledge or create mechanisms of undoing the pre-existing forms of, let's say, violent norms of knowledge?**

**FV:** As I have said, I was helped by the fact that I was born into and grew up in a very political family. My parents were communist, anticolonial and feminist activists who took their children to meetings, demonstrations, encounters and events. We were not forbidden from listening to debates and conversations. They explained to us why people were imprisoned, defamed and killed.

From a very young age, I always wanted to accompany them, and I met people from all walks of life in Réunion, different classes, religions and origins. I witnessed racism and poverty. My father, whose mother was Vietnamese, was called "devious and a liar", as "Asians are". His comrades of African or Indian descent were racially insulted; the entire society was racist. At home, I was reading journals that my father had received from Cuba, Mozambique, Vietnam, India and the Soviet Union, in other words, I had access to sources of information other than those available at school or via the French media. This made me feel that we were part of an incredibly large struggle.

I received two types of education: the education at school and the education outside school. The latter was the most important. Even if I could not put into words everything I witnessed, it entered my consciousness, it shaped me. At school, I learned to read and write, and there were things I liked (literature, theatre, geography and history, even though they were strictly French), but it was the political and cultural education I received outside school that was truly formative. I realised this year after year through the different practices of activism in which I was involved. I have had an interesting childhood: playing, reading, listening in a country which was beautiful and fascinating, with a long history of resistance.

Last year, when I was in Réunion, I went to the archives to read police reports on anticolonial activists from 1950 to 1980. There was practically an entry related to my father every week, detailing what he was doing, with whom, and where. Even as a child, I noticed that we were being followed and that our house was being searched, but reading these reports made me realise just how deeply the State was invested in surveillance. The police must have had nearly five officers assigned to follow my father. As I was looking through file after file, I found one on me. I had not even turned 15! The report described me as someone of interest because I was very active and the police had to keep an eye on me. I realised quite early that France was not just a country of literature and art, but a State whose objective is to hinder dissent and repress. The State will use the police, the media and the tribunal to repress and censor, and it will do everything to hinder a movement of decolonisation.

Theories travel, they circulate, and though I did not know the language or culture of India or Cuba, for instance, I could read about their struggles. Literature has always played an important role. Novels taught me a lot about

Central and South America – about the United Fruit Company<sup>11</sup>, for instance – but there was also the sheer pleasure of reading, of being transported to other worlds through words. Cinema has also been important. I do not learn from theory alone. I often say that although I learn a lot from history books about slavery, literature brings me something that a history book cannot.

**VP: La Réunion, I think, is a very particular case. Most people perceive France as the “Hexagon”<sup>12</sup> – or Metropolitan France – and tend to ignore the existence of Overseas France<sup>13</sup>. What was it like for you to come from a place such as Réunion?**

**FV:** I have French citizenship. But I didn’t grow up as “French.” I grew up as a girl on Réunion Island, with anticolonial communist parents and their comrades. Réunion is a tropical island with an active volcano, it had no native population when the French state decided to make it a colony and brought enslaved people from Madagascar and East Africa, as well as from India and other parts of the Indian Ocean world; later came indentured workers from China and India. Many religions co-exist: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism. This is my world. I did not grow up with apples and pears. I grew up with lychees and mangos. I grew up with a year around the sun, the ocean and hurricanes. I grew up with a landscape that lives in my mind; it shaped me, as a child and as a teenager. And I grew up with the Creole language and the international anticolonial struggle.

When I left Réunion, I ended up – for various reasons – in Algiers in the early 1970s. I did my final year of high school there. Algeria taught me a lot. I was living in a country that had freed itself from the French colonial yoke. Once I got my high school diploma, I went to France for higher education, but I left after two months – I couldn’t stand it. I returned to Algeria and, at the time, I wanted to settle there. I started learning Arabic. But I had Algerian friends who wanted to leave and go to France, so I followed them. I start-

<sup>11</sup> Founded in 1899, the United Fruit Company was a major American corporation specializing in the production and export of tropical fruits – particularly bananas – from Latin America to markets in the United States and Europe. Throughout the 20th century, it had a profound impact on the economic and political landscape of various Central American and Caribbean nations. The phrase “Banana Republic” emerged from the company’s dominance and refers to politically unstable countries whose economies rely heavily on a single export commodity, often controlled by foreign corporations.

<sup>12</sup> The «Hexagon» or Metropolitan France refers to the European part of France, primarily comprising the mainland, Corsica, and nearby French islands in the Atlantic Ocean, the English Channel, and the Mediterranean Sea. There is often a lack of awareness that France and the French state are not limited to these geographic areas; they also include Overseas France – territories located outside of Europe, which together with Metropolitan France constitute the French Republic.

<sup>13</sup> Overseas France (France d’outre-mer) refers to the French territories located outside the European continent, most of which are former colonies. These include overseas departments and regions (DROM) like La Réunion, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, as well as overseas collectivities (COM). Françoise Vergès, among other decolonial thinkers, critically examines how the legacy of colonialism continues to shape political power, identity, and social struggles within these territories and their ongoing complex relationship with the French state.

ed university again, but soon joined leftist and migrant activist groups and abandoned my studies. I did small jobs, but I also got my journalist card and worked as a journalist for a feminist weekly and for small anti-imperialist journals. In Paris, during my first years, I lived in a commune with people from Réunion, Martinique, Algeria, and France.

If I had not come to France, I am not sure I would have longed for it, I would have been curious, for sure, but not in a melancholic way – not as if I had missed something, or lacked something essential. I live here now, and I have dear friends, and the decolonial movement is growing stronger. But for a long time, I took every opportunity to travel away from France.

Things have happened because the road took me here or there – something or someone came up, and I changed worlds. When I went to the USA in 1983, it was supposed to be for just a week, but I stayed for 12 years. It was not planned. After two years without proper papers, I finally got them and decided to go back to school. I earned my BA, MA, and Ph.D. When I lived in the States, I decided I would try to understand what this country was. I did not look for French people, but for communities that would teach me something – whose struggles were anchored in that country. And when I lived in England, I was interested in England and the English; when in Mexico, in Mexicans – and so on.

I have lived more or less permanently in France since 2010, and for several years now, I have been increasingly involved in the decolonial and anti-imperialist movements in France.

**VP: This is a particularly intriguing point in your theoretical and political engagement. How challenging must it be to be both a public intellectual and an activist without holding a fixed position within a French institution?**

**FV:** When I came back from the States in 1996, I applied for jobs in French academia. I had a PhD from Berkeley and had already published articles and books in both French and English. Each time I was shortlisted and went for interviews, I was rejected. A friend even told me I would never get a job in France. Immediately after, I was offered a job in England (1996-2007), and later visiting positions in the US, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates. I have learned to live with that. It has been frustrating at times, but at the end of the day, it's okay. The French university system certainly has its reasons. Years ago, I decided not to let it affect me, otherwise I would spend all my time ruminating.

**VP: You referred to the United States. How do you perceive the current hostile socio-political climate against Latinx, Black, queer, and trans communities?**

**FV:** The patriarchs and wealthy capitalists, the predatory class, are enraged by social movements against racism, for Free Palestine, for land and water rights, for indigenous rights, Black Lives Matter, the Standing Rock movement, the Gilets Jaunes in France, Queers for Palestine, movements against police violence and gentrification, indigenous struggles for land and water, feminist movements in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, the youth movement against corruption in Africa, and what was called the “Arab Spring.”

The predatory class, whose objective has always been to roll back social protections and restore total domination, is now panicking. I see the current counter-revolution as a clear sign of this panic. This class lacks imagination; it harbors technological fantasies and desires to secede from society while exploiting humanity and the environment – but it has no imagination. All it knows is how to kill, beat, criminalize, massacre, and imprison. Their only response is cruelty and brutality. That’s all they know.

The new scramble for Africa’s riches, the imperialist fracturing of West Asia, the genocide in Gaza, the Israeli bombings of southern Lebanon and Syria, the effort to partition Congo and break postcolonial nation-states into smaller, more controllable pieces – all of this requires mobilization. The predatory imperialist class is witnessing a changing world where its hegemony is being challenged. China, India, and the Gulf oil monarchies<sup>14</sup> want a seat at the table. The post-World War II order dominated by the USA is crumbling. White men and women still cling to the illusion of their importance to the world – that what they say, do, think, and how they understand women’s and human rights are “universal truths and notions.” But it’s over. We are not yet living in a world of peace, freedom, and equality, but the post-World War II order is collapsing. In the Indian Ocean, it’s no longer just the old imperialist powers – the British, French, and the postwar one, the USA – that are present; they have to deal with new actors: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, India, and China. The world is shifting. The imperialist patriarchs are panicking because they’re scared of losing their rule and domination. They fear they won’t have access anymore to all the resources that feed their unlimited thirst for control and their so-called “good life.”

It has always been through dispossession, extraction, exploitation, and military presence that imperialists have preserved their domination. They are once again facing a deep challenge to their world, based on private property, devastation, permanent war, dreams of total domination. They know they have lost the ideological battle, so they turn to murder, torture, and genocide. The predator class is racist and fascist. They still have some economic and military power, but they are afraid and mad. Mad as hell.

The counter-revolution takes different faces: Javier Milei<sup>15</sup> in Argentina, Narendra Modi<sup>16</sup> in India, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Orbán, or Macron – but they all

<sup>14</sup> Gulf oil monarchies are the monarchic states located along the Persian Gulf – specifically the member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – that possess vast oil reserves and derive significant economic wealth and political influence from their petroleum resources.

<sup>15</sup> Javier Milei has been serving as the President of Argentina since December 10, 2023, following his victory in the presidential runoff held on November 19, 2023, where he defeated Sergio Massa with 55.7% of the vote. Milei is a libertarian economist and the leader of the conservative and right-wing La Libertad Avanza coalition. Milei’s tenure has been widely criticized for implementing harsh austerity measures, including significant public sector layoffs, severe cuts to social and educational funding, proposals to dollarize the economy and dismantle the central bank, and tax policies favoring wealthy investors – factors which collectively exacerbated social inequality and provoked widespread public protests.

<sup>16</sup> Narendra Modi, a member of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has been the Prime Minister of India since May 2014, winning consecutive general elections in 2014,

adopt the policies of the fascist, authoritarian counter-revolution. But peoples are fighting back; their aspiration for liberty, justice, and liberation never dies. Imperialism has always been about stopping movements for freedom, justice, and peace. Coups d'état, assassinations, CIA support for military dictatorships, structural adjustment programs – for centuries, imperialists have done everything to block the road to freedom and peace.

Remember that the French State, with the complicity of Western powers, imposed sanctions and a blockade on the young Republic of Haiti because they could not tolerate the military defeat of Napoleonic armies by a Black army of formerly enslaved people! It was inconceivable – a direct challenge to the very idea of the West as the cradle of human rights. Independence was supposed to be given, not won! The French State imposed a huge ransom on the Republic of Haiti, which later became impoverished, and chaos was deliberately fostered. The ransom was followed by armed US occupation. This is imperialist rule: sanctions, blockade, assassinations, military coups, military occupation... Imperialist interventions in Africa, South America, Central America, Oceania, and Asia have always had the same goal: “You will have the freedom we give you, on our terms and conditions.” The struggle is going on.

What Gaza is showing us is that settler colonialism<sup>17</sup> is not just a 19th-century phenomenon but very much a 21st-century reality, inseparable from imperialism and Western liberal democracy. The link between liberal democracy and settler colonialism (hence genocide, massacre, and dispossession) is wide open.

The USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, these 19th-century Western democracies, all rested on the genocide of Indigenous peoples, dispossession, tearing families apart, forbidding Indigenous languages and cultures, enslavement, and the privatization of land and water. The claim that “all men (sic) are created equal” rings hollow; only the struggle of the colonized, of the oppressed, has been able to challenge racism. What is the so-called “leader of the free world,” the “home of the brave and the land of the free” (the USA), if not a liberal society founded on genocide, slavery, dispossession, imperialist wars, and racism?

Five years ago, most people would not have known what “Nakba”<sup>18</sup> referred to. Now, “Nakba,” “from the river to the sea,” “Free Palestine,” and “Glob-

---

2019, and 2024. His leadership is marked by economic reforms and a strong nationalist agenda, but also faces criticism for its impact on religious minorities and social inclusion.

<sup>17</sup> Settler colonialism is a distinct form of colonialism characterized by the permanent settlement of colonizers who seek to replace and displace indigenous populations to assert sovereignty over the land. Unlike other forms of colonialism focused primarily on resource extraction or trade, settler colonialism involves the ongoing elimination – through displacement, assimilation, or violence – of indigenous peoples and their structures to establish a new societal order controlled by settlers. For further analyses, see Veracini 2021 and Wolfe 2016.

<sup>18</sup> [18](#). Nakba («catastrophe» in Arabic) refers to the forced expulsion and dispossession of approximately 750,000 Palestinians during the 1947–1949 Zionist colonization and the establishment of the State of Israel. This event constitutes a foundational rupture in Palestinian collective memory and remains central to critiques of settler colonialism, displacement, and the ongoing Palestinian struggle for return, justice, and liberation. For further analyses, see Allan 2021 and Masalha 2012.

al Intifada” have become rallying cries. There is a rapid politicization and a quickly acquired political consciousness and activism rooted in past struggles but also connected to new conditions. The weaponization of antisemitism has not stopped solidarity with Palestine; there is a growing understanding that “Free Palestine” is a global goal.

**VP: You have highlighted various contexts of struggle and social justice movements that require our engagement. Earlier, you referred to Houria’s recent work on coalition building. Although this is a broad inquiry, from your perspective, what strategies might be most effective in fostering connections between diverse struggles – such as those involving LGBTQ+, racialized communities, and the working class – to promote collective solidarity and transformative social change?**

**FV:** We learn through practice. We work with and across differences. We overcome years of soft multiculturalism and the liberal politics of “inclusion and diversity”, the inclusion for the few and exclusion for the many. Capitalism is highly dynamic; it knows how to cannibalize even its critics, turning dissent into a new commodity.

We fight through action our decolonial, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, feminist, and LGBTQ+ struggle. We learn to be humble, to listen to people. Education, education, education. Political education. Do the work, educate yourself, and join collectives. Develop a burning desire to understand and to learn every day and every night. Understand that the world around us is not “natural”; it has been shaped by social forces, and thus, it can be undone. That it could be made otherwise. That is very liberating. Because otherwise, we may feel that nothing will ever change, that the odds against liberation are too great. We must unlearn in order to learn – unlearning everything that normalizes exploitation and domination, and learning again and again, by listening, by paying attention.

When I joined the picket line of the women on strike at the Ibis hotel<sup>19</sup> in Paris, their struggle was not immediately recognized as a decolonial, anti-racist, feminist struggle. Their demands, including better working conditions, fair wages, access to toilets when needed, and so on, might have seemed “modest.” But they brought to public attention an understanding of the inner workings of an industry whose mechanisms of domination and exploitation had long remained invisible. White feminism had denounced domesticity, but treated it as an individual issue. Racialized women cleaners revealed how white bourgeois women had been “liberated” from the drudgery of domestic work by exploiting non-white women. These cleaners held their picket line

<sup>19</sup> Earlier this year, cleaning staff at Ibis Hotels in France, particularly at the Ibis Batignolles in Paris, engaged in significant protests and strikes to demand better working conditions and fairer treatment. These workers, employed by the subcontractor STN, faced challenging conditions, including excessive workloads and inadequate compensation. Similar mobilizations had taken place previously through a social movement that began in July 2019 and ended in May 2021, primarily organized by the chambermaids working at the Ibis Batignolles hotel in Paris, part of the Accor group.

every day, despite long commutes, despite rain or snow, they showed up. It was, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore<sup>20</sup> has argued, a rehearsal of freedom, a rehearsal of what could be.

**VP: Your reference to the Ibis cleaning workers evokes broader reflections on the intersectionality of struggles. On the one hand, we observe queer spaces that often remain predominantly white and, in some cases, reproduce forms of structural racism. On the other, migrant or racialized spaces may at times exhibit homophobic or transphobic attitudes. How might we move beyond this dichotomous framing? What strategies can be employed to dismantle both racist structures within queer communities and homo/transphobic structures within migrant or racialized communities, fostering coalitional forms of resistance?**

**FV:** You do have collectives of gay, queer, and trans people in Africa who are not following the white bourgeois ideology of gayness. Look at the very strong queer and lesbian community in South Africa<sup>21</sup> who fought against “corrective rape” – where men claimed that rape would make Black women heterosexual. That movement wasn’t NGO-based. Racialized queer and trans people have their own voices, and the way they fight belongs to them. White gays who show up saying, “It’s terrible what’s happening to you, we’ll teach you how to fight,” are rejected. People are aware of pinkwashing – like in Israel, where gay-friendly policies are built on anti-Muslim racism.

**VP: Your work engages with concepts such as art washing and pinkwashing. Could you elaborate on the relationship between oppressed communities and institutional funding? Given that many of these communities require financial support, visibility, and space, how do you reconcile the tension between the necessity of such support and the perception that radical critique might be considered a luxury?**

**FV:** Private foundations have realized they can offer residencies and exhibitions to racialized artists without threatening their own interests. It’s understandable that racialized artists, often precarious and seeking recognition, would accept these opportunities. While the art world is changing, for every artist who gains entry, thousands remain excluded. Art school budgets are being cut, curricula often remain Eurocentric, and the art market favors the “discovery” of singular artists – bearing in mind the problematic role that “discovery” has played in colonialism. Galleries and museums are frequently complicit in imperialism and genocide. Looting continues.

<sup>20</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore is a Black American scholar and activist whose work focuses on abolitionist theory, racial capitalism, and carceral geography. For indicative examples of her work, see Gilmore (2007, 2022).

<sup>21</sup> For an extended analysis on gender-based violence in South Africa, see Gqola 2015 and Lewis & Baderoon 2021. Additionally and more precisely for the corrective rape against lesbians, see Gaitho 2022 and Koraan & Geduld 2015. Furthermore, for an empowering archival project dedicated to the politics of exclusion and the LGBTQI+ struggles in South Africa, see Muholi 2018.

I understand everyone needs to eat, so, okay. But are we opening the door for others? Are we creating collectives? Do we truly understand how capitalism works? Do we realize why capitalism relies on the inclusion of a few and the exclusion of the many? How is it that, at the same time, a racialized artist is accepted while barbed wire is placed around refugee camps? How do we work with that contradiction? This is not a moral question; it's a political one. We started this conversation with Houria's exclusion from the HM conference. I was not excluded – I could have gone, right?

But I'm not going to accept my inclusion when a political comrade, a friend, is excluded. I don't think there is *one* single answer, but I do believe we must analyze the political economy at work. We need to understand why the systemic destruction of museums, historical, and archaeological sites in Gaza has not sparked outcry from major Western museums; why looting of African, Asian, and Islamic art continues; and why billionaires are creating art foundations.

I have said to friends that with our work (the broader work on representation, arts, and politics around the world) we have opened the door for fifty years of curating, that curators can launch careers, write books, and organize shows about decolonial artists and hidden histories, but it will be without us, and mostly without the oppressed. We've laid out ideas for fifty years of curating. That's that. A more important question for me is: What now? We know their game – some women, some queer folks, some racialized people will be invited to participate. Okay, that's that. But what do we do now? Isn't it time to imagine something else? To free ourselves from that hegemonic model? What should we try to build? I'm not focusing on those who accept the money and why not take the money and run, and do whatever you have to do with it. The most urgent question, I argue, especially in a context of genocide, is: What next?

For me, what matters is imagining the abolition of the museum<sup>22</sup> – an institution born in the colonial West of the 18th century and solidified during the age of imperialism. I want to return to an analysis of the political economy of art. Where is the money coming from? How does this private foundation fund itself? Through oil? Weapons? Plantations? We must study the economy of that world – how it operates. *We live in an extremely brutal, deeply cruel world, and we must constantly ask ourselves: how do we create solidarity?*

For a fellowship I received, I proposed the topic of the “post-museum.” What would its architecture look like? How would bodies enter and move through its space? What would its collection include, how would it function, and where would its funding come from? When we say we want a non-binary space, what does that actually look like? In what kind of space does my body enter and circulate?

As part of this fellowship, I curated a workshop in London with architects, where we developed three prototypes of the post-museum. In Paris, I

<sup>22</sup> See Vergès 2006; 2008; 2024.

brought together 40 young artists and activists and proposed that we create and stage a street theater performance around the theme: “The anticapitalist object of the museum.”<sup>23</sup> We had two days to produce it, using the principles of street theater – because street theater carries a strong history of political activism. We had to make explicit the difference between an object within an economy of exchange and affective relations, and an object within the market economy – shaped by speculation, private property, and the patriarchal law of inheritance.

One group represented the women and men who traffic in ideas and objects through an extractive economy. They were not to be portrayed as caricatures – the audience needed to see how they manipulate the language of inclusion and diversity. Another group represented those who produce the object, but held differing views: some wanted to sell it, some argued it should not be sold, and others insisted the knowledge and practices should be hidden to avoid being looted. Finally, there was the anti-capitalist group. They all wore black t-shirts with slogans I had written by hand: “Down with the capitalist merchant society!”, “Under the museum, history,” and other anti-capitalist messages.

Each group had to imagine and produce their part of the performance. I moved between them, reminding everyone what street theater is, what its historical importance has been, and how our performance could be staged in a market, on the street, or in a public square. The message needed to be immediately clear – people had to understand what we were addressing, right away. We had to be very explicit.

The public performance was beautiful. People who did not know each other, who came from different artistic practices, connected, laughed, reflected, and created an extraordinary piece of street theater. I could have organized a conference on the same topic and some of them would have come, but would they have intervened? There, they went on stage and spoke. How do we build autonomy?

**VP: You have offered a strong critique of state feminism, white feminism, and carceral feminism. However, I would like to bring attention to the perspectives of the families of victims. In some cases, abolitionist feminist approaches may propose alternatives to the prison system, yet the victims’ families often seek punishment or even revenge. How do you engage with this complexity? And, as a final and more hopeful reflection, how do you understand abolition as a political project rooted in hope?**

**FV:** Yeah, well, I understand revenge – the desire for revenge. Tragedies have been written around that feeling, which can be very strong. I cannot tell you exactly what kind of “punishment” that is not carceral punishment. In some societies, when someone committed what the community perceived as

<sup>23</sup> For further information on the performance “The anticapitalist object of the museum”, see <https://www.citedesartsparis.net/en/restitution-atelier-et-performance-lanticapitalisme-et-lobjet-du-musee>.

a crime – an attack on the community – they were expelled. The idea was that, alone, they couldn't survive. If you attack the community, you attack yourself. I will not survive by myself.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls “rehearsals of life,” these collective moments when a space of freedom is created in a world of unfreedom, an autonomous space where to find solidarity, mutual aid, rest, discussion, joy. *The aspiration for liberation, peace, and justice never dies*. Never, ever, ever, ever, ever. It's always there. Every day, I wake up and learn that somewhere in the world, in many parts of the world, people are standing up and fighting back. This is the politics of hope, of radical hope.

## References

- Allan, Diana, ed. 2021. *Voices of the Nakba: A Living History of Palestine*. Afterword by Rosemary Sayigh. London: Pluto Press.
- Bouteldja, Houria. 2017. *Whites, Jews, and Us: Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love*, trans. Rachel Valinsky. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Césaire, Aimé. 2010. *Letter to Maurice Thorez*, trans. Clayton Jeffers. *Social Text* 28 (2): 103–110. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2009-072>
- Gaitho, Wanjiru. 2022. *Curing Corrective Rape: Socio-Legal Perspectives on Sexual Violence Against Black Lesbians in South Africa*. *William & Mary Journal of Race, Gender, and Social Justice* 28(2): 329–357. <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wm-jowl/vol28/iss2/3>
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2022. *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation*, ed. Brenna Harney. London, New York: Verso.
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2007. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gqola, Pumla Dineo. 2015. *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. Johannesburg: MF Books Joburg.
- Koraan, Raudhah, and Alicia Geduld. 2015. “Corrective Rape of Lesbians in the Era of Transformative Constitutionalism in South Africa.” *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 18 (5): 1930–1952. <https://doi.org/10.4314/pej.v18i5.23>
- Lewis, Desiree, and Gabeba Baderoon, eds. 2021. *Surfacing: On Being Black and Feminist in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Masalha, Nur. 2012. *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*. London; New York: Zed Books.
- Muholi, Zanele. 2018. *Zanele Muholi: Somnyama Ngonyama, Hail the Dark Lioness*. New York: Aperture.
- Veracini, Lorenzo. 2021. *The World Turned Inside Out: Settler Colonialism as a Political Idea*. London, New York: Verso.
- Vergès, Françoise. 2024. *A Programme of Absolute Disorder: Decolonizing the Museum*, foreword by Paul Gilroy, trans. Melissa Thackway. London: Pluto Press.
- Vergès, Françoise. 2022. *A Feminist Theory of Violence: A Decolonial Perspective*. Trans. Melissa Thackway. London: Pluto Press.
- Vergès, Françoise. 2021. *A Decolonial Feminism*. Trans. Ashley J. Dublet. London: Pluto Press.
- Vergès, Françoise. 2020. *The Wombs of Women: Race, Capital, Feminism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Interview

- Vergès, Françoise. 2015. "Cartographies of Memory, Politics of Emancipation." *At the Limits of Memory: Legacies of Slavery in the Francophone World*, 229–247.
- Vergès, Françoise. 2010. "'There Are No Blacks in France': Fanonian Discourse, 'the Dark Night of Slavery' and the French Civilizing Mission Reconsidered." *Theory, Culture & Society* 27 (7–8): 91–111.
- Vergès, Françoise. 2008. "Methodology for a Creole Museum: For a Postcolonial Museum of the Living Present." In Jennifer Trant and David Bearman, eds., *Museums and the Web 2008: Proceedings*. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2008/papers/verges/verges.html>
- Vergès, Françoise. 2006. "Creolization and the *Maison des civilisations et de l'unité réunionnaise*." *Journal of Visual Culture* 5(1): 29–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412906058359>
- Vergès, Françoise. 1999. *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Wolfe, Patrick. 2016. *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*. London; New York: Verso.

## After August 2020: Stories of LGBT+ People in Belarus

**T**hese interviews were recorded in 2020 after the elections in Belarus. These are very different stories – some talk about experiences of detention and violence, others about their relationship with parents, participation in protests (or their choice not to participate), support, hope, experiences of emigration, visibility and invisibility, and homophobia among protesters. These are all different facets of the same story of how the LGBT+ community is experiencing the socio-political crisis our shared country has plunged into.

Now, as the crackdown in Belarus continues and we learn of new detentions every day, for safety reasons we publish these stories without names. Each story is titled with a separate number. All but the last story are recorded interviews and the seventh is a written text about finding one's place and visibility, which unfortunately also has to be published anonymously. One day we will be able to sign our names to all these texts, but for now, we hope – as a hero of one of the interviews said – that this forced anonymity can also provide a sense of universality and the possibility of seeing ourselves in these stories.

### The First Story

#### I

I was detained near Minsk Hero City Obelisk on August 11, we live there. I was just walking home from work, and I was detained. Some guy and a girl went ahead without problems. But I was detained. When I first got into the police van, I still had a small hope that they would let me go – as they say, «nobody wanted to die.» You don't know what will happen, but you think – most likely, yes, you will be imprisoned, beaten, and so on.

And so it happened. In total, I was sentenced to 13 days, and I did three of them. First, we were taken to one police department, then to another. In both

---

The author of this project is not disclosed for security reasons. The original text (in Belarusian and Russian), as well as the German translation, can be found here: <https://feminist.krytyka.com/ru/articles/posle-avgusta-2020-istorii-lgbt-lyudey-v-belarusi>

© Anonymous author 2026

© Anton Klimovich (translation) 2026

© ISSN 2524–2733 *Feminist Critique: East European Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies*, 7 (2026): 49–72, <http://feminist.krytyka.com>.

police departments, we were treated roughly. I was ready for this mentally, but it turned out that not physically. I mean, I can, of course, do some ordinary things, but I can't stand on my knees for hours with my hands behind my head, face to the floor.

We spent one night in Okrestina. The camera is 4x4 meters in size, maybe a little more. Seventy-eight people in a 4x4 cell under the open sky – we could not lie down or sit down normally. And in the corner, there was a shit hole. We tried to sit so that everyone could sleep. It was impossible – someone had to stand while others were sleeping. At that moment, people were being beaten up in the yard. They were screaming all night, and you didn't know if they were the same people or not. And if so, how can one still stay alive? Then we heard that probably they were different people. More and more new people were brought in, and they stood on their knees in the yard at night with their heads on the floor, because there was no place for them. And if someone moved – everyone was beaten, it feels like they were beaten half to death.

## II

If you are detained for the first time, the very beginning is the hardest part. It was very difficult in the police department. Most of all the humiliations in the police department happened before they wrote the detention report. If they didn't like something, they beat us. I was not beaten, but they treated me cruelly and threatened to beat me. There was a moment when I had to go up to the fifth floor, and either a riot policeman or someone else humiliated me while leading me up so I asked him to stop. Your shoelaces have already been taken away, you stumble, try to adjust your pace, but he starts walking faster, then slower, in the end, I could not walk at all, he pulled me, tilted me to the stairs so that I stepped on my hair. I realized that he was doing this on purpose to humiliate me. It was the toughest moment.

There was also a moment when they were writing the detention report. I was forced to lie down on the floor. The door in the room is open, you are lying flat on the floor, people are walking back and forth, and they are stepping over you. It was quite strange. They probably found something on my phone – a gay dating app or some messages, and one of them said: «Oh, so you're one of those!» – and hit me in the ear once or twice. It wasn't very painful, but it was unexpected. I mean, I was lying face down, and he just suddenly hit me. I didn't say anything. I was not afraid then that they would find out that I was LGBT. But they were probably trying to tease me to see my reaction. «Oh, are you one of those? Well, then you'd better not get into prison...» But whether because of a large crowd of people, or because it didn't bother me, I don't know for what reason, but I didn't get some special treatment towards me further.

## III

The scariest moment was when I didn't know what was going on. I expected that we would be mistreated in the police department and in Okrestina, I heard all of it before and understood what was going to happen. I mean,

it was not too hard for me emotionally. The way they beat people in the yard in Okrestina – it, of course, clearly confirmed that we heard a real nightmare happening. But I had already heard even about this. But when we were taken to some gym class after the police department, it looked like a kidnapping, as if we would be taken to some forest and shot. That was scary. Mentally, I assumed that «everything is fine», it's just some stage that I hadn't heard about, but panic began to creep in inside. I still don't really know where it was.

In the gym class, they laid us flat on the floor, tied our hands, and so we had to lie like this. Obviously, you need to sleep, but whether you can sleep or not depends on the way your hands are tied. You might be lucky or you might not. One guy's hands were tied so tight that he could not feel his fingers afterward. I tried to make it look as if [the zip tie] had accidentally loosened... I could do it.

There was also a moment in the beginning when they put us on the floor and said: «If you need water or to go to the toilet, raise your hand. Any questions?» I raise my hand and ask: «For how long are we detained?» And before that, we were told the rules. If someone breaks them, we all get up and stand on our knees. And so he tells everyone to get up. Questions are not allowed. Did you want something? Here, take it, now everyone is punished. It feels like they are trying to tell you that you have no right to anything. That they have absolute authority.

We spent the night lying on this gym class floor, and the next day they woke us, lined us up against the wall, and made us sing the anthem. If people hesitated, they were beaten. At first, it was hard for me to stand, but at some point, I felt like I got a second wind. I don't even know how it happened, but at one moment I just couldn't stand it, and at another – nothing hurts anymore. Then I could stand, I could stand with my head on the floor, near the wall, and, if necessary, on my knees.

Then we were taken to Okrestina.

#### IV

There was a moment in Okrestina that I didn't share almost with anyone. We were kept in the yard for a long time, for two hours, maybe more, until they put us in a cell. There was no ceiling in it, there were bars at the top. The cell was about 5x5 or 4x4 meters in size, maybe a little more. In the corner, there was a shit hole, just a gutter with holes in the concrete floor. No one could think that that was the toilet. At first, you think – well, they will take us to the toilet. I thought so. But it turned out that that was the shit hole, and you needed to take care of your needs there. Later we counted that there were 78 of us in this cell. We couldn't fit there together at night. There were, of course, no beds; nothing, just a concrete floor and concrete walls. This gutter was not separated from us in any way; no one, of course, wanted to sit there. And we probably spent three hours trying to arrange ourselves so that everyone would fit. We tried in different ways: back to back, not to lean against a cold wall, but against each other. But there was not enough space. We tried to put

one slipper under the ass, and put our feet on the other, and sit this way. It didn't really work out either. Then we sat at each other's feet. That was probably the best way to fit, but still someone had to stand. And so we changed, someone was sleeping, someone was standing, well, we were dozing, it's impossible to sleep properly there. The whole night someone was being beaten in the yard, and we heard all those screams. And then a guy who was sitting behind me hugged me. And I also hugged the guy who was in front. And we were sitting there like that. It was so calm. In this world where everything attacks you, you still find yourself in this cell. It was sad. But at the same time, I felt such happiness. We are alive.

## V

I think I will leave the country. I want to find a job and go abroad. Why did I, in particular, decide to leave? My parents support Lukashenko. They voted for Lukashenko. There was always a lot of pressure from my mother, all these conversations, «What don't you like here?», etc. The fact that my mother supports Lukashenko felt like a betrayal in a certain sense. This is your mother, she teaches you some basic things, like, what is good and what is bad. I'm probably still so naive to think that there are some obvious truths, for example, that beating people is clearly bad, and that the absence of development in the country is bad. But she... «It was so awful in the 90s, we survived such things...» And you don't know what to say to that.

I went to my hometown to vote. My parents voted early, and I voted on election day. There was an opportunity to vote in Minsk, but I decided that it would make it easier to steal my vote, so I went home. I hadn't been to my school in a very long time. It was a little awkward and scary to come there and vote, maybe to see my teachers and know that they were likely to fake votes. Before that, I found out on the Internet that my class teacher is the secretary of the commission. I was determined to express my resentment. I went there and intended to take a picture of the ballot, no matter what will happen. And so I move cautiously along the hall to the tables, expecting that now everyone will stop me, prevent me from taking pictures or something else, and it will be my teachers. But my class teacher saw me, came up, and we talked for quite a long time. It turned out that she didn't support Lukashenko, knew about the protests, about what had happened in 2010. I asked her directly if they were faking votes, and she said no. I felt an absolute connection with her, mutual support, we hugged at the end, and it was very pleasant as if we were «on the same side». Only later I saw that the votes between Tikhonovskaya and Lukashenko were distributed more or less equally in my voting district. I could believe in such results. Later, when I saw stickers saying «Teachers are traitors» around the city, it hurt me. Of course, I can agree that, probably, many people forged votes... But my teachers turned out to be normal. And this makes me cry. But on the other hand, this is normal. This should be normal.

With my parents, I don't feel that «we are on the same side» at all. I even felt more tenderness for that teacher as a mother figure than for my actual

mother. I love my parents, but at the same time, they are my enemies. They think that being gay is not normal. They reacted to my activism saying «when will you stop doing this nonsense»? And to the fact that I always wanted to make games – «when will you finally find a normal job»? They were literally against everything that was interesting to me. We've always had this kind of relationship with them, like, «we don't accept you.» I thought that I would come out and something would change, but it didn't happen. They have always been hostile to my interests, and to my sexual identity. And my coming out didn't change that. Now, maybe, I feel a bit less hostility, but only because I try not to raise this subject at all.

Yes, they came to meet me after I was released. They started communicating with my boyfriend to «know how I am doing.» After my release, we all sat together in a cafe, and it was a «family reunion», but nevertheless they still continued to support Lukashenko, and made sure that I did not go out to protests. My mother called every night, asked me not to go out. I tried to argue and ignore it... After my release, I was invited for a «preventive talk». I know I didn't have to go there, I told her I didn't have to go. The climax was that my mother went there herself with my father to tell them that «he did not participate in anything, but he will come to you.» And she continued to put pressure on me – go, go. She called me, pressured me, and then, probably, against such a background, I fainted. At night I got up, went to the toilet, and lost consciousness. My boyfriend was not sleeping at that time, he saw that I was lying... I was lying on the floor convulsing. When I fell, I hit a wall, then it turned out that I had a cracked rib and a closed fracture. And this was the last straw for me. I thought that it was necessary to leave – this is a direct attack when there is damage to your health.

\* \* \*

We met with the guy who hugged me that day in Okrestina and talked for a while. We stayed in touch. It turned out that he was pansexual. It's like a magic story. I've kind of decided to leave, and then it's like, «hi, there's still life here.» In fact, it's an incredible, magical story. Like, how did it happen, what is it? Sometimes it seems to me that you get a lot of things you want when you no longer need them in your life. And this injustice makes me sad. What for? Why? How to react to this?

## The Second Story

### I

When N. was detained, we still did not have all the information, we did not fully understand what was happening. Our friend passed us the news by text messages from Poland. And this feeling when you don't know what to do – feed the cat or something else – you are ready to tear yourself apart to help somehow, although at that time, let's put it this way, N. was not the closest person to me. And then each detention was like that. It reminded COVID:

at first, it was «someone out there». Someone out there got sick – someone out there got detained. My friend knows someone who got sick – my friend knows someone who got detained. Then the circle narrowed and narrowed, and you realized that there were practically no people left in your environment who had not been detained. And then... It's like you're getting used to it. The indignation doesn't last that long anymore. And you're happy if it's just a fine. Or just wait out these days in detention.

It's very scary that you get used to it. You notice these feelings: someone has been detained again, but you are calmer than before. It's like a child who gets used to violence in an abusive household – the same can happen here. When I realized this, I thought – okay, that's how defense mechanisms work now, but that doesn't mean I'm giving up.

## II

The two things you care about when you are detained are the march reaching its destination and your loved ones worrying about you too much. You sleep for short periods, you doze, you think about your relatives, and it feels like you're reading your feed, you wonder if your friends at the protest were dispersed. You stand and sleep standing up, you remember your yoga instructor when you practiced something in one position. Or when it's cold, you remember camping and think: well, it's been even colder once. Clinging to something to bear it. And you just try to support each other.

It's hard when you don't know the rules. You don't know where they're taking you, what's going on, you can't call your loved ones. They are told that you are not in the Okrestina prison. They're going to Zhodino<sup>1</sup> when in fact I'm where they were told I wasn't. When you get to a police department, first they tell you «don't keep your hands under cold water for so long, you might catch a cold.» And then they put you on the goddamn concrete floor for four hours, when you can lie only with your sneakers under your kidneys.

If you think that when you are detained there is some certain procedure for registration in the police department, and then you are transferred to some particular place, and there is some kind of daily routine, then 15 days pass, and you get out the same person as you got there – you're wrong.

After the detention, at first, it seemed to me that now it would be less scary. But I remember going to the following march and realizing that I was damn wrong. It seems like I'm okay, but the slightest movement of the riot police or seeing someone run – and something twitches inside me immediately. I almost reached the end, and when the plain police clothes ran near the Opera House, I was standing near some bench and just sat down, lit a cigarette, and realized that I was wrong when I thought that it would be less scary now. Then I walked to the subway station. It seems like you're just walking down the street, no longer in a protest crowd, there are no ribbons, no flags, noth-

<sup>1</sup> Zhodino and Okrestina are pretrial detention centers, the first in the city of the same name around 50 kilometers outside of Minsk, and the second is in the capital.

ing – and you’re still not sure whether you’ll get to the subway or not. You get scared by every passing minibus, I mean, even a security guard inside a store triggers such a reaction. There will be such consequences, and we just have to decide how to deal with them.

### III

When people joined the first Sunday march – it was an incredible, mind-boggling sight. There are so many of us! But the sense of community did not come immediately. I’ll be honest, my life had been showing me that it was every man for himself. Probably, it was only with the beginning of COVID that it began to feel that if some accident happens, you can count on someone. But when you haven’t experienced it for a long time, it’s very difficult to believe it.

At first, I had a feeling that there are these people and there is me, and they are kind of together, and I am «kind of» as well. But I didn’t have this feeling of solidarity and community. It began to appear when people started smiling at each other on the street. It was very unusual.

I probably believed it after Okrestina, when I was released – and someone brought me coffee, a blanket, offered to sit down<sup>2</sup>. And I didn’t seem to need it then, I was okay, but still... It was the first time in that period that I burst into tears. All that brutality that was going on before horrified me, but I hadn’t had this emotion – I hadn’t cried. It turns out that in the end I was more impressed by the second side – kindness, mutual assistance... As if violence is something you prepare for and expect. These days in detention, the arrest, all such moments are not very pleasant, but it was easier to «put up with» them than with this cup of coffee given to you on the street when you’re ready to burst into tears just from the fact that it’s happening.

People are probably the most striking thing to me. It seemed to me that with such people you would be definitely taken care of. There is such an exercise when you fall backward from some elevated place, and people catch you. It’s still very hard for me, but I think I could «fall» with such people. It’s as if you already see it with your own eyes but still can’t believe that it can be so. But in the end, you start to trust... Trust people, and in general trust life.

## The Third Story

### I

When it all started back in April [COVID-19 – editor’s note], I was in quarantine for a long time, apathy and impotence accumulated, and at some point, I felt that I had to do a lot to somehow compensate for all the time when I was in «suspended animation». So began my return to life. At first, I sewed medi-

<sup>2</sup> Outside Okrestina, volunteers established a camp where they offered medical, legal, and psychological aid to released detainees. Read more: <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/08/19/the-mutual-aid-corridor>

cal masks<sup>3</sup>, then I joined Food Not Bombs<sup>4</sup>, I began to get more and more used to risks (as practice has shown, you can get detained for giving away meals), and I understood that I was mostly ready to participate in something.

On August 10, I was where the action was. When I got too scared, I left, then came back, brought water, and left again – I ran around like that. And when, a month later, I read about the violence experienced by the detainees that day, I realized how miraculously I managed to avoid something horrendous. Going there wasn't some rational decision, it was made mostly out of guilt. On August 9, we were walking with a friend, and she wanted to go to the protests, but I was too scared. I walked her to an intersection, and I kind of go and understand that, on the one hand, I want to drop everything and go, and on the other hand, there's a voice inside: no, they'll kill you, stay the fuck away from there. And I turned around and went home. I was ashamed, I blamed myself very much for not going with her. The next day I decided – here goes nothing – I'm going out.

It was hard to stay away. I couldn't sleep, I think many couldn't. I was rushing around my apartment, but I could hear everything from the balcony, and even if I closed the door, I still could hear everything. I understood that I was going to go crazy there, there was no Internet connection, and you couldn't get distracted anyhow. And I didn't want to be distracted, I couldn't. And I decided to go, among other things, to find some semblance of inner peace. I'm outside – and that's it, I'm here, where I should be, everything is over, I can breathe out. Without hesitation.

## II

All this time I had thoughts of bringing queerness to the protest. Even before the queer block, my friend and I went out with a small banner «Pussyboys and sheep support the miners»<sup>5</sup> with a reference to the movement «Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners». It did not draw attention; except for us

<sup>3</sup> During the beginning of COVID pandemic in Belarus, Lukashenko declined to institute measures to restrict movement and mass gatherings, there was not enough PPE in hospitals, and many regular people and organizations joined a nationwide effort to help hospitals and doctors: <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarusians-colunteer-coronavirus-lukashenko-plays-down-covid-19-threat/30594557.html>

<sup>4</sup> Food, not Bombs is a worldwide movement that gives away food for those in need free of charge (e.g., in the form of vegan meals). The movement is closely related to anarchist and anti-capitalist ideas. As in many other countries in the world, it is also criminalized in Belarus: <https://freedomnews.org.uk/2021/01/28/belarus-food-not-bombs-activists-receive-prison-sentences-for-giving-away-food/?fbclid=IwAR0ZGGzoJ8lmYHw88rRVgn-P0o1Feyp-4mwoyITllyOSc67ZXq2qgkalf-II>

<sup>5</sup> «Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners» was a protest movement in Great Britain in the 1980s in which gay and lesbian activists publicly supported the miners' strikes. During the protests in Belarus, this banner was used to express the support of the striking workers. "Pussyboy" (originally "rooster" from Russian "петух") is a derogatory term for gay men mainly associated with prison hierarchy, it has been used by prison personnel and police to humiliate detainees. "Sheep" is a derogatory term that governmental media used to depreciate women taking part in the protests.

and our friends, no one understood this reference, but we were proud of ourselves that we came out with such a queer banner.

A couple of weeks later, we were already walking with the queer block<sup>6</sup>. The first time was the scariest – we were a very bright, attention-grabbing group, and if before that I could somehow blend in with the crowd, then there was no such opportunity. In any case, you are the center of attention, as if you have a target on your back, and you are simply at the mercy of the crowd. Fortunately, everything was fine. And now I remember it not as «God, what a fool I was, it was so scary,» but rather with joy and pride.

I am proud and glad that, despite all the hate, we have introduced this agenda. And I don't doubt for a second that it was the right decision. I noticed that there were different approaches to introducing this agenda. Someone was promoting the idea that the oppression that all Belarusians are experiencing now is how we have always felt. This approach is not quite close to mine. Yes, it is important, but for me, it was not the most important aspect.

For me, it was important to convey that we exist, we are also part of the protest, we are not some group of people who are always «on the outside» and suddenly appear when they need something, but who are always close, who have their social stance, even if «you don't know about it.» It was important for me to identify myself. As it was important for students to identify themselves, or pensioners, or miners, by analogy, as in any case when there is a social group with strong social ties within it which makes it possible to unite and represent a greater force than everyone by themselves. And that's great.

I'm sure only a few understood the banner «How are we going to explain OMON to our children?» Probably more than «Pussyboys and sheep support miners», but still not as much as we would like. Some said, «Why are you comparing?» (it is simple to explain queerness to children, but not OMON, the riot police). And we explained that that was a kind of mirroring. I understand that the meaning was understood only by those who heard this phrase a thousand times in their address. But I'm okay with this joke being only for the inner circle.

### III

I felt part of the protest even when I didn't identify myself as a queer person or wasn't part of the queer block. Queer is part of my identity, but not all of it, so it was okay for me not to label myself. It was interesting for me to be there in both aspects.

I didn't shout the slogan about «sucker pussyboys», addressed to the police, but I didn't feel any intense aggression or sadness because everyone used it. I understood that people can repeat hate speech without analyzing it, without processing all its meanings, and I was ready to turn a blind eye to the correctness of their vocabulary, realizing that we have one common goal.

<sup>6</sup> Read more: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2020/11/10/the-rainbow-colours-flying-together-with-the-white-red-white-flags-the-belarusian-lgbt-community-at-protests/>

I had different emotions about the slogan «Long live Belarus!», as it is, essentially, a nationalist slogan. I've been shouting it all my life, but now I've started to rethink it, and at some moments I didn't shout it, but at some I still did – as if it rose above the nationalist idea and became just a protest slogan. Like the white-red-white flag. My favorite slogan is «Put prison trucks to prison trucks». I sometimes shouted «Put Lukashenko to a prison truck», but then I thought – I'm against prisons. And on the other hand, it's just an expression of aggression. And it is normal to feel aggression, it is normal and important to express it. But I'm against prisons. And it was also a fluid sensation. And then when I heard «Put prison trucks to prison trucks», later I used only it. It perfectly expressed both anger and some kind of ideological rationale.

#### IV

I started to process these fears [of detention – editor's note] back in June 2020, at one point I was discussing it with my girlfriend and just sobbed at the thought that I could go to prison, that I (with the gender marker changed to male in my ID) would be totally fucked up there. Probably because I went through all this horror and grief at the beginning of summer – in September, when I was deciding whether to go or not to go, I didn't think whether I would pass or not and how it would affect me. I relied more on irrational feelings: whether I was scared or not, anxious or calm. It was more of an emotional decision. It seems to me that one decides to participate in protests largely relying on emotions. Today I'm not very scared – I'll go, today I'm very scared – I won't go.

When my trans friend was detained, I felt guilty that we were not detained together. This is the survivor's guilt. I worried about him. Of course, it was very scary – you can imagine what kind of special treatment one might get. And he did. It was important for me to know every little detail about what had happened to him in order to imagine what could have happened to me. And, probably, due to the fact that I thought a lot about it in June, imagined myself in the worst scenarios (rape, physical violence, etc.), when I didn't read about it happening to him, I felt some relief. Like, it's fucked up, but not as much as I imagined. He was released. It is clear that he will have nightmares about it all his life, but at least he's physically intact. After that, I began to feel a little less anxiety. No matter how terrible, wrong and inhumane this treatment was, it seemed that I could take that risk.

#### V

After two marches with the queer block, I felt an attack of decadence. Several of my friends were detained in other marches, and since then my activity in terms of taking to the streets has dropped very much. I went to another march when many people from the queer block were detained. We had been walking with the protest crowd for 5 minutes, and that was it. I was already in a very tired mood then. After that, I returned to other risky things only in December. And then I was in a much more depressed state. But all the

same, it rather supported me. I compare myself with other people from queer activism who publicly write about their moods, and I feel that no matter what, I still have more hope that not everything is gone. I think this is due to the actions that I did, which gave me strength, despite the fact that they were risky.

Despite all the horrors that happened in the world, 2020 is a very cool year for me. I participated in life and felt that I was doing useful things. I found new friends, and the protests helped me to get in better contact with my aggression. Without exaggerating, without trying to philosophically justify the benefits of something bad in my life, I really say with joy and confidence that I finished that year with the advantages and acquisitions, and I continue to receive them because nothing is over yet. Many people say about themselves: «Me a year ago and me now are two different people.» I feel it very strongly. A lot of radically new things happened in my personal life, I never thought before that I would dare or allow myself to do something like that. And I think that the whole year is like a transformational wave that pushes you and helps you to change yourself and do something new – not necessarily good or bad, it's unclear how to evaluate it, just something qualitatively new.

### The Fourth Story

I left Belarus on the first days of the August events. People around me managed to convince me that it was not safe for me to stay, that the government would change and we would face trial. And I fled. I fled from the proponents of changes when I first left in August, and six months later I ran away from the adherents of the «dying era».

I felt like a part of the system for a very long time. Until August 2020, I did not support the movement of changes. I understood that the people who took to the streets did not know what they protested against. By virtue of my work, I understood what kind of regime we had very well. All disloyal people were removed 15 years ago. And therefore, the more euphoria there was, the scarier it became for me.

In a sense, I think this is due to the «Stockholm syndrome», when a naturally weak and vulnerable person appears on the side of strength and begins to feel secure, and confident in their position. This, of course, greatly affects our assessment of reality. Therefore, before this snarl of the era, before the terrible events of August, unprecedented violence, and the subsequent deep humanitarian and political crisis, I was not on the side of those who wanted changes. I was on the side of the passing era. I was convinced that we could achieve everything through evolution – do you really want to say that nothing is happening in this country and nothing is changing? This is not true. I believed in it very sincerely. But today I do not share this position. I suffered in many ways just because I was very close to this system. Because, of course, such «betrayal» and «infidelity» (in the terms of the regime) are severely punished.

I didn't see a single reasonable solution offered by the passing era and was very disappointed. There were many opportunities to make at least one

sensible step toward the people. They were not some political party, not an opposition. They were very different people, with very different views. I have not seen any steps towards the evolution that I once really hoped for. A lot of things started to change in me. In September, I received an invitation to attend a theater festival in Ukraine. And my employers forbade me to leave. I took another vacation. It was clear to everyone where I would go on this vacation.

Basically, that was the moment when there appeared a split between me and the system. Upon my return, I was blamed for that, it was regarded as a betrayal. And they began to perceive me as «ideologically unsteady». It was a counter-revolution, the revenge of the passing era. «Other people» were simply no longer needed. And this, of course, greatly affected me.

There had been a time of «multi-vector efficiency» when «other» people were needed for showing off («we also have this»). It was so disgusting for me to hear people commenting on me saying «let us have one official...» (faggot, they meant), and yet it was still some degree of freedom. I gained the greatest possible share of freedom for myself, being in this system, having access to its resources, and using them for some other purposes, far from just performing ideological functions. I have been inside this system, and I understand that these structures (the Academy of Arts, the Academy of Music, the Ministry of Culture) are completely useless, but for performing ideological functions at the right moment, at ideological gunpoint – as it has happened now. But I understand that I was not there for it. I had other goals. All the years of my work in this field, I advanced a completely different theater, I promoted something completely different. Being in this system, I was able to gain for myself the position where I could remain myself as much as possible. It was also possible because such people were necessary, they needed to have such «cards» in their deck. Now they are no longer needed. Now such people can be thrown away.

It is interesting that my break with the state system was not connected with any specific event, I was not blamed for any specific activity during the events of August or subsequent events. I was blamed for the fact that everything I had done before was wrong. The performances that I promoted, the texts that I wrote, everything that I did was «purposeful undermining of the ideology».

The management wanted to dismiss me because of the «loss of trust» related to «non-compliance with the instructions of the State Security Committee». I managed to get fired at the end of the contract. I didn't want to be fired for a political reason. I think, why? Probably, it was impossible for me, because I regarded it as the result of some period of my life. And I didn't want to be assessed this way. I didn't deserve it. I wanted us to part ways for some neutral reason.

When my employment was over at the end of the year, I left for Ukraine. It was very difficult for me, even in mundane tasks – I had no money, I moved a lot, I did not have any certainty there. It was such a big difference compared to my life before that. People who knew me as a fairly successful person in the

profession now saw me as someone who came to ask for help, for temporary residence. In total, I lived in Ukraine for a month. I lived in a house with a glass veranda, a light came through it, but there was no window in the room where I lived. All of it affected me very hard. I was there all alone. This brought me to such a state that I began to have involuntary nervous breakdowns, I began to cry, I was losing my breath and could not stop.

In the end, having celebrated the New Year in a hostel in Kyiv and having drunk a bottle of champagne, I realized that I was leaving for Minsk the following day. On January 1, in the evening, I left for Minsk on the last Minsk-trans bus.

I'm safe now. I'm doing pretty well. But the most terrible thought for me today is that it seems to me that I have nowhere else to go back to. That I have nothing else to do in Belarus. Of course, I want to have the right to return to my family, to the people close to me who stayed there. I would like to return to Minsk because this is the city where I have lived all my life.

What is happening now in Belarus greatly devalues my life, its various spheres. When it is a challenge to the academic theater, the Belarusian theater school, when it is a challenge to the entire civil sector – this is a very personal challenge for me. It feels as if the world is collapsing. As if everything around is.

I feel a lot of pain and loss. I came to the theater very consciously, at a fairly mature age, I gave up a lot, gave everything to this profession, and it was as if I had lost everything. My whole life was there – my personal life, all my plans. It turns out that I was forced to leave the profession. And if we talk about the state system – I came out of there with one suitcase, I didn't earn anything, I didn't get anything. I left Belarus with this very suitcase, and that's it... I have nothing else.

I was thinking, why is anonymity important to me? Because it seems that everything is already in the past. Probably due to the same reason why it was important to me that I was not fired because of the «loss of trust». I can't break the connection with that time. For me, saying such things openly means breaking up with the past. I don't have the strength to do it, at least not now. At the same time, anonymity in this very individual story which has not very popular and typical references still feels multipurpose in a certain way – it shows that there are people with such a view, with such an experience as well. People who found themselves in the system and felt like a part of it, and having experienced this revolution inside themselves, they completely left this system.

## The Fifth Story

### I

Both sides called each other «faggots». I don't remember a single word that was used so often and with such anger, meaning the utmost degree of inhumanity.

I remember when I was detained, my cellmates «discussed» LGBTQ+ issues now and again, of course, in a negative way. And I was so scared, hurt, and bitter, although this is not the first time, and it's far from the last one, but it seems impossible to get used to it. And you can't get away from these conversations, because you are locked together. We seem to protest for the same goal, detained for the same thing, but still. I didn't tell them anything because I was afraid to mess things up. I was in social isolation within social isolation.

I was kind of hurt by the fact that this is said by people who are on board with us. So even if this regime falls, we will still have problems. I saw the comments under the photos with rainbow flags. «Why did you take to the streets? We don't support you.» And it's young people who write this. You understand that you still have to live with these people in the same society, in same Belarus – new or old – and you understand that they are not with you. They see a new progressive Belarus in their own way. And it seems there is no place for us there, or we should just sit in the corner and do nothing («do whatever you want behind closed doors»). These comments are not just the way people talk on social networks. These are real people who really think that and really say that. And I heard it, I saw it, I was in detention with them.

## II

I was detained on November 13. When I was in prison, my mother wrote to me that my cousin gave birth to her son. On the day of my detention. I was detained, and somewhere out there my nephew was born.

When I've seen the news about Roman Bondarenko's death, I went to the Square of Changes<sup>7</sup>, lit a candle, put flowers... and the next day we were going to do something with my fellow students: to go out to the entrance of the dormitory, turn on flashlights on the phones, chat, and share emotions. I went out, and there was no one out there. I went to our second dormitory – there was no one there either. And then I don't know what got into me, but I went to the Bison monument. I thought if no one would be there, I wouldn't remain there. I was very nervous then – when you receive such shitty news all the time, you realize that today it is him, and tomorrow it is you or your friend. So I went there, and there were three women standing there. Ordinary respectable women. We turned on our flashlights, we didn't shout anything, didn't say anything, I didn't even talk to them. 10-15 minutes passed, then a blue minibus arrived. I tried to leave – but I was grabbed by my hand and put in that minibus.

In Okrestina, the doctor asked if I had any chronic diseases. I said that I have depression and anxiety. What do you take? I replied. And she's like, well, we don't have that. In short, I had a two-week break from my medications. I was afraid that I would feel super-bad, but probably my body had mobilized

<sup>7</sup> The Square of Changes is a backyard in Minsk, which since August 18, 2020 has become the center of remembrance for the victims of state repression and the protest movement. Read more: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Square\\_of\\_Changes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Square_of_Changes)

a little. And I turned all these forces, all the anger into survival energy – I just had to survive.

On adrenaline, I wanted to laugh. I felt derealization. It seemed like it wasn't real, as if I was watching some movie. My brain coped this way. You wake up, and you want to rub your eyes and wake up again. It's a shame my detention was so stupid: not for a big march, not for some kind of super-action, but for a chain of solidarity made of five people. We didn't even have flags, posters, or anything. But they wrote in their reports that we were standing with posters and flags, shouting «Long live Belarus», disturbing everyone, and were super-dangerous. I pleaded not guilty, but no one was interested in it.

I was sentenced to 15 days of detention.

We got to Mogilev in a police van in a «stakan» [*a single-prisoner cubicle – translator's note*] one meter by one meter – and there were two of us, three of us there. We arrived, and again I had to undress. They scanned each item with a metal detector, every piece of clothing, even my mask. It wasn't enough just to undress and squat – you had to turn around, stick out your tongue, show your heels, elbows – everything was scanned and viewed. We haven't eaten for more than a day. We were taken for a walk just once. We didn't shower for two weeks – somehow we endured it all.

While we were in detention, the guys talked and talked. I don't remember what exactly, but they said something so offensive, something so untrue. Things like «I'm not a homophobe, but...» When they say that, they feel free and confident. They can say it and feel that the majority supports them. They think that you are also «on their side», that you will support them, that everyone thinks so too. I wanted to say to them, well, here I am doing time with you, I am like you, a normal good guy, we get along... but we still have to spend here many days, and if something goes wrong, then it's over. Of course, they won't put me near the shithole and won't spit on me, but who knows what they will do and what they will say. Because I can't go out for a walk while they're there discussing «if gays are humans or not.» And you understand that the people who are on your side, who fight for everything good and pure, for our victory – when everything is over, they will be against us anyway. And whatever you say – that we protested as you did, that we were detained as you were – you can't prove anything. You feel hurt and bitter. You can't go anywhere not to hear it. I chose not to get into trouble, just to be safe. Because I still had a long detention time ahead. And these conversations occurred now and again.

That's ordinary systemic homophobia which has spread its spider legs through the whole society and affects literally our whole life.

### III

I was released from the Mogilev Temporary Detention Facility, first my mother met me at the door, behind her was my boyfriend, and then everyone else. He and I hugged for a minute. But even if we made out, mom wouldn't understand anything. She's sure we're just friends. He came to meet me and

booked return tickets for a minibus, he thought he would go back to Minsk in the evening. And I'm like, why won't you come to our place? I do not know why I said that. Well, and my parents were like, yes, yes, stay with us for the night. My boyfriend, whom my parents didn't know about, spent the night at my place. I was freaking out. In the morning he and my mother talked, and then she put him on a minibus to Minsk. She still thinks he's my friend, but we broke up a month ago. It hurt a little, but it's fine.

Neither mom nor dad knows that I'm gay. Cause I get everything: when they see something like that on TV, they scoff a little. I'm afraid that while I'm not financially stable, I don't have my own housing yet, and there may be problems. When I will live in a dormitory, have a scholarship, when I will be less dependent, maybe then I will tell them. But I believe they will change. Because mom and I have been through a lot. First I was hospitalized because of my depression – she was there with me, then I was detained – she bravely went through it all, supported me, said «I'm with you.» There's one last trial left: to tell my mom that I'm gay. I think maybe everything will be fine. Dad is also not a super toxic masculine person, not super homophobic. I believe in them. They are good people, they will learn.

#### IV

After the detention, I applied for free psychological help. I wrote that I want a psychologist (preferably a female psychologist) to be LGBT-friendly. So we went through my whole gay story with her. We didn't even talk much about my time in prison. I had to go through everything: my relationships, growing up, childhood, and parents. She helped me a lot. It turns out that I had to get detained so that I could get this help. It would be amazing if I just had to say that I am gay and that I need help.

I can already talk about it, joke about it, but my voice is still shaking. When policemen pass by, especially in uniform with batons – I'm freaking out, my heart immediately sinks. Even if it's not a policeman, but a security guard in a supermarket, or just a man in black... it's still scary.

I was supported by the fact that I knew that it would end, I would get out and life would be normal. I knew that at uni, probably, no one would expel me. At my faculty, they supported me and made the rector's office treat me well. That is, I had no problems at uni, I finished my semester without any stress, then, when my condition deteriorated, I got an academic leave. I got it with no trouble, just because I had my diagnosis on a piece of paper: I am being treated and I need a year for this treatment.

The letters were very supportive, and the care packages as well. I got letters from very unexpected people. From a girl I don't know – just a stranger wrote me a letter. Or from people I didn't expect to think about me, not even to write a whole letter. My friends wrote to me. They later said that they tried to pass me notes – it didn't work out, I received them later, but it still warms my heart. I keep them all, I remember. Letters are super-important, you definitely need to write letters – this is great support.

## The Sixth Story

### I. August 9 and 10

My name is Seth, I'm 26 years old, I'm from a small town in Belarus. When the protests began on the 9th, I had a work shift. I tried to move it, but it didn't work out. So I had to watch all those horrors from my tiny room – some news was sent to me by guys who were in my hometown, some was sent by guys who were here [in Minsk – editor's note] on the streets. When the Internet appeared literally for a second or two, you could see what was happening on the streets. Your guys get maimed and beaten, and you just sit and watch – it wasn't much fun.

So on August 10, we decided: screw the protest, we need to do one specific thing. We took medications, bandages, antiseptic, and water, and carried them to people. It was not so important for us to participate in the protest itself, it was important for us to pick up people who were injured, barely escaped, and help them<sup>8</sup>. August 10 was hell. We watched where the crowd was going, and moved at some distance from it. I had to constantly be on the lookout, run away and use the minimal experience that I had, just to protect people around me. We are not all warriors and fighters in the sense in which it was necessary at that protest. So at two o'clock in the morning, it was decided to call it a day and take the people who were with us home. We didn't manage to get everyone to their places, so we took them to ours so that they wouldn't be left on the streets – it would be easier in the morning.

On the 11th, I got a call from work, they told me: «You have an hour, get ready. We've gathered our team, found a car, you're all leaving.» We spent almost a month in Ukraine. Just stuck there. It was hard, but I had no way out. I couldn't lose my job. Upon arrival, after two weeks in quarantine, I immediately returned to the streets. But it wasn't as rough as on the 9th or 10th.

### II. Hometown

When you live in a city of 100 thousand people, you are brown with Middle Eastern face features, and all guys who are more or less socially active are ultra-right, you have to survive somehow. First, you internalize homophobia, you realize that you are far from straight, but you learn to hate it and hide it as much as possible through this hatred. When in your family any mention of the LGBT community is followed by «faggots should be burned and shot», when you have been trained for years to hate yourself, eventually, you start doing it. I joined the fascist movement, and so at least

<sup>8</sup> During the first days of the protests a lot of people were injured and could not get help because the police were arresting ambulance staff, doctors, seizing medicine, and were scared to go to hospitals fearing police retribution, so ordinary people and professionals volunteered and providing services in the field and at home: <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-08-18/volunteers-brave-risks-to-give-belarus-protesters-medical-aid-food>

I wasn't subjected to constant violence. They knew me, I could name a couple of names, so they often left me alone. It was all racially motivated, and of course, no one knew that I was queer, otherwise I would have completely lost all my privileges. They despise you, they look down on you, they don't like you, but at least they don't beat you. That's how it works somehow.

When I moved to Minsk, I joined an online movement, and, to be honest, it turned out to be much worse than the offline one. Online, hiding behind the mask of anonymity, you can do terrible things, bully and drive to suicide, and organize campaigns of the most cruel humiliation of people. I remember one of these campaigns when a girl with a disability was bullied for making reposts from feminist blogs. She attempted suicide, the second attempt was successful. It felt as if I was hit in the face with an oar. I thought that we were calling for some kind of «power of the nation», that we were a part of this movement to avoid such cases, but it turns out that we are the evil that does not allow humanity to develop properly. I said no, I have to get out of this. The long process of getting out of this shit began. Now I'm here.

I cut off all social ties, sat at home all alone, didn't do shit. I was very lucky to meet one person (my fiancée), we are together now. She's queer. Because of my alt-right views, we didn't get on well in the very beginning. A year passed before we started communicating again. I was already a little less reactionary then, a little less messed up in this regard, and we got along with her. It was important to have a person who explained what was going on.

What do they tell you about prides when you are in that movement? That those are «degenerates who came out to convert children to their terrible faith.» What do you learn from the LGBT community? You learn the history of how it all started and why everything really happens. The guys take to the streets because they still feel shitty. And if there is at least some venue for freedom, then why not use it – why not show people around that being yourself is normal? What do you think about the transgender issue? These are either sick people, or people who want to earn money somehow, or these are people who had their brains fucked up by «scary terrible leftists.» What do you learn about transgender people when you come to the LGBT movement? That it's just people, that's all. There is no «common ideology», although before that I had a delusion that there was.

It was an identity crisis. I didn't know what to do. I've already come to terms with the fact that I'm queer, that I don't have to suppress it in myself («live and let live»). But I didn't understand what was going on inside this movement, why it was like that. If you don't know the history, you don't know the roots, you don't understand why people do certain things. So slowly, starting with prides (the easiest thing that can be explained to a person) and ending with the question of transgender women in women's sports – as soon as these things began to have more context, it became clearer and it was easier to accept them.

### III. Queer block

When I saw the queer block at the protests, I got scared, I opened our neighborhood group chats<sup>9</sup> and saw what people were saying about it. All my fears were confirmed: I saw that, unfortunately, society is not ready to accept allies in the form of the LGBTQ. There were allies there, but the general attitude was «Why do we need them?» My participation mostly consisted of opening the chat and suppressing this reactionary rhetoric. They were usually quite persuaded when I told them: «Are there too many of you? They are not fighting for legalizing same-sex marriage right now, they are protesting against dictatorship, against deaths, against violence, which they have experienced many times more than you – therefore, shut your mouth and accept your allies.» It seems to me that they don't want to see a political protest process at least a week in advance. They know that tomorrow «faggots will come», and they think «we want no faggots». That's their whole idea. And then, when you protest, you, of course, expand the window of what is permissible, but in the end, you are not particularly different from the movement you are fighting against if you cannot accept an ally.

A protest movement cannot just assemble, do something together, and not have a fight with each other later after the victory. But in order to overcome such a serious repressive apparatus as the state, and the state in the form it has here, 10 socialists will not be enough, we will also need conservatives and free-marketeers. Most people understand this. When some people flew black flags, I heard some say: «I don't like anarchists, but since they are with us, maybe these guys are okay.» If there was antagonism, it ended with «I don't care, they protest with us.» This was the case with everyone, the only movement that received harsher treatment was the LGBTQ community.

### IV. Detention

After the murder of Roman Bondarenko<sup>10</sup>, my fiancée and I first went to the Taraykovsky Memorial<sup>11</sup> to say thank you, then we were going to pay homage at the Square of Changes. It was November 15, when the detentions were quite tough. They dragged me into their bus, first they beat me with their fists, then they tried to kick me, but since the bus was moving, they couldn't. When they realized that they could not kick me, one of them stepped on the back of

<sup>9</sup> Neighbourhood group chats on Telegram became a distinct phenomenon during the Belarusian protests. Villages, city districts, and sometimes individual houses organised chats, uniting neighbours and fostering cooperation: <https://www.internetjustsociety.org/how-telegram-shaped-the-belarusian-protest>

<sup>10</sup> Roman Bondarenko was an activist stopped by plainclothes officers during an altercation between opposition and pro-government citizens. Eyewitnesses claim to have seen masked men, thought to be police, beating Bondarenko, who later died in hospital.

<sup>11</sup> Aljalexandr Tarajkouski was a demonstrator who was shot dead by security forces during the protests in Minsk on August 10, 2020. A video released on August 15 shows him approaching police officers with empty hands raised, stopping in front of them, and then being shot.

my head and pressed my face into the floor so that later a red crust remained. But compared to how others were tormented, you could say I was just tickled.

Then they took me out of the bus and took me to the prison truck, they asked: is this one normal or not? «Well, so-so.» They asked the question «normal or not normal» about every detainee. And when someone responded «not normal», the beating began. There's nothing to talk about with them, so you just walk in silence and do what they say. We were taken to a police department, where the 12-hour registration process began, after which they told us: this group will now go to Zhodino, this group will go to Okrestina, and these ones will be released. They took us to the prison truck, put us on our knees, hands behind our heads, and with our heads down we had to sit for another two hours – our compressor broke down, and we waited for a new one to arrive. They really wanted to talk, but as soon as you started answering and they didn't like something, they beat everyone around. By the way, they immediately «explained» all this violence to us. «Any move you make, any attempt to talk back will be considered as aggression in our direction and we will use special means against you, is everything clear?» When they brought us to Zhodino, twenty of us were loaded into a cell for eight. The first couple of days were not very good. During the day we were not even allowed to sit on the bunks. Where to sleep at night? Twenty people can't fit properly in the cell, so someone had to sleep near the radiator, which was so hot it could make your head spin, someone slept on the floor, those who were lucky to get to the bunks slept on the bunks. But they didn't even give us mattresses.

Then the trials began. They were held via Skype, mostly no one had any witnesses – only those who demanded them. At the trial, I told the truth that I came not to protest, but to honor the memory of the dead. That I didn't shout slogans. They sentenced me to 10 days.

### V. Homophobia and violence

The riot police asked every group that fell into their hands, «who supports the faggots here»? And it's better not to say that you do because you will get a much more horrendous treatment. And if you are «one of them» – never talk about it in your life. The only ones who could say something about it were clearly straight people. In that situation, only they could somehow protect this movement.

When you see a very closed male collective that talks endlessly about fucking each other – clearly this subject means something to them. I think it's a way to show a domineering attitude. Here I can draw a parallel with my former community. Antagonism against homosexuality is a very simple way to assemble a toxic masculine group when people are not educated when they do not meet LGBTQ people in their lives, and all they hear is exclusively state propaganda. This homophobia is so overemphasized because they have no other excuse for antagonism. To talk about social problems, and politics, you need a deep understanding of these things.

Inside our LGBTQ circles, we discussed what was going on. When there were some victories, we rejoiced, when it got worse, we cried. I don't have extensive social connections, but almost all LGBTQ people I have ever talked to (with very rare exceptions) have always opposed violence as much as possible. That is, even if we are beaten, killed, tortured for several days in Okrestina – we will still be peaceful. I think the reason for this is the history of violence against the LGBTQ community itself. Like, we have been subjected to so much violence, and we understand that violence is always bad, no matter who is its target. Being in the movement for not so long, I don't understand it. In my previous movement, guys wouldn't do that. This is the main problem and the main strength of the right: they are ready to use any venue to promote their goals, it doesn't matter, the main thing is the result. But their result is an endless continuation of violence.

I understand that after the protests it will become better, freer, but the protest itself will not solve deeper social problems, will not solve the problem of the small group of people I belong to. In the next 10 years, same-sex marriage will not be legalized here, it will not be normal to be an open gay of my color on the streets. This will require fundamental changes in society. Therefore, I plan to leave, if not now, then someday. And this desire is not connected to protests. I've always thought about leaving. I'm not particularly happy with this society, I don't see myself in it... I don't feel at home here, and I never have. For the first time I felt at home in Dubai where no one even looks at me, no one cares, you're just one of a huge number of different people, nations, cultures that co-exist here.

## The Seventh Story

This text is about visibility and invisibility. About my attempt to integrate my experience as an LGBTQ person into the general protest experience of Belarusian people last autumn. As a starting point, I want to take a small period of time and take a closer look to try to consider how different lines are intertwined in it and what pattern they form.

\* \* \*

In 2019, the Open Hearts Foundation, with the support of the Catholic Church of Belarus and its then head, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, collected 52,000 signatures on a petition calling for criminal liability for spreading information about LGBT people. In February 2020, together with other LGBT initiatives, we gathered and brainstormed, thinking about what we, as an LGBT community, could do about it. One of the decisions we made was to write a letter to the Pope asking him to condemn hatred. Our goal was for the Pope to pronounce the word «Belarus» publicly, addressing the world from his rostrum. We wanted people to hear about us.

On March 5, 2020, we sent the letter to the Pope.

On March 9, 2020, the Open Hearts Foundation held a press conference on the results of collecting signatures. «The church supported this initia-

...tive because it corresponds to the teachings of Jesus Christ,» Tadeusz Konrusiewicz said at that meeting.

We started preparing our press conference with the parents of LGBT people, but we didn't have time to hold it. On March 11, 2020, WHO announced a COVID-19 pandemic, and there was no room left in the media for any other agenda, so we canceled the meeting.

Today it seems that it all happened in another life.

August 16, 2020, during the traditional sermon in St. Peter's Square in the Vatican, Pope Francis says: «I entrust all Belarusians under the protection of Our Lady, the Queen of Peace.»

\* \* \*

What do I know about (in)visibility? As a Belarusian. As an LGBT+ person. As a non-binary person in Belarus.

Until August 2020, my experience as a Belarusian overlapped and coincided with the experience of an LGBT+ person. Just as I felt my invisibility as a queer person in a heteronormative world, Belarus has always remained invisible to the outside world. And my affiliations here had to be described through many words and other names. – Where are you from? – From Belarus. – ? – It's between Russia and Poland. And suddenly, with every cell of my body, I felt what it was like to be the center of attention when all eyes were directed at me. Belarus has become part of the global agenda. Extreme violence has made us visible and put us on the map of the world. Why was it difficult to digest this new and long-awaited experience of visibility? Maybe because «with every cell of my body» at the same time I felt the opposite – that there is no place for me here, and I am not there. I experienced visibility and invisibility all at once. I've been thinking a lot about how to cope with such active attention directed at you at a time when another important part of you remains invisible. And how is it possible to experience two opposite processes at the same time?

At marches, standing next to other people, I felt excluded as a queer (non-binary) person. This experience was most acute at the moment when a feminist block was formed in the Women's marches. The way people chatted (addressing everyone as «girls», etc.), how I was invited to join, but I noticed that my cis male friends were not invited as well. Many of my friends joined the feminist block at the march on August 29. And I just physically couldn't do it. And it was hard. No matter how I tried to explain to myself the irrationality of my action (that «all this is unimportant now», «it doesn't matter who calls me and this march which way», etc.) – I couldn't do anything about the fact that uncontrollably, against my will, at that moment my entire trans experience came to the forefront. I felt that when I was included in this march, I was included as a woman (\*). But I'm not a woman (with or without an asterisk). It seems to me that cis men at the Women's marches were automatically read as allies (and in this regard, there was also a place for them there). And where was mine?

I was reliving the painfully familiar experience of the impossibility to be myself, it was the thing that did not allow me to join the action, whose values I deeply shared, which did not allow me to stand with the people close to me. And it was only with the appearance of the queer block that I realized that there was a place for me in the Women's marches.

On September 5, 2020, during the next Women's march, a queer block appears at the protests for the first time. A day when, in some miraculous way, many stories intertwined for me (including personal ones). And there was a place for everyone. The march began at the Komarovskiy market and ended at Independence Square. When prison trucks and police vans arrived at the square, when people in camouflage uniforms and masks came out, we all climbed the steps of the Red Church and lined up in several rows. I looked at the masked people and thought if they start pushing us back and detaining us now, will I be able to hide in this church where they had collected signatures against me quite recently? Because of these contradictions, it seemed, my brain was about to explode. But I felt that there was a place for me, as well as for everyone else.

The queer block created a place for me at the Women's marches. It was not there a priori, but as soon as it appeared, it became something very tangible and quite stable – I continued to go to the Women's marches even when queer people no longer publicly expressed their identities because at some point it became dangerous. I knew that *at that point* there was a place for me anyway.

I wonder how this place appears? After all, it didn't have one single creator. It was something that seemed to be in the air, many thought about it at the same time, it was already ripe and ready to appear as soon as someone would announce that *obvious*, but still not *self-evident* idea because it had a long history of fighting for its place.

«Are they with us or not?»: a history of acceptance and rejection

On September 5, in a bright, noticeable group, we quickly walked through the rows of Komarovka market to a gathering point, trying to break away from the police in plain clothes. Market workers and random passers-by looked at us, and there was a question in their eyes, I saw that they could not put us in any of the available «boxes». Our symbols were incomprehensible to them. What does this rainbow mean? What are their slogans about? Who are these people?

– *Are they with us or not?*

– *They are with us.*

Words cannot convey what I felt after overhearing this short conversation while we were walking between the rows of Komarovka. I still have tears in my eyes when I write about it. Such an unusual and long-awaited feeling of acceptance, which you have not expected for a long time (I remember all the stories of the exclusion of LGBT activists from the protests of previous years), but suddenly you get it. You are «with them».

Later, acceptance was also followed by rejection. Again, two ambivalent oppositely directed experiences. It turns out that at the same time you need

to be visible in order to get a place for yourself, but at the same moment when it appears, this visibility makes you vulnerable. LGBTQ people were the only social group that, after it identified itself, others tried to exclude from the protests. That is, you «get your ass kicked» for your visibility, but at the same time you are being forced to be visible, otherwise, you will not be able to say that you took part in the protests. It is telling that in many media sources the appearance of the queer block in the protests was described as «the LGBTQ community also joined the protests in Minsk.» Such recognition of our contribution brought satisfaction, but at the same time, it brought pain, because we did not «appear», or «join», or something like that. LGBTQ people have been here from the very beginning: we were observers at polling stations, in teams of alternative candidates, on the streets, and in volunteer movements – we have always been here, and now we have simply identified ourselves. And as soon as we did it, we faced aggression in our direction.

«This is our city»

The slogans «This is our city!» and «We are the power here!» appeared first at one of the Women’s marches, and later became one of the staples at big Sunday marches. I have devoted a lot of time in my activism to appropriating the history of the city by the LGBTQ community. I recorded interviews with activists of the past years, told stories about places memorable for the LGBTQ community, returning queer places to the general map of the city. That is why the slogan «This is our city!» contained several meanings for me at the same time – in it (again) my two identities – of a Belarusian and a queer person – were able to connect and coincide. When I shouted it together with other people, everything inside started to tremble, and I finally felt whole.

My second favorite chant was the roll call which was born in response to attempts to marginalize the protesters, calling them «sheep», «prostitutes» and «parasites». At first, protesters tried to reject these names, it was possible to see quite a lot of posters like «We are not sheep,» «I am not a prostitute, but a mother,» etc. But gradually they began to be replaced by other posters. «Prostitutes with the people», «Junkies with the people», «Minsk has flourished under junkies and prostitutes». And finally, these statements transformed into a roll call, which I fell in love with as well as the slogan «This is our city!». It caused the same quivering in my body.

«Are the sheep here?» – «Here!» – «Junkies here?» – «Here!» – «Prostitutes here?» – «Here!» – «Parasites here?» – «Here!»

«Everyone is here.»

## Втікаючи від окупації Маріуполя

Я приїхала в Маріуполь 17 лютого допомагати татові. Він захворів, мав ускладнення після бустеру, високу температуру та напади лихоманки. Планувала провести тут пару тижнів, поки не одужає, тому зворотного квитка не брала<sup>1</sup>.

Після повідомлення про татову недугу я страшенно нервувалася. Шукали з чоловіком лікаря в Маріуполі, підняли на ноги рідних, дізналися про всі приватні лікарні міста (зокрема ті, що мають сайти). Отримала повідомлення від лікаря, якого вдалося запросити до тата (військовий український лікар), що легені більш-менш в нормі. Двоюрідна сестра купила ліки. Але я все ж таки вирішила їхати. Виявилося, що поїзд є і 17-го числа прибуває рано-вранці, тож я встигаю на свої онлайн-заняття о 08:30. Я взагалі збиралася в лютому до тата: в нього нормальний wi-fi, і можна працювати онлайн. Купила квиток в інтернеті, зібрала речі (включно із тривожною валізкою та томом «Соціології» Петра Штомпки) – сумка виявилася завеликою. У новому телефоні ще не встановила Gmail, згадала про це вже в машині, дорогою до вокзалу. Значить, треба роздрукувати квиток в касі. До відходу поїзда лише 15 хвилин, у довідковій квитки не роздруковують, до каси черга, а я маю дістати комп'ютер та продиктувати номер із більш ніж 10-ти цифр. Жінка попереду погоджується мене пропустити, але касирка має якісь ускладнення з принтером і йде. Я чекаю, згадую про сервісний центр, біжу туди, поруч водій таксі несе мою сумку (перший раз у житті попросила про це). Кажуть: покажіть QR код у комп'ютері провідниці – цього достатньо. Ще з десяток сходинок униз, декілька десятків метрів чомусь напружено порожнім тунелем, сходинки догори – і я біля свого вагону. Ось уже заносу сумку всередину й видихаю.

Дорогою було напрочуд спокійно: порожнє купе, навіть маску не треба вдягати. Молода провідниця звертається українською мовою.

Поїзд прибував удосвіта, о 04:25. Звичайний ранок, обтяжений передчуттям побачити хворого тата наживо, не телефоном почути.

<sup>1</sup> Вказані в тексті дати відповідають часу події, а не запису.

15 хвилин погриміти колесами валізи по новому асфальту біля вокзалу, піднятися сходами, ще трохи розтщеним асфальтом провулка та вулиці – і я у дворі.

У Харкові ще сніг лежав, а в Маріуполі сухо, сіро й тепло: південь, весна.

## Звуки та голоси

Записувати в зошит про події я почала 25 лютого.

*08:16 – вибух ближче, ніж учорашній, легкий дзвін вікон. 10:35 – це один.*

Саме звуками й голосами війна підходила до мене. Бо слова... Батько за день до промови Путіна сказав: «Буде війна»; мій чоловік у Харкові вранці 24-го побачив з вікна розриви снарядів з боку Белгорода й подзвонив... Слова до мене не доходили.

*27 лютого, 07:50 – звуки обстрілу... 07:51 – це вибух... 07:54 – далеко... стріляють тривалими чергами з моря.*

2 березня – близько першої години ночі був звук, дуже сильно та близько. Здавалося, над самим дахом пролетіло. У настінному годиннику брязнула пружина. І ще був хруст – тепер ясно, що це вікно: залізничка в замку виламала пластик... Вибух чувся об 11:10...

*13:04 – вибухи далеко; 14:04 – сильно, близько, розрив; 14:14 – хлопок далеко; 14:14 – ще; 14:25 – ще; 15:30 – стріляють; 17:47 – канонада зі сходу; 17:58 – знову; 18:26 – дивний звук: ніби газовий пальник запалили; 19:55 – далеко, великі важкі вибухи; 21:34 – два вибухи поспіль; 23:07 – три вибухи далеко; 23:15 – вдалині два вибухи; 23:15 – дванадцять... дванадцять далеко на сході; 23:28 – один, два, три, чотири, п'ять вибухів ближче.*

І ще один день є записи вибухів протягом години. Так військові дії відчувала у старому центрі Маріуполя на початку березня людина, яка не є обізнаною у військовій справі та живе у приватному секторі:

*3 березня, 04:20 – одинадцять вертикальних, глухо; 04:40 – дванадцять вертикальних; 05:03 – як феєрверк, ближче; 05:17 – один, два, три феєрверки; 05:20 – канонада; 05:21 – один і два, три; 5:30 – один... два... три (схожі на попередні звуки, але з певним інтервалом); 5:33 – (вибухи чуються) тривало; 05:44 – (малюю дві стрілочки праворуч догори із проміжком – намагаюся передати відчуття напрямку руху снарядів); 5:45 – (малюю стрілочки горизонтально праворуч).*

Записи обстрілів не є регулярними. Вони були першою реакцією на неординарність ситуації, незвичність перебувати в місці, де стріляють чи наявна інша небезпека для життя. Швидко стало зрозумілим, що всі постріли та вибухи неможливо зафіксувати. Не вистачало військових знань, аби назвати різні види звуків, а описувати було занадто довго. Далі в зошиті залишилися записи щодо дуже сильних чи нових звуків.

*4 березня, 13:02 – страшенної сили вибух, близько, над самими дахом... Під час вибуху знову відчуття, що летіло прямо над головою. На*

*мансарді щось упало й задзвеніло (декоративна емальована тарілка). Потім усе затихло, і я пішла дивитися. Снаряд зруйнував сусідній будинок, його внутрішню частину. Він загорівся, зараз уже майже згас. З вікна кухні видно розтropicений паркан, з вікна дитячої кімнати – шматки шифера на землі і як догорає туалет.*

Це було те влучання, через яке у спальні впала люстра. Я про це писала на фейсбуці. Тоді ж я побачила вирву від першого влучання біля згорілого тепер сусідського дерев'яного туалету.

Мінометні постріли мають металевий, чіткий та дзвінкий звук. Що це був міномет, мені потім сказали знайомі, які облаштували підвал п'ятиповерхового будинку на протилежному боці вулиці. Стріляли, як я тепер розумію, від нас, чотири рази по дев'ять-десять пострілів. Це було посеред ночі, я сиділа на підлозі на своєму матраці в центральній кімнаті (в нормальні часи тут була вітальня), в абсолютній темряві. Кожен постріл розривав повітря десь поруч, а через темряву стіни, сусідський сад, тротуар, дорога – усе, що було між ними і мною, – зникало. Я перебувала безпосередньо поруч із пострілами, абсолютно беззахисна.

У повній тиші та повній темноті після пострілів виникли інші звуки. Хтось намагався відкрити вікно ззовні, я чула виразні звуки колупання пластику. Це вікно сараю, прибудованого до дому і сполученого з кухнею через двері. Потім стали колупати щось залізне – це замок сараю. Згодом я виразно почула, як двері відчинилися і декілька гучних кроків пролунали сараєм. Щось гучно впало на підлогу – мабуть, якісь татові знаряддя чи інструменти. Іще звуки, які важко було ідентифікувати, але я майже бачила цих людей усередині сараю. Від них мене відділяли троє дверей, які легко відчинити. Коли звуки стихли, я вже не змогла заснути. Вранці тато перевірів сарай – той був замкнений. Найімовірніше, сусідська кішка відчинила пластикову квартиру старого вентилятора, але, нічого їстівного не знайшовши, пішла... Мародери до татового будинку завітали вже за півтора місяця.

Пізніше до звуків обстрілів додався звук літака. Він летів зі сходу. Звук наближався, потім певний час лунав над нами, пролітав далі у західному напрямку. Потім кидав десь свою бомбу. Було чути вибух і гул літака у зворотному напрямку. Так само поведився і гвинтокрил. Перший гвинтокрил я побачила 10 березня. День був яскравий, із високим чистим небом після нічного морозу. Обстріли зранку були інтенсивнішими та різноманітнішими, ніж раніше. Я бачила літаки, які дуже високо «розбиралися між собою». Потім з'явився гвинтокрил, обстріляв одне місце, потім інше, потім когось біля моря – і полетів у бік Їська. Після цього (десь о 2-ій дня) запала тиша – довга, приємна, обнадійлива. Серед інших згадок про вертоліт у щоденнику: *«Прілітав вертоліт. Скинув щось два рази й полетів».*

Коли обстріли стали регулярними, з'явився також звук церковних дзвонів, які попереджали про небезпеку обстрілу. Він вчувався зі східного напрямку, з Лівого берега. Але міг бути й із церкви на проспекті

Нахімова. Днями здавалося, що церква дзвонить безперервно. Я прокидалася з цим звуком у вухах, і вже важко було виокремити реальний дзвін від уявного.

Мені казали: якщо чуєш вибух – значить, снаряд у тебе не влучив, ти жива, і це добре. Однак, сама думка про можливість такого попадання для мене була несумісною з існуванням. Чутний здалеку літак – це потенційне пряме влучання. Опинитися так близько до закінчення свого життя для мене було нестерпним.

На відміну від мене, птахи в нашому саду не боялися пострілів. Особливо горобці, що цвірінькали, намагаючись зігрітися на сонці. Горлиці прилітали й сиділи навколо годівниці. Якось прилетіла велика сойка. Я стояла під стіною сараю, намагалася впіймати сонячне тепло, а сойка сиділа на дереві, крутячи своєю великою головою. Птаха поводитися як завжди, як до війни.

Силу й відстань обстрілів також можна виміряти певними звуками або сигналами. Так дзвенять одна об одну банки з наперед набраною водою. Голоси людей – отже, немає електрики і не працює дзвінок; якщо хтось прийде до нас, то їм треба буде кричати або стукати у вікно (скло-пакети ще були цілі).

### Що буває під час війни: родинні історії

Мамині батьки у війну 1941–1945 воювали, татові були в евакуації на Уралі. Прабатьки з татового боку були в окупації в Маріуполі. Згадки про це прийшли до мене з усвідомленням теперішньої перспективи для міста.

«Ми горілого хліба не їли», – сказала моя прабабуся своїй доньці після її повернення з евакуації з Уралу. Йшлося про те, що вони обмінювали свої речі на муку та інші продукти харчування. Згадуючи про це, я починала подумки оцінювати перспективу обміну наявних у будинку речей на картоплю чи олію. Інші питання, які поставали тут: де саме такий обмін може відбуватися, як туди потрапити без машини та громадського транспорту, як відстояти своє право на такий обмін – залишалися без відповіді. Чоловіки з підвалу будинку навпроти їздили на ринок (центральный був тоді ще цілий, тільки зачинений), якось домовлялися, привозили звіди продукти, які купляли за гроші. Тобто ця перша сімейна історія про війну залишалася на майбутнє.

Друга історія, яку ми пригадали з татом, була про часи громадянської. Вони тоді жили майже на гавані, на декілька кварталів нижче від нашого будинку. Вікна виходили на вулицю, ікона ще висіла на своєму місці, та її лампадка почала блимати: або олія закінчувалася, або гніт прогорів. Вечоріло, вдома були тільки жінки й діти. Неочікувано гучно відчинилися двері – й у кімнату зайшов солдат із гвинтівкою в руці. Він був дуже розлючений: виявляється, світло від цієї лампадки було видно аж із берега моря, а її блимання здавалося сигналом до когось. Це була

історія про те, що під час війни мирні жителі опиняються між ворожими сторонами, і безневинна річ чи жест можуть стати небезпечними.

Третя історія від прабабусі про німецьку окупацію була така: поки вони переховувалися в підвалі свого будинку, прийшли німці і забрали меблі. Декілька стільців, стіл, щось іще. Було дуже страшно сидіти в підвалі й чути, як чужі люди зі зброєю ходять твоїм помешканням і про щось розмовляють чужою мовою. Якби прадідусь був удома, могла би статися трагедія, бо він був людиною рішучою і свого віддавати не любив. Прабабуся вела себе мудро і стримано. Вони дочекалися, поки німці пішли, піднялися до кімнати, а там знайшли розписку з переліком взятих предметів. Тобто під час окупації люди зі зброєю мають необмежену владу, зокрема й над речами, які я звикла вважати своїми чи нашими. Документ не зберігся, бо перебування в окупації не є досвідом, яким треба пишатися (і який влада буде схвалювати).

Загалом про війну не розказували. Тепер я розумію, що про неї частіше мовчали. Наприклад, про те, що чоловіків-греків (бабуся з татового боку – з маріупольських греків) не брали в армію. А коли розказували, то це найчастіше виглядало як дорікання. Мені ставало соромно за себе, за свою незадоволеність життям чи незграбність. «Як можна жалітися на щось, коли люди пережили таке?» – звучало в моїй дитячій голові. З іншого боку, радянський телевізор, що соціалізував мене разом із бабусяю та батьками, казав, що найстрашніша й найголовніша війна закінчилася нашою перемогою, а іншої не буде.

## Ресурси зникають

26 лютого я купила в АТБ стільки продуктів, скільки змогла донести у двох великих пакетах, розплатилася картою. Напередодні батько не зміг зняти гроші через великі черги до банкоматів, тож готівки в нього практично не залишилося. Що я купила: дві пачки рису, пачку булгуру, заморожені овочі, дві пачки заморожених пельменів, літр олії, сосиски, дві упаковки сиру, вершкове масло, дві упаковки шинки, десяток яєць, два пакети крабових паличок. Дешевої крупи вже не лишилося, хлібні полиці були порожні, треба було чекати невідомо скільки. Також закінчилося печиво та все, що можна їсти сухим і холодним.

Доволі скоро стало зрозуміло, що разом із макаронами, сіткою цибулі, парою кілограмів картоплі та гречки, які були до мого приїзду, це всі наявні ресурси харчування. І їх треба берегти, розтягувати. Такий досвід у мене вже був на початку 1990-их, за часів інфляції. Також берегти продукти й витратити ощадливо було постійною практикою в моєму радянському дитинстві, і образ бабусі, безпосередньо пов'язаний із цим місцем, із цим домом, допомагав. У щоденнику є два списки, датовані 7 і 8 березня: «що ми з'їли сьогодні» та «опис продуктів». Третього кроку, який би завершив процедуру, – розрахунку кількості днів до закінчення продуктів – я так і не зробила. Не вистачало сміливості й сил.

*Електроенергія, світло.* Вперше світла не стало 2 березня, коли був перший приліт у сусідський двір. Але потім електрика знову з'явилася. Тато до цього майже зник: старий район, старі мережі, вже декілька років відкладене відновлення проводки в будинку. Важливо, що відсутність світла означала відсутність тепла, бо газовий котел мав електронне управління. А березень прийшов із нічними морозами та снігом. Немає електрики – немає зв'язку, бо навіть стаціонарний телефон, номер якого я пам'ятаю все своє життя, працював від зарядки, не кажучи про мобільні та wi-fi. Відповідно немає зв'язку – відсутня інформація ззовні. У приватному секторі відчуваєш себе як на острові. Остаточно світла не стало 4 березня, після другого прильоту в сусідський двір, але, можливо, ці явища й не пов'язані.

Газова плита за відсутності електрики (останнім часом тато використовував електричну плитку) стала й джерелом тепла та світла ввечері. Одразу перерахувала наявні коробки сірників. Газу не стало 7 березня, після тієї жакливої мінометної ночі. З одного боку, відсутність газу була логічною, бо інтенсивність обстрілів мала позначитися на цілісності газопроводу. Але з іншого, – відсутність газу вимагала набагато радикальніших змін у побуті для продовження існування. Готувати їжу в каміні на мансарді було татовою порадою. Він навіть казав, що багато людей не мають такої можливості, ходив запрошувати родичів за три квартали від нас. Але їхній дім після близького влучання залишився без вікон, і вони переїхали «на підвал» в інший район міста. Підніматися на мансарду треба 11 височенними сходинками, відповідно всі продукти, посуд, воду треба теж піднімати. Як тримати каструлю для супу над вогнем каміну? Як її виймати з вогню? Скільки часу і дров буде потрібно для приготування супу? Ці питання були дуже важкими. Але вже 8 березня я смажила в каміні яєшню, а 14 на вимогу батька – оладки (з мого походу в магазин залишилася сметана, а муку я знайшла в буфеті). Страшним виявилось інше: вікно мансарди виходить прямо на схід, на Азовсталь. І, коли починається обстріл, у мансарді почувалось дуже небезпечно, ніби наближаєшся до пострілів і снарядів, а хочеться бути від них якомога далі. До речі, два рази я бачила, як щось летіло в напрямку до нас, але влучило в інший будинок.

*Вода.* 25 лютого я набрала води з-під крану в усі пластикові пляшки, які знайшла в домі. Добре, що тато любить газовані напої у дволітровій пластиковій тарі. У скляні банки понабирала води з фільтру. Ще за пару днів набрала води у ванну. Це була одна з перших порад щодо поводження в нових військових умовах. Цю воду використовували для змивання туалету та миття посуду. Поки питна вода в посудинах не закінчилася, ми сперечалися з батьком, що будемо робити далі. Я говорила, що треба йти на криничку. Це природне джерело води, яке ще в позаминулому сторіччі місцевий підприємець облаштував для масового використання. Криничку згадувала бабуся: там вони набирали воду, поки до будинку не провели водогону. Я навіть думала: нарешті побачу, як вона

выглядає. Однак іти туди було доволі далеко (три квартали нашою вулицею вниз, а потім іще ліворуч пару кварталів), і страшно робити це під час обстрілів. Але люди туди ходили. 11 березня я виглянула з-за воріт: ішов сніг, догори вулицею посередині дороги йшов чоловік з тачкою із двома п'ятилітровими пляшками води. Він був вдягнутий по-зимовому, хутряна шапка й піднятий комір, ішов нешвидко, але в одному ритмі. Летів повільний колючий сніг. На асфальті всюди валялися шматки дротів, якісь уламки та дрібні рештки бетону чи цегли. Ця картина для мене означала, що не треба очікувати змін на краще. Тато не хотів відпустити мене на криничку, пропонував набирати воду з погреба, ґрунтову воду. Літом батько використовував її для зрошення городу. 13 березня ми стали її пити після потрійної фільтрації та подвійного кип'ятіння. Декілька разів ці процедури призводили до того, що вода ставала геть непрозорою: можливо, під час нагріву в каструлю потрапляв попіл з каміну. Але й прозора вона була гіркою.

Обстріли фізично прив'язали мене до дому та двору. У перших числах березня на сайті «Укрзалізниці» поїзд Маріуполь-Рахів іще існував, близькі радили сходити на вокзал за 15 хвилин від дому. Але я не чула звуків поїздів і не могла вийти з двору через страх опинитися безпосередньо під обстрілом чи біля ушкоджених будинків. Останній раз я виходила з дому 7 березня, ходила до родичів за три квартали. Це здавалося можливим, бо йшла з одного конкретного місця в інше. Тоді я дізналася, що газу немає ні в кого. Вулиця перед краєзнавчим музеєм була вся вкрита склом. Якись чоловіки залазили через паркан «Нової пошти» й витягували дерев'яні щити. Жінки з великими пакетами йшли в напрямку від розбитих дверей «Єви». Напередодні батько бачив на проспекті двох абсолютно голих юнаків із надписами «мародер» на спинах. Трохи пізніше, коли перерви між обстрілами майже пропали, я пару разів ходила до знайомих у підвал дому через дорогу. Один із двох під'їздів п'ятиповерхівки залишився майже неушкодженим. Уявити собі вихід в місто, аби дізнатися, що відбувається навколо, не було сміливості.

Коли не стало світла, ми почали вимикати телефони. Вмикали їх тільки для дзвінка, перевірки, хто дзвонив, читання повідомлень та соцмереж. Я перевіряла кількість заряду: 4 березня – телефон 45%, комп – 25%. Телефон та інтернет були критично важливі не тільки для мене (мої чоловік, донька, друзі, колеги поза межами Маріуполя, бо вже понад 30 років я живу в іншому місті), а й для батька. 11 березня зникла мережа «Водафон», номерів на інших операторах у нас не було, і я залишилася без зв'язку. Тобто без можливості дізнатися, що відбувається поза межами двору, саду, кварталу. Заряд у телефоні можна було спробувати поновити: 5 березня заїхав родич із міцним павербанком, «на підвалі» будинку навпроти був генератор. Тобто доти питання було в моїх власних зусиллях та їх ефективності. Повне зникнення мережі ніби стало знаком, що від мене тут уже нічого не залежить.

Батько знайшов старий китайського виробництва маленький приймач та батарейки. Тож зі всіх джерел інформації залишилося FM-радіо з Донецька. За структурою мовлення воно нагадувало радянське «Радіо Маяк», під звуки якого я виросла в цих самих стінах. Теж новини через кожні півгодини та музика у проміжках. Тексти новинних повідомлень були квазіінформативними (наприклад, кількість кілограмів гуманітарної допомоги, розданої людям у Сартані). Переважно це були пряма мова очільника ДНР, дорікання «Заходу», звинувачення України, обіцянки скорого завершення «спецоперації» й перспективи економічної співпраці з Херсонською областю, заклики до українських військових скласти зброю. Але згадки про Зеленського означали, що він принаймні живий. Музика у проміжках була нестерпно одноманітною: пісні у чоловічому виконанні, про загиблих друзів та невірних жінок. Загалом ворожість, образа, ресентимент – за змістом, слабка підробка – за формою. Дізнатися щось можна було тільки в інших людей, яких ми практично не бачили. Трохи надії додавала думка про родичів, що зараз мешкали у трьох кварталах від нас, але це тривало тільки чотири дні. Зі щоденника 12 березня: *«Весь світ десь далеко і є недосяжним»*.

Перший тиждень міський голова Маріуполя двічі на день чи один раз увечері робив брифінг, який я дивилася в телеграм-каналі міської ради. Ці відео й зараз доступні в мережі. Оперативна обстановка в місті, життєзабезпечення, транспорт, лікарні та кількість постраждалих. Обстріли району «Восточний», перелік укриттів, безплатний проїзд у комунальному транспорті. Пізніше йшлося вже про відновлення зруйнованого комунального господарства, гуманітарну допомогу, заплановану евакуацію. Стан мера змінювався, знаходити слова йому ставало дедалі важче. Але головним його повідомленням для мене була наявність української влади в місті. Після невдалої евакуації 5 березня й остаточного зникнення зв'язку стало очевидним, що все, у чому я звикла покладатися на закон та державу, залишається незабезпеченим. Будьхто зі зброєю, фізично сильніший за мене або просто більш поінформований ставав загрозою.

Відчуття безпеки всередині будинку прискорено зникало. Чоловік телефоном ще в лютому вмовляв піти у бомбосховище через дорогу. Але спочатку я перемістила своє спальне місце в кімнату з меншою кількістю вікон. Потім перенесла матрац на підлогу у вітальні, вікно там завісила товстою шторою та заклала подушками. Тато спав у кімнаті з двома вікнами, але в кутку на дивані. Я завісила вікна шторами заради світломаскування. З цієї ж метою закрила картоном скло кухонного вікна. Познімала з полиці над татовим диваном усе, що могло впасти від вібрацій і вибухової хвилі. Скотчу в магазині вже не було, а того, що знайшла в тата, вистачило на укріплення третини склопакетів. Кожен крок із переведення будинку у військовий стан викликав спротив батька: він казав, що по мирних жителях не стрілятимуть. Мій власний спротив вірити у реальність війни минув після влучання в сусідський двір та відвідуван-

ня підвалу бомбосховища в домі через дорогу. Але тут страх допомагає активності. Я облаштувала для сидіння частину погребу, не зайняту водою. Фактично це були тільки сходи. Завісила покривалами прохід, щоби було не так волого, завісила іржаві залізні полиці з порожніми скляними банками, які нагадували про колишні бабусину, а потім мамину консервацію. Принесла стілець для сидіння, він хитався на нерівній кам'яній підлозі. Певний час у погребі обстріли відчувалися трохи слабшими, звуки – віддаленішими. Із початком важких бомбардувань, коли дім постійно здригався, підвал перестав давати відчуття захищеності. Стіна сараю могла впасти на мене справа, а з іншого боку була вода.

### Щоденна рутинна

Активність фізична обмежується світлою частиною доби, тобто приблизно з 6-ої ранку до 6-ої вечора. Решта часу спливає майже в повній темноті. Батько лягає на своєму дивані й читає книжку за допомогою налобного ліхтарика або слухає радіо. Я лягаю на своєму матраці у вітальні, намагаюся заснути, а коли обстріли стають нестерпними, іду в погріб.

Імо двічі на день: сніданок та обід. На обід я варю суп, на сніданок – кашу й чай. Поки був газ, я пила гарячу воду. Приготування їжі перевела в режим максимальної економії, хоча розуміла, що продукти все одно закінчатся. Суп варила на воді з пельменів, залишки каші йшли в суп. Моркву для супу я різала маленькими кубиками. У погребі знайшлася трилітрова банка солоних огірків, які мама закривала свого останнього літа одинадцять років тому. Вони виявилися придатними до вживання, тільки трохи м'якими. 12 березня я поклала в суп останню скибку шинки. Із подрібненим солоним огірком це був суп, який нагадував розсольник. Ще готувала суп, схожий на борщ, із подрібненим буряком. 8 березня була яєшня, засмажена в каміні на решітках. Зосередженість на питанні ресурсів мала позитивні результати: я згадала про порошок какао, який залишився з минулого мого приїзду. Додала до рису й отримала майже шоколадний десерт.

Рутинізації зазнали не тільки дії із життєзабезпечення (приготування їжі, пошуки одягу, відповідного до поступового зниження температури в домі, облаштування місця для сну, заготівля дров і запасання водою), а й написання щоденника й описування обстрілів. 10 березня я вирішила писати у щоденник тільки про вчорашні події<sup>1</sup>. По-перше, це тренує пам'ять, дає відповідні завдання увазі. По-друге, те, що було вчора, уже не зміниться. А ще – щоби не наврочити: тільки-но почнеш писати «зараз тихо» – як починаються постріли. Поступово виникла звичка дивитися на годинник, коли від пострілу прокидаєшся вночі, або він був дуже близько, або дуже сильний. Пізніше, коли я почала ховатися в погребі, то брала з собою бездротову лампу (коли батарея в ній сіла – свічку й запальничку) та годинник. Ці речі я тримала разом у коричневому

пакеті, який клала біля свого ліжка та брала з собою в погріб, дорогою вдягаючи татову дублянку. Можливість відслідкувати тривалість переживання, мабуть, давала певну ілюзію контролю за власним життям.

Декілька перших днів обстріли вкладалися в певний розклад: нічні, ранкові, денні, вечірні. Тиша між ними відчувалася як перерва чи відпочинок. Можна було навіть запланувати якусь власну активність – приготування їжі, туалет чи облаштування будинку. Поступово перерви зникли, влучання чи джерела вогню відчувалися ближче, вибухи ставали сильнішими. У щоденнику з'явилася рубрика «режим обстрілу»:

*9 березня – стріляють безперервно нерегулярно з 4-ої ранку. То один з відлунням, то декілька з віялом звуку за ними, то важкий або декілька дуже близько.*

*11 березня – вночі три обстріли. Близько 22:00, 01:00 та 03:00.*

*12 березня – обстріли практично цілий день, різні та інтенсивні. Літак швидко й низько пролетів, я сиділа за столом у кухні, все захиталося.*

*13 березня – уже до 7-ої стали стріляти невпорядковано і близько, ніби на паралельній вулиці.*

*15 березня – стріляє та бухкає з 02:00 ночі. По-різному. Іноді дуже близько, ніби на паралельній вулиці. У повітрі дим та пил, запах гуми, що горить.*

*18 березня – учора був жахливий день. Обстріл жорсткий, близько, важкими, дім трясеться. ... Нічний обстріл був дуже страшний.*

Повсякчасний моніторинг небезпеки: прислухаєшся до звуків обстрілів, їхньої віддаленості чи близькості й сили. Точніше, не прислухаєшся, а відчуваєш їх. Відповідно робиш висновки: продовжуєш різати моркву та картоплю для супу, ідеш надвір відмикати хвіртку на день та замикати на ніч, або перебираєшся у вітальню й пробуєш пересидіти обстріл, або береш коричневий кульок і йдеш у погріб. Слідкуєш за простором дому: на підвіконні з'явився крупний пил – значить, насипалося з тріщини над вікном (скло у вікнах було ще цілим).

Зразком пристосованості й організованості були люди з будинку через дорогу, які облаштували підвал. Я була там двічі «в гостях». У підвалі було тепло, вхід облаштований завісами й освітленням (світлодіодна стрічка, здається). Люди організувалися й розподілилися за завданнями та ролями. Навіть побіжного погляду було достатньо, щоби це побачити. Декілька чоловіків і жінок стояли надворі біля під'їзду, ще один чоловік чергував біля бутилів із водою на сходовому майданчику, хтось у самому підвалі розкладав продукти на столі під лампою, більшість мешканців сиділи чи лежали на матрацах, диванних подушках, розкладачках чи на підлозі. Як сказала мені знайома, продукти приносили в кого що було, зібрали гроші, машиною їздили на базар за харчами, на криничку по воду. Я приходила поміняти цибулину на картоплину для супу. У тата був невеличкий запас цибулі. Але знайома віддала мені три картоплини, знайдені в холодильнику (її квартира тоді була неушкодженою), зі словами: «У нас складчина, у нас усе є». Біля однієї з уцілілих квартир поставили генера-

тор, заряджали телефони. Їжу готували на вогнищі у дворі біля під'їзду. Пізніше вже на мангалі, що набагато зручніше, бо не треба нахилятися. Здебільшого мешканки підвалу під час мого відвідування сиділи або лежали на матрацах на підлозі. Було декілька дітей. Коли приходила вдруге, принесла дитячу книжечку – котрась дитина мені подякувала. «На підвалі» мені сказали, що можна дзвонити з «Київстару». 16 березня мені там підтвердили, що величезний чорний дим пожежі йшов від драмтеатру.

Відсутність газу позначилася на потребі у дровах. Люди стали обривати з дерев на вулиці кору, рубати сухі дерева. Характерний звук сокири було чутно навколо нашого двору. У тата був певний запас дров, але камін ніколи досі не використовували так інтенсивно й утилітарно – переважно для задоволення. Спочатку я наполягла на визначенні наявного обсягу дров у сухому сховищі. Потім перенесла ті, що були заготовлені й лежали в саду, у сарай. Вони мали бути збережені та висушені. Якась деревина знайшлася в сараї, але потребувала подрібнення. Батько приніс козли для пиляння дров, якими вони користувалися ще з моїм дідом у 1940–50-ті роки (опалення було вугільним, а деревина потрібна для розпалювання). Ця міцна конструкція зі сталевих двотаврів знову була в роботі.

Їдучи до Маріуполя в лютому, я збиралася викладати онлайн. Взяла з собою том «Соціологія: аналіз суспільства» Петра Штомпки для мого курсу «Соціологія для спеціальності “Соціальна робота”». У четвер 24 лютого дивним здавалося не проводити заняття. Але вже скоро рівень тривожності не давав зосередитися на жодному тексті. Батько читав: художню книжку, потім щось технічне, потім знов художню. Ділився зі мною враженнями та критичними зауваженнями, іноді на моє прохання читав уголос. 14 березня я почала читати Штомпку. Визначила таке завдання: кожен день читати розділ та писати тестові питання за ним. На підвіконні батькового кабінету була майже ціла пачка паперу А4. 20 питань до одного розділу вкладалися на один аркуш із двох боків дрібним почерком. Серед іншого важливою була тема про моральний зв'язок. Сприймати її було важко, це потребувало певних зусиль. Бо безпечний простір умоглядних побудов здавався надто віддаленим від мене зараз. Але те, як Штомпка виводить мораль із соціальності, визначаючи моральний зв'язок як соціальний, побудований на довірі, лояльності, взаємності та солідарності, було *«сильно і круто»*, як я тоді написала.

Наступним етапом мого пристосування до обставин мало бути перенесення зібраних для виїзду власних речей в якесь місце поза домом на випадок, якщо стіни не витримають вибухових хвиль.

## Емоції та тілесні відчуття

Зі щоденника: *9 березня – як я радію ранку зараз!*

Приїхавши в Маріуполь, я хвилювалася за батька, за його стан здоров'я. Треба було дізнатися про доступні тут медичні послуги, навчи-

тися ними користуватися; зорганізувати харчування й інші побутові питання; налаштувати новий простір для дистанційного викладання, зокрема привчити близьких поводитися певним чином протягом моїх онлайн-занять. Загалом ці завдання я реалізувала, навіть вдалося влаштувати аналіз крові на дому, що для батька було дуже незвичним. Знайшовся навіть час зустрітися з подругою, яка перебувала тут у відрадженні. Гуляли вечірнім містом. Ілюмінація на проспекті Миру через туман виглядала загадково й романтично. У телефоні також лишилося фото Азовстальської водної станції з новими пірсами, сучасно обладнаним майданчиком для споглядання моря та порту.

Відчуття перших двох днів війни – це шок і подив разом із роздратованістю та гнівом. Моя уява та свідомість чинили спротив, не погоджувалися визнавати реальність повномасштабного вторгнення. Але стрімкі зміни в навколишньому фізичному просторі не залишали місця для незгоди та гніву. Ще в п'ятницю, здається, я дивилася обнадійливе відео з мариупольського вокзалу про відправлення поїздів за розкладом. Дівчина у відео казала, що їде з рідного міста майже з порожніми руками, з одним наплічником, бо «не хоче тут ДНРу». Певний час в мене була надія, що все це закінчиться швидко. На думку спадали словосполучення на зразок «шестиденна війна». Поступове наближення ознак війни безпосередньо до мене, до мого місця перебування, до мого тіла перемикало увагу. Тобто поступово розрив між уявленням та дійсністю зменшувався. Маю на увазі власні уявлення про неможливість для мене опинитися всередині війни. А я опинилася в епіцентрі бойових дій.

Потім прийшов страх. Я боялася померти зараз, потрапити під завали будинку. Боялася мародерів, людей зі зброєю з РФ та ДНР і загалом – незнайомців, які можуть бути сильнішими за мене фізично та з непередбачуваною поведінкою за цих обставин.

На початку березня похолодало, були нічні морози. За відсутності світла в домі не стало гарячої води та опалення. Будинок поступово втрачав тепло. Спали в одязі під декількома ковдрами та в головних уборах. Визначити температуру повітря в кімнаті було неможливо, бо звичайних термометрів не залишилося, а електронні не працювали. Ми постійно перевдягалися в тепліший одяг. Я змінила теплий халат поверх штанів і светра на батькову термобілизну, штани та три светра, один більший за інший. Із переходом на приготування їжі на вогні руки ставали темними від сажі. Відмивати її у холодній воді не вистачало сил і бажання. Поступово температурний режим став таким, що для комфортного існування потрібно було або рухатися, або лізти під ковдру чи вдягати щось хутряне й важке. Ранкові гігієнічні процедури ставали ще коротшими. Волосся я ховала під шапкою, потім знайшла мамин пуховий берет. Останній раз в Маріуполі мила голову 15 березня, після більше ніж двох тижнів. Обмеження гігієнічних процедур протягом тижнів дають відчуття, як багато в них задоволення. Але треба знайти сили й час між обстрілами, аби зігріти воду, спустити окріп із мансарди у ванну

кімнату, незважаючи на холод, роздягтися, а потім іще сушити волосся біля вогню. Дуже приємно також було помити ноги.

Холод та страх під час обстрілів примушують тримати тіло повсякчас напруженим. *З березня, 12:21. Обстріли – зовнішня загроза – примушують мене знерухомитися, застигнути, зачаїтися, обмежити фізичний рух.* У людей, наскільки я бачила, виробляється специфічна постава. Тіло зібране, шия втягнута, кожної хвилини людина готова присісти чи «згрупуватися». Пересування по відкритих ділянках, наприклад, перехід через дорогу, відбувається швидко, великими кроками. Ти подумки ніби перебігаєш між відносно безпечними точками, але й там не можеш розслабитися. Від постійного напруження виникають м'язові зажими, біль у спині. З початком важкого бомбардування, коли будинок почав здригатися, виникло відчуття тілесної спільності з домом. Він був моїм головним фізичним захистом, екзоскелетом, хоча й великим та невідомої міцності. Відповідно завдана йому шкода відгукувалася моїми емоційними реакціями.

Відчай підступав час від часу. Переважно це відбувалося в затишся між обстрілами. Пригнічувало усвідомлення, що я є «гарматним м'ясом» і не в змозі самотійно цей стан змінити. У відповідь виникало відчуття провини перед близькими, які не радили їхати в Маріуполь (батько), або радили виїжджати поки ще ходили поїзди (чоловік). Але відчуття себе слабкою та неспроможною не допомагає триматися, робити денну рутину, постійно відстежувати ступінь небезпеки. І коли мала сили, то придумала таке: *я в поході – непередбачуваному, небезпечному, із вичерпними ресурсами та невідомою тривалістю.* Батько був більш оптимістичним: він порівнював стан на початку війни з першими тижнями своєї строкової служби в армії вкінці 1960-их років: незвична й неприємна підпорядкованість іншій волі, логіка якої не є тобі цілком відомою та зрозумілою.

Під час другого попадання в сусідський двір упала люстра в колись маминій кімнаті. Я реально була в шоці (без лапок). Тілесно відчувалося, що в мене немає рук – така собі метафора безсилля й відчаю. Немає сил навіть різати моркву для супу. Але немає і сил читати та розуміти щось. Треба сказати, що ця люстра зберігалася в родині з дорадянських часів. Вона складалася із трьох плафонів та двох низок тонких скляних підвісок. Якщо їх обережно торкнутися, вони видавали приємний дзвін. У часи радянського товарного дефіциту (коли я саме росла в цьому домі) вона виглядала шикарно та загадково. Коли я дитиною дивилася на неї, бачила інші – кращі – світи, а бабуся сиділа під нею за накритим оксамитовою скатертиною столом. Тепер люстра лежала на підлозі, розтрощена. З іншого боку, це означає, що був час затишся, аби відстежити цей відчай та пірнути в нього.

Постійне перебування у напрузі разом із поганим харчуванням призводить до поступового знесилення. Треба розраховувати й берегти сили, щоби виконувати повсякденну рутину, берегтися від обстрілів. У

перші два тижні війни я вигадала правило: одне важливе діло на день, окрім необхідного. Під ділом я мала на увазі світломаскування, укріплення вікон, утеплення спального місця, перенесення дивану, бо на підлозі спати холодно. Ще сил має вистачити на те, аби вибратися з-під завалу, якщо будинок не витримає ударної хвилі або якщо я залишуся живою в разі прямого попадання. Тому полежати, особливо в затишші – це головний відпочинок та задоволення. Від зменшення об'єму їжі я поступово втрачала вагу, це було видно по одягу. Але відчуття голоду не було критичним.

## Люди. Спроби евакуації

Поступово настало усвідомлення, що події розгортаються в бік погіршення – краще не стає. Наша мобільність містом була обмежена через обстріли та страх вийти на вулицю. Ми опинилися майже в повній ізоляції. Порівняно з багатоквартирними будинками, у приватному секторі завжди треба докласти зусиль, щоби побачити людей, поспілкуватися. Сусіди або живуть в іншому ритмі життя, або зайняті своїми справами в оселі чи на городі. До найближчого магазину декілька кварталів пішки. Усі ці можливості з початком війни зникли. Не можна не тільки побачити, а й подзвонити чи написати знайомим. Найсильніше бажання – аби поруч опинилися люди, бажано знайомі і близькі, але можна й просто безпечні люди – такі ж, як я. Побачила їх у черзі на евакуацію 5 березня.

Про невдалу спробу евакуації маю детальний допис у щоденнику від 6 березня, який додаю.

*Вчора лягла близько 8-ої, написала чоловікові, як мені шкода, що не послухалася його, говорила з дочкою. І плакала.*

*5 березня – перша спроба гуманітарного коридору. Встала рано, випила теплої води, зробила фізичні вправи, приготувала їжу на день, поїла. Батько встав пізніше. Близько 10-ої відкрила Телеграм у телефоні. Евакуація, збір біля драмтеатру об 11-ій годині. Нічого незрозуміло, батько їхати відмовляється, але я зібралася, вдяглася, взяла на пам'ять порцелянового хлопчика, залишила батькові грошей. Передзвонила братові, що батько не хоче їхати. Прощалася назавжди... На вулиці – люди з порожніми пляшками йдуть по воду, машини їздять. Хоча десь чути постріли. На Грецькій вулиці їхали жигулі, із заднього вікна стирчала кришка домовини. У мене тільки речі – ані води, ані їжі.*

*Біля театру люди, їх стає дедалі більше, приватні машини заповнили майже всю площу попереду, але автобусів немає. Ті, хто на машинах, стоять по периметру площі, а зліва, з боку ресторану, черга піших. Вона тягнеться вздовж усієї бокової стіни театру. Я прохожу і стаю на кутку. Поступово за мною виростає довга черга.*

*Постояла, роздивилася, перевірила телефон. Багато людей мені написали... Я скучила за людьми. Жінка із собачкою попереду, рудий юнак позаду мене. Собачка увесь час скигдила. Її хазяйка, звертаючись до лю-*

*дей поруч, вибачалася й пояснювала причини. Що біля 60-ої школи йшла по вулиці, а в людину поруч влучив снаряд, і та впала. Люди, що підходили, ставали в чергу. Хто не міг стояти, сідали на лави вздовж алеї... Потім прийшов рішучій та схвильований чоловік у формі чорного кольору та скомандував розходитися. У його словах чулося, що тут залишатися небезпечно. Сказав, що будуть їздити військові машини з гучномовцями й сповіщати про евакуацію. Дуже швидко людей навколо не стало. Я подумала, чи почую я гучномовця з моєї вулиці? Навряд чи. Зайшла у під'їзд будинку знайомих неподалік. Під'їзд був такий чистий, нічого не лежало й не стояло зайвого, тільки вказівнику бомбосховище. Посиділа трохи на сходах, трохи відпочила й пішла додому... Довелося стукати батькові у вікно палицею. Віддала йому статуетку. Поїла супу й лягла. Незабаром стало зрозуміло, що сьогодні нічого не буде.*

Про зелені, чи гуманітарні коридори почула за день-два до цього. Хоча не було світла, мобільна мережа ще працювала. Я вмикала телефон тільки для перевірки повідомлень та новин. Щодо коридору, то така ідея виглядала логічною: треба евакуювати населення з місця бойових дій. Але надходили також і панічні повідомлення, що коли мова про зелений коридор, то насправді вже не розбирають, де військові, де цивільні.

Про маршрут евакуації та перелік місць збору повідомляли в телеграм-каналі міської ради та в інших. Окрім драмтеатру, вказували ще дві локації: стадіон «Ильчовець» на Нахімова та райадміністрація на Металургів. Рекомендовано було прийти в місце збору об 11:00 та чекати на прибуття автобусів. Коли я прийшла до драмтеатру й побачила кількість людей, то подумала: це скільки ж треба автобусів? Далі почала уявляти собі, як люди намагатимуться потрапити в автобуси і яка під час цього виникне тиснява. Непокіли звуки пострілів, що було чути повсякчас. Далеко й нечасто, але чути. Це не було схоже на згадуваний у повідомленнях про евакуацію «період тиші». Як наважитися їхати в автобусі, якщо навколо будуть постріли? Що робити, якщо дорогою автобус спіткає обстріл? Чи зможу я продовжити шлях пішки? Стоячи в черзі біля драмтеатру, я дивилася на людей навколо, раділа їм, але й думала про те, що, можливо, не всім нам вдасться виїхати. Військовий у чорній формі поставив крапку в цих роздумах. Обіцяні ним військові машини з гучномовцями, що інформують про евакуацію, виглядали так само нереально, як і автобуси, яких ми не дочекалися. Ввечері в телеграмі я прочитала повідомлення міського голови. Він писав, що траса, по якій був запланований маршрут евакуації, зруйнована внаслідок обстрілу. Те саме сталося і з автобусним парком.

Ідучи до драмтеатру 5 березня, я зрозуміла, що потрібно брати з собою воду та якусь їжу. І вдягти зимові черевики, а не нові осінні. І похвалила себе за рішення взяти стільки, скільки зможу нести в руках. Це був результат третього чи четвертого раунду складання речей. Почалося із «тривожної валізки» ще наприкінці січня в Харкові. Документи, ліки, девайси, зарядки тощо. Потім я збиралася, ідучи до Маріуполя в

середині лютого. На початку березня я зрозуміла, що треба залишити більшість речей, нібито пожертвувати. Тому й не буду їх тут перелічувати. Батько виїжджати зі мною відмовився. Це місце надає йому набагато більше впевненості, ніж мені. Він сказав: «Коли я один, мені нічого не страшно». Я відчувала найглибший за цей час розпач та відчай. Написала повідомлення доньці, щоб не повторювала моїх помилок, виїжджала за кордон. Інша частина мене думала, що треба знайти людей, які допоможуть виїхати мені.

Ще однією можливістю я не скористалася вже за власним рішенням. Дехто, зокрема моя родичка із синами, виїжджали в Ялту. Вони вже з'їздили туди й назад. Перевірили, що це можна зробити відносно безпечно. Вони бачили багато людей, що йшли з міста пішки. Тому виїхати машиною разом із сусідами видавалося правильним рішенням. Головне, що там не стріляли, було тільки чути стрілянина з Маріуполя. Але Ялта була під ДНРом, і я не поїхала. Страшно було уявити перевірку документів чи будь-яке інше зіткнення з не українськими військовими. Окрім безправності жінки з окупованої території, я боялася також непередбачуваності та підступності цих людей. Цей страх мабуть був другим після страху прямого попадання снаряда в будинок.

Мене вивезли 18 березня. Це сталося завдяки моєму чоловікові, його друзям – автомобілістам і волонтерам, та неймовірно сміливій жінці. Ірина виїхала із Дніпра на день раніше на автівці, заповненій дитячим одягом та іншою гуманітаркою. У Мангуші машину мало не відібрали на блокпосту, тому ми їхали іншою дорогою.

Рано-вранці 18 березня я почула з двору, як хтось кричить наші з батьком імена. Цю людину я бачила вперше. Щоб я не сумнівалася, вона дала мені послухати голосові повідомлення від чоловіка й від доньки. Я востаннє перепитала тата щодо рішення не їхати зі мною, вдягла куртку, взяла рюкзак та сумку з документами й комп'ютером. Через декілька хвилин, ми з Іриною були вже на вулиці. За два дні до того бомбили драмтеатр. Зараз наші відстрілювалися вже в самому центрі міста. Їхати треба було низом, Приморським бульваром. Ірина скомандувала мені показувати їй дорогу. Загалом ми мали виїхати з міста, пройти російські блокпости, перейти зону зіткнення, а там уже до Запоріжжя та Дніпра. Потім ми поїхали по інших людей з Приморського району, яких теж треба було вивезти. Впоперек вулиці стояв тролейбус, на землі валялися дроти й уламки. Люди біля хрущовок розводили вогонь на мангалі. Ірина залишила їм одяг та їжу, упаковувала речі новоприбулих у багажник. На задньому сидінні машини було двоє жінок, чоловік і два хлопчики. Сім'я з двома дітьми була тутешньою, а жінка прийшла з Лівого берега до знайомої. І ми поїхали з Маріуполя в напрямку Портовського.

На виїзді з міста була велика черга. Праворуч від дороги дачі, де поміж будинками по садках бігали собаки та ходили російські військові. Ліворуч – поле. Людей із джипа перед нами перевіряли дуже ретельно, молодого чоловіка примусили роздягнутись до пояса. Старший чоловік

в окулярах та дві жінки стурбовано ходили навколо машини. У заповненому до верху багажнику було видно клітки з кроликами. Чоловіка з нашої машини не викликали.

Інструкція щодо проходження блокпоста: сидіти тихо і спокійно, віддати паспорти, питань не ставити, самим не починати розмову, чекати. Говорила з військовими тільки водійка. Вони дивилися прописки в паспортах. Це були дні зелених коридорів, тому Ірина сказала, що вивозить людей із Маріуполя. Далі їхали на Мелекіне, Азовське, Ялту, Юр'івку. Пересувалися переважно полями вздовж посадок по твердому ґрунту. «Ось для чого слугував мороз усі два тижні березня», – думала я. Інші говорили, що бачили міні біля дороги в полі, але я не бачила.

В Урзуфі зробили зупинку. Тихо, світить сонце. Добре встати, розім'яти ноги. У магазині поруч майже порожні прилавки, роздратовані продавчині, люди чекають хліба. Я купила апельсин. Приємно було це зробити вперше за останні двадцять днів. Відчуття, що ти на щось можеш гроші витратити, з людьми провзаємодіяти. На іншій зупинці ми чекали в Андріївці жінку з дитиною. Маріупольців зустріли родичі біля села Осипенко, і в машині звільнилося заднє сидіння. Жінки все не було, і я пішла до магазину. Звідти люди виносили такий красивий трикутний у перерізі сірий хліб. «Чи видно по мені, звідки я?» – думала я. Бо говорити вийшло тільки тихим скрадливим голосом. Небезпека бути під обстрілами ніби оточила моє тіло. І це яскраво відчувалося біля людей, які купували пшеничну крупу, розфасовану по два кілограми в тонкі пластикові пакети. Жінка так і не з'явилася, натомість після Андріївки ми підібрали хлопця-студента. Він уже другий тиждень вибирався з Маріуполя пішки.

Окрім замінованих полів та російських блокпостів, головна небезпека – зона зіткнення. Вона не має позначених кордонів, а обстріл на ній може розпочатися в будь-який момент. Блокпости були майже в кожному населеному пункті. В одному на високому старому кам'яному паркані було написано «русский военный корабль, иди нахуй», але останні два слова зафарбовані. Уже з Мелекіно присутність російських військ позначалася літерами Z на парканах чи вивісках. Військові на блокпостах були з білими пов'язками на правій нозі. Їхні руки були в сажі, поруч були палатки та вогнища. Під час перевірки на одному із блокпостів я побачила, як зліва на дорогу повертає легковик зі свинею у причепі. А солдат із блокпоста говорить: «Что ж ты нам везешь ее, такую худую?!». Велика черга була на блокпосту Токмака. Перевіряли декілька машин одночасно. Дивилися багажник, бардачок, перепитували звідки й куди.

Після Токмака на дорозі вже була російська військова техніка. Раніше ми тільки один раз бачили їх під Осипенко. Окрім, звичайно, згорілих залишків машин і, можливо, танків. Точно не пам'ятаю, а фото зі зрозумілих причин не робила. Інтуїтивно хотілося бути подалі від цих машин. Іноді вантажівка їхала дуже повільно й доводилося її обганяти. Мабуть, це було найсильніше у моєму житті переживання недовіри. Але

водночас я мала уособлювати «цивільне населення на зеленому коридорі». Зараз я розумію, що важливо було не асоціювати в той момент військових на блокпостах із тими, хто стріляв по Маріуполю.

В одному місці декілька людей стояли на узбіччі з пакетами в руках і махали ними в бік дороги. Це була їжа для людей із уже майже окупованого Маріуполя. Мірою наближення до зони зіткнення сідало сонце, машин, окрім військових, не було. У Василівці, в районі перехрестя з «НЛО», назустріч нам ішла транспортна колона в бік Маріуполя. Попереду – машина Червоного хреста, потім близько 15 автобусів та багато легкових машин.

Міст у Василівці був підірваний. Звернули праворуч й метрів за 300 стало зрозуміло, що треба було повернути ліворуч та їхати через яр. Хлопець на велосипеді сказав, що там міни, і погодився показати дорогу. Треба було розвернутися, а за нами вже йшло з десяток автомобілів. Далі – ґрунтовкою через яр. Внизу була машина ДСНС України і двоє людей у формі стояли й роздивлялися потік машин через яр. Потім ми в тій само послідовності автівок довго підіймалися на протилежний бік яру. І там уже були українські блокпости.

На нашому боці паспорти перевіряли тільки пару разів, один навіть перепитав у мене мою (харківську) прописку й відповів: «Вгадала!». Тепер ми радісно віталися з військовими на блокпостах. У Запоріжжі нас спрямували до логістичного центру для переселених осіб у приміщенні «Метро». Я помітила, що у військового, який регулював рух, руки чисті. Нас записали, і, оскільки притулку ми зараз не потребували, повернулися на трасу. Десь близько 10-ої вечора ми були під Дніпром.

### Подяки

Цей текст також оприлюднено в авторському перекладі англійською мовою в збірці *Russia's War in Ukraine 2022. Personal Experiences of Ukrainian Scholars* (*ibidem-Verlag*, 2024; ISBN 9783838217574), яка була упорядкована дослідницями, викладачками Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія» Тамарою Марценюк і Тетяною Костюченко. Моя велика вдячність видавництву та редакторкам, які запропонували написати про досвід перших тижнів війни у Маріуполі. Ця робота була здійснена за підтримки Харківського національного університету імені В. Н. Каразіна, програми «Scholars at Risk» Швейцарського національного наукового фонду (SNSF) та Університету Фрібургу (Швейцарія). Особлива вдячність Christine Bichsel (Університет Фрібургу) та Cecile Druey (Університет Берну), які зробили мою роботу у Швейцарії можливою.

## Своїм і чужим голосом

Ідея дослідження народилась у горах Киргизстану на семінарі журналістської і правозахисної мережі «Unit». Діалог про сучасні квір-театр і квір-драматургію виявився захопливим і складним: настільки багатогранні ці теми у Східній Європі. Вони, безперечно, не мають точного тлумачення, що відкриває двері для творчого пошуку й інтерпретації.

Особливо увагу привернули образ ЛГБТК-людини у драматургії кінця ХХ – початку ХХІ століття та автентична сучасна квір-драма, бо в наш час рідко трапляються повноцінні репертуарні вистави, і найчастіше квір-драма існує лише як літературний твір або одноразові сценічні читання й режисерські ескізи. Після обміну думками ми вирішили підготувати лаконічне дослідження, у рамках якого квір-прочитання п'єс білоруських авторок і авторів здійснив Маріам Агамян (Україна), а Дмитрій Єрмолович-Дащінскій (Білорусь) розгляне образ ЛГБТК-людини в українській квір-драмі як формі активізму. Білоруська дизайнерка й художниця Анастасія Стельмахова, з якою Дмитрій вже співпрацював в інтернет-журналі про гендер і сексуальність «MAKEOUT», обрала цитати з п'єс, які ми аналізуємо в цьому тексті, і підготувала до них асоціативні ілюстрації, які також представлено в нашій спільній роботі.

У театральній культурі Східної Європи виникли два основні простори квір-репрезентації. По-перше, масовий театр, що виявляє солідарність із ЛГБТК-людьми й висвітлює їхні проблеми для широкої аудиторії. Серед театрів, що формулюють повістку соціальної детабуїзації назвемо Київський академічний театр «Золоті ворота» і незалежний «Дикий театр» в Україні, незалежний театр «НомоCosmos» у Мінську та «Беларускі свабодны тэатр». А по-друге, – автентичний квір-театр, що виникає в середовищі квір-активізму і який створюють квір-люди для ЛГБТК-аудиторії (як порівняти з Білоруссю, більший розвиток отримав в Україні).

Отож далі ми розглянемо явища сучасної драматургії і театального мистецтва.



## Збоку хочеш нас роздивитися?

### *П'ять текстів для театру не про норму*

Попередження: у текстах розглянутих далі п'єс є згадки про зґвалтування, насильство, самоушкодження й суїцид.

«Trigger warning», або попередження для людей із чутливістю до важких або тривожних епізодів у фільмах, книжках, виставах досі мало використовують на наших теренах. В Україні практику проставляти й осмислювати подібні маркування я спостерігала тільки в проєктах кількох феміністичних ініціатив, як-от онлайн-виставка «До(к)віра»<sup>1</sup> та фестиваль феміністичного кіно «Фільма»<sup>2</sup>. Водночас попередження про негетеронормативність у анонсах фільмів чи вистав – звична практика. У наймейнстрімніших медіа це ще і страхування від закидів про «пропаганду» та аби не налякати зненацька заскочену поважну гетероприречену аудиторію.

У рамках нашого обміну із Дмитрієм Єрмолович-Дацінським я отримала п'ять п'єс, так чи інак пов'язаних із ЛГБТ-тематикою. Запропонований аналіз є спробою квір-прочитання цих драматичних творів, навіть коли ті не маркуються як «квір» автурою і критикою.

Я працювала з текстами Альони Іванюшенко «Шкура» (2018) і «ты найдешь Алису под старым снегом» (2019), Алексея Дударева «И был день (Свалка)» (1988), Андрея Иванова «Источники света» (2019) та Нікола Рудковського «Бог щекотки» (2010).

Тексти Іванюшенко містять сцени жорстокості й насильства, багатьом добре знайомого зі шкільних років. П'єса «Шкура» оповідає про двох дівчат, які придумують спільний сценарій фільму та діляться історіями, про які незручно говорити вголос. Точне, майже документальне

<sup>1</sup> <https://dokvira.cam/explication>

<sup>2</sup> <https://filmafest.org/discussion/made-with-love/>

відтворення шкільної атмосфери досягається шляхом уведення класичних лесбо- й біфобних жартів, що знецінюють поцілунок дівчат-однокласниць, і гомофобних реплік про тісну дружбу хлопців. Нас вчать гетеросексуальності, міфологізують і нумерують: перший гетеросекс, перший гетеропоцілунок. А от насильству, яке коять щодо тебе, нема ліку. Це насильство треба ховати й розповідати про нього тільки у фантазії уявному Камбербетчу. До речі, це цікавий перетин із драмою «Пьеса в шести отвратительных сценах» Ольги Романової. Там найбільше відкритості героїня дозволяла собі із своєю уявною подругою, акторкою з фільму «Кінг-Конг» (Агамян 2021). Якщо б можна було ввести до переліку персонажок і цноту в п'єсі «Шкура», то вона би могла фігурувати як окрема міфічна фігура. Цнота – це й тягар, і міфічний дар, що бережуть або безславно втрачають героїні впродовж п'єси. Дружба з хлопцями у творі побудована на тому, що «они не делали с Яной ужасных вещей». До цього додається велика спокуса бути не такою, як інші дівчата в мізогінному патріархальному світі. Тримаючись за імітацію цієї дружби, мушиш приховувати все, чого боїшся й чого не розумієш. Рефреном звучить ця теза й у «ты найдешь Алису под старым снегом» Іванюшенко: чи персонажка така, як інші, чи можна з нею так; а як не можна? Чи погано, що «ідеальний» хлопець Марк знімає домашні еротичні фото Яни, навіть коли вона просить припинити? У цій п'єсі є сцени насильства, після якого хлопці-гвалтівники виправдовуються, мовляв, це були проводи їхнього друга в армію, і Яна мала би ставитися з розумінням до їхніх «потреб».

У «ты найдешь Алису под старым снегом» авторка оповідає історію двох поколінь жінок однієї родини. Старша жінка втратила чоловіка, молодша – свою кохану. Між реальністю й минулим стоять ці болючі трагедії. Вера й Аліса мають власні способи триматися за спогади, і жодна не має плану, як будувати майбутнє. Героїні наче заціпеніли у своїх втратах, що законсервували і їхні уявлення про нормальне життя, яке було до, і з яким порівнюють свою нормальність тепер упродовж дії п'єси:

...Саша немного заставляет. И они медленно качаются под грустную песню. На диване потом долго сидят, смотрят друг на друга, держатся за руки. Поцелуй.

Алиса в реальности соскребаёт обои и штукатурку там, где проекция. Соскребаёт то место, где сама сидит на видео. А проекция очень большая, как в кинотеатре. И Алисе не победить себя же двухметровую... (Иванюшенко, 2019)

Питання цієї п'єси: чи можна бути щасливою? Чи правда, що всі тут мають перешкоджати щастю одне одного, а особливо – Алісі і її колишньої коханої Саші?

Героїнь «И был день (Свалка)» описано на сайті kino-teatr.ru<sup>3</sup> так: «...они влачат жалкое существование, но в каждом из них жива страдаю-

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kino-teatr.ru/teatr/movie/108059/annot/>

щяя душа, стремящаяся обрести прощение». Це одна з перших п'єс часів перебудови, де є доволі детальний опис згвалтування в армії. Пастушок, що оповідає свою історію служби, не єдиний, хто розгортає перед нами структурні вади мілітаризованих інституцій, – про них заговорить у другій половині драми й інший герой, Афганець. «Шкура», «Свалка», «Бог щекотки» містять антимілітаристську повістку, не артикульовану прямо: нас, як у підручнику, лишають із довоколамілітаристськими фактами наодинці, у полі причинку для роздумів.



Лінія про шкідливі відходи, які вивозять на сміттєзвалище, де живуть дійові особи, провокує міркування про спешисизм і те, де він має ефект знелюднення певних груп, серед яких безхатченки, люди без документів, потерпілі від насильства, секс-працівниці, небілі мігрант\_ки й люди з інвалідністю. Для тих, хто не вписалися в суспільну «норму», також є прийнятна роль – стати «матеріалом» для Журналіста. Текст справедливо критикує методи роботи Журналіста, який проводить своє «дослідження». Це влучно викриває пристрасть медій до «унікального життєвого досвіду». Упізнаваний мотив особливо в жанрі документальних досліджень про вразливі групи, коли журналісти/режисери позбавляють можливості лишитися в цій історії суб'єктними тих, про кого хочуть зробити матеріал, який викликав би сильні емоції в аудиторії. Відомі випадки, коли ті, про кого робилися соціально важливі кіно- чи фоторепортажні висловлювання, втратили контроль над подальшою долею цих матеріалів, хоч фінальний продукт залишався в полі мистецтва/дослідження. Детальніше про подібний випадок можна прочитати в тексті «Нас не можна включити на ваших умовах»: квір-критика імперіалістичного погляду в «Тейкейшн: Україна» (Сердюкова, Танцюра, чушак 2021).

П'єса Іванова «Источники света» складна й неоднорідна за структурою робота: майже без ремарок, із довгими монологами, які потенційно могли би складатися в моновистави, де герої ніколи би так і не побачили одне одного. Усі, із ким нас знайомить текст, перебувають поза «нормою», однак тільки гомоеротичні стосунки охоронців прописані як історія складних суперечливих персонажів. Тим часом трансгендерна

жінка, здається, зовсім не цікавить автора як героїня, а тільки з'являється в коротких епізодах під деднеймом (ім'ям, яке людина не використовує щодо себе, попри те, що воно може бути прописане в паспорті чи дане батьками). Текст містифікує інвалідність і наділяє «надприродними» властивостями кількох інших дійових осіб. Наприклад, є сцена, де людина з інвалідністю бачить фантастичне світло, що еманує від секс-працівниці. Екзотизація як драматургічний прийом?

На жаль, цей текст важко законспектувати, тому аналіз теж лишаю трохи хаотичним. Ілюстрація Анастасії Стальмахової вдало схоплює поетичну фрагментарність цієї драми:

«...У меня в детстве было дерево, мое дерево. Когда мама челночила, она меня в деревне на несколько дней одного оставляла, и я вечером шел к моему дереву.

Дерево росло на берегу реки. Оно было бугристое, крепкое и... похоже было, как будто это такой огромный мужчина голый вверх ногами, с закопанной головой. Там руки, ноги... Там всё похоже было. Все дети хихикали над тем, что так похоже было, а я ходил рыбачить под ним, а на самом деле, спал под ним и обнимал его. Потому что это был мой друг тогда. Иг. Нат...

..Мне снятся твои руки. Ничего не помню, только руки. Одна лежит у меня на солнечном сплетении. Мышцы переплетенные, вены. Большие, красивые руки. Крепкие. Древесные руки. Человеческие корни. А другая – у меня под головой. И волнами накатывает твой запах. Как теплое море мне на ноги накатывало, когда я был малышом. Тоже ничего не помню. Мама, какой-то мужик с ней, Азовское море, небо выгоревшее, как волосы у мамы, мои ноги и волны. Мерно накатывают. Иг-нат.

Иг-нат. Я смеюсь своим малышowym смехом. Корни. Твои руки. Одна – под головой. Одна – на груди. Такой хороший сон...» (Иванов, 2019)

У «Бог щекотки» повторюється мотив персонажки з п'єси «Свалка»: там так само героїня мріє – тільки про народження дитини. Це її головна мотивація, про це її репліки, про це кожна її поява у сценах. Фотограф зі «Шкури», фотограф із «Бог щекотки», журналіст зі «Свалки» – у чомусь подібні образи: як мінімум, усі вони зверхні й домінують, а ті, кого вони обирають центральною фігурою своїх кадрів і публікацій, для них тільки матеріал.

«Бог щекотки» Рудковського – одна з частин трилогії. Тут багато некоректно вжитих термінів щодо вразливих груп. Головний герой – Ілля, гомосексуальний чоловік, фотограф, що переживає втрату коханця – небілого хлопця на ім'я Тім. Страждання інших дійових осіб – ніби пародія на справжнє життя, адже дійсно живе і страждає тільки Ілля. У тексті зображено його зближення з безіменним новим коханцем, який фігурує як «гастарбайтер». І лише на певному етапі Ілля наділяє його ім'ям свого колишнього коханця, що зрештою, за відповідним режисерським задумом, може стати хорошим способом показати впізнавану фетишизацію небілих людей.

Нерідко як художній прийом використано екзотизацію «інших». Певно, що цей текст потребує чутливої розшифровки, бо одна й та сама сцена може бути поставлена і як расистська, і як критична до європейської «кризи біженців», де білість визначає ступінь доступу до привілеїв. Наведу уривок із п'єси, що можна дуже по-різному поставити в театрі, залежно від політичних поглядів команди. Репліка матері головного героя: «Как геи, эмигранты, беженцы, так и я хочу иметь такие же права на любовь». Це може звучати вже звично, як сотні голосів, незадоволених «ною етикою», яка виборює права для дедалі більшої кількості вразливих груп людей. А може бути щось зовсім інше: наприклад, вона може бути про те, що з наших квірних маргінесів ми тільки тим і володіємо, що правом на кохання, бо любов поки що не регулюється міграційними службами, не обкладена податками й не має терміну дії, як посвідки.



У п'єсах «Свалка» і «Бог щекотки» є епізоди з паспортами, що чудово ілюструють спільну беззахисність мігрантів, осіб без визначеного місця проживання та інших людей, які мають труднощі з документами. Наша спільна вразливість перед державами могла би нас об'єднати і посилити опір. У всіх текстах є міркування про протистояння й невписування у загал, у «норму», у той образ людини, яку можна назвати «звичайною» і, мабуть, це і є причина зчитувати персонаж\_ок п'єс як квірних. Бо моє розуміння квірності виходить за межі сексуальності й гендерної ідентичності, а відкриває можливості співжиття та розуміння також і з людьми з інвалідністю, потерпілих від воєнних злочинів, секс-працівницями й мігрант\_ками.

## О себе говорю только я...

### *Аутентичная квир-драма современной Украины*

Наиболее соответствует правозащитному принципу «Ничего для нас без нас» квир-театр как форма арт-квир-активизма. Создаваемые для него тексты преимущественно носят документальный характер и представляют собой своего рода «лабораторно кристаллизованный», «чистый» вербатим, так как автор\_ки сами исполняют личные монологи под подлинными или предпочтительными именами и без их специальной драматургической адаптации.

Сценическая читка пьесы о трансгендерном переходе «Больше, чем женщина» (автор идеи и режиссер – Нин Ходорывско, Postplaylab, г. Киев, 2017) поднимает тему множественности идентичностей человека. Произведение стремится донести мысль, что каждый человек – единственно возможный эксперт по своей жизни.

В пьесе, основанной на реальных событиях, поднимается тема социальной стереотипизации и стигматизации. Освещаются проблемы гендерного насилия над женщинами и дискриминации феминных людей, а также обыденной практики гетеронормативного разделения искусства, моды, этических норм на «мужские» и «женские». Актуализируются нарушения прав человека в Украине при оказании гинекологической помощи трансмаскулиным людям и проведении обязательной медицинской экспертизы. Ценно, что в произведении затрагивается редко репрезентируемая тема множественной маргинализации (история трансмаскулиного политэмигранта из России).

Точный и выразительный образ «красного носа» появляется в монологе Мариам Агамян. Она надевает яркий клоунский нос, когда в компании слышит ксенофобные шутки, и смеется вместе с теми, кто транслирует ксенофобию, таким образом, легко доводя ситуацию до абсурда.

В формате видеointервью была представлена документальная пьеса «Перехід дозволено одній людині» (авторы – Магрит Сибиряков, Влад, Саша Стриж и Эдвард Риз, режиссер – Магрит Сибиряков, Киев)<sup>4</sup>. Действие происходит в вагоне электрички. Кроме героев (они же – авторы и артисты) вводится условный персонаж – голос диктора. Реальные истории трансгендерного перехода нередко предстают как ожившие воспоминания. Как часто в дороге случайным знакомым мы можем рассказать больше, чем самым близким людям... Именно в этих обстоятельствах герои делятся прозаичными событиями из жизни. Как бродячие музыканты в поезде, они пускают по рядам зрительного зала шапку, собирая на гормонотерапию. В целом, пьеса полна иронии, возможной только среди людей с общей идентичностью и недопустимой со стороны тех, кто вне одного сообщества.

<sup>4</sup> «Перехід дозволено одній людині» <https://youtu.be/oVncO-41SQs>

Текст может выступать составной частью мультижанрового комплексного произведения, как в случае с поэтической монодрамой Эдварда Риза в проекте «You are here @ Павлівська психіатрична» (перформер – Эдвард Риз, Postplaylab, Киев, 2021). Арт-инициатива включала экспозицию коллажей с использованием фрагментов текста, видеоинсталляцию и стендап-перформанс. Поэма в форме верлибра контрастна, как повседневность больничной реальности и реплики наивного народного искусства Марии Примаченко во внутреннем саду лечебницы. Тревожность и чувство несовершенства окружающей реальности оставляет яркое впечатление борьбы героя за себя, свою идентичность, свой гармоничный внутренний мир (приведем развернутую цитату):

*...коли на закритому показі фільму про геїв-військових  
нацисти розбивають вікно і пускають сльозогінний газ в приміщення  
(note: підводка eveline витримує сльозогінний газ, дуже рекомендую)  
товариш патрульний говорить:  
пишіть  
«я перебуваю у світлій пам'яті і тверезому розумі  
не відвіую лікаря нарколога і лікаря психіатра»...  
...»девички!» – кричать медсестри всім своїм підопічним  
і мені теж, незважаючи на діагноз,  
я намагаюся згадати, як реагувати на «девички!» та «я за этой  
женщиной» спокійно  
але натомість згадую гендерну клініку в Стокгольмі  
місце, повне людяності, поваги і психотерапії  
дякую тобі боже що я українець  
...сьогоднішня медсестра називає мене моїм іменем  
Справжнім  
і виправляє пацієнток, коли вони звертаються до мене «девушка»  
мабуть, мені пощастило... (Різ 2021)*

Несмотря на фактическое положение низовой художественной инициативы, квир-драма имеет немалое социально-психологическое и культурное значение для ЛГБТК-комьюнити и в целом для современного общества в стадии трансформации. Безусловно, она дает возможность услышать живой голос квир-людей в Украине. Открытым, однако, остается вопрос: как результативно и корректно расширить круг читательской и зрительской аудитории квир-драматургии?

*Дослідження підготовано за підтримки Міжнародної мережі журналісток та правозахисниць, що працюють із темами ЛГБТК, «Unit».*

### Список джерел

Агамян Мариам. 2021. «'Жизнь женщины' – очень размытое понятие». *Критика Феміністична: східноєвропейський журнал феміністичних і квир-студій*, 2021. <https://feminist.krytyka.com/ru/articles/zhizn-zhenshchiny-ochen-razmytoe-ponyatie>

- Иванов Андрей. 2019. «Источники света». Рукопис із архіву автора.
- Иванюшенко Алёна. 2019. «ты найдешь Алису под старым снегом». *Центр белорусской драматургии* 11. [http://dramacenter.org/upload/information\\_system\\_25/4/2/7/item\\_427/information\\_items\\_property\\_661.pdf](http://dramacenter.org/upload/information_system_25/4/2/7/item_427/information_items_property_661.pdf)
- Різ Едвард. 2021. «You are here @Павлівська психіатрична». Рукопис із архіву автора.
- Сердюкова Юля, Танцюра Ірина, чушак надія. 2022. «Нас не можна включити на ваших умовах»: квір-критика імперіалістичного погляду в “Тейкейшн: Україна”. *Критика Феміністична: східноєвропейський журнал феміністичних і квір-студій* 5: 29–52.

## A Decade after “Theorizing NGOs”: The Entanglement of State, Feminism, and Neoliberalism

Victoria Bernal & Inderpal Grewal. *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2014.

This anthology on the global state of NGOs and feminist activism brings together previously unpublished research and reprints of earlier work. The chapters discuss a wide range of contexts, including NGOs run by women for women and NGOs that incorporate work with women within a broader agenda and bring perspectives from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. A central issue debated by the book is a phenomenon described by its critics as the “NGOization of feminism,” namely the transformation of feminist activism that followed the NGO boom of the 1990s (Lang 1997; Alvarez 1999). This process has arguably transformed feminism into a depoliticized, donor-dependent, project-based activity that is not only compatible with neoliberalism but actively promotes the formation of neoliberal subjects. This has been attributed to aspects of NGO work as diverse as the focus on entrepreneurship of many aid NGOs and normalizing the idea of a neoliberal state by taking over the delivery of previously state-provided social welfare. The editors do not frame the book as a history of NGOization, but rather as an open discussion of how feminist activism fares in this transformed environment bringing new opportunities and limitations.

Another issue addressed by the volume is how the global North-South divide structures unequal access to power and resources for NGOs and feminist activists. The book affords considerable attention to Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space – three out of 11 chapters focus on Eastern Europe and Russia (Helms, Hemment, Grünberg), and a fourth discusses the post-enlargement EU (Lang). Despite this, the volume struggles to situate the region within the North-South paradigm, oscillating between assuming Eastern European exceptionalism and implicitly subsuming the region under the global South. For example, the editorial introduction speaks of “North-South relations – or, in the case of Eastern Europe, East-West histories,” understanding both frameworks as related to unequal access to power but somehow unconnected to each other. On the other hand, the editors and several contributors understand Eastern European countries as places where donor agendas formulated in the global North dismiss local priorities, but without an explicit positioning of the region within this paradigm. It should be noted, however, that the publication of the volume precedes more recent debates that have questioned the continued positioning of Eastern Europe as the former “Second World” external to global colonial histories that have led to the formation of the North-South divide.

The book has three thematic sections. The first, “NGOs Beyond Success or Failure,” focuses on the relations between NGOs, civil society, states, and social movements and explores some of the unintended outcomes of the work of NGOs in the field. Elissa Helms discusses the proliferation of women’s NGOs in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, where international donor agendas promoted a reduced state and facilitated the creation of professionalized NGO cadres. Nevertheless, Helms argues that promoting gender equality NGOs in a context that lacked a strong history of feminist organizing enabled the emergence of feminist activism rather than precluded it, as the NGOization hypothesis would have it. Discussing Maoist insurgency in rural Nepal, Lauren Leve asks whether popular support for the rebellion resulted from a failure of development, as defined by Western liberal discourse, or was perhaps its inadvertent result. Leaning towards the latter, Leve considers the role played by NGO-run women’s literacy courses in producing subjects that were more likely to support Maoist visions of social justice. Aradhana Sharma draws on research with an Indian government-organized women’s NGO (GONGO) to explore how governance is reconfigured in the relationship between the NGO, the state, and neoliberalism. Sharma suggests that the neoliberal governmentalization of empowerment resulting from this collaboration brings both risks and unexpected possibilities.

Section II, “Postcolonial Neoliberalisms and the NGO Form,” looks at how the work of NGOs, which operate in a neoliberal context, can reproduce social divisions and neglect local concerns by privileging donor-supported agendas formulated in the global North. Julie Hemment examines some of the contradictory effects of the focus on violence against women in international development, using the example of women’s crisis centers in post-Soviet Russia. The author argues that the issue of violence, which succeeded in uniting women from the global North and South, simultaneously silenced local concerns and ignored the effects of post-socialist economic dislocation. Hemment’s otherwise convincing analysis, however, relies on the global North-South paradigm without explicitly discussing Russia’s position in this dichotomy. Kathleen O’Reilly describes negotiations over the meaning of women’s participation that took place in an Indian NGO that aimed to empower women by involving them in water supply management while at the same time marginalizing their female staff. O’Reilly understands participation as a flexible notion defined not in policy documents and project plans but in dialogic exchanges between project actors of unequal power. LeeRay M. Costa compares rural women’s activism with the activism of urban middle- and upper-class women in Thailand. The author argues that rural women’s concerns regarding class, ethnicity, and cultural difference situate their interests differently from those of elite urban women and concludes that power and difference continue to undermine women’s attempts at solidarity. Lamia Karim examines how the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner, the Grameen Bank, and several leading NGOs in Bangladesh mobilize pre-existing notions of honor and shame to ensure microcredit loan repay-

ments. Within a system of collective responsibility for individual loans (taken out by women but used mainly by their male kin), women's honor acts as loan collateral in what Karim calls an "economy of shame."

Section III, "Feminist Social Movements and NGOs," addresses the relationship between different forms of feminist organizing, particularly the idea that the proliferation of NGOs working on women's issues has weakened feminism's political edge. Saida Hodžić considers NGOization an evaluative rather than a descriptive term and argues that the "NGOization paradigm" shapes feminist knowledge in ways that limit our understanding of NGOs. Drawing on research about women's organizing in Ghana, the author suggests that anti-institutionalism, the idea that feminists should be working against rather than with the state, is not universal. Hodžić locates it in the global North and the academy and claims this is not without epistemological and geopolitical implications, which privilege Northern perspectives. Laura Grünberg provides a personal account of establishing a women's NGO in post-socialist Romania and describes a steep learning curve in assuming NGO management and adopting the language of international donors, "an almost magical, alienated, specialized language," (p. 262) and the frustration of chasing ever-shifting funding priorities. Sabine Lang, one of the first scholars to discuss the NGOization of feminism, revisits the issue in an essay about women's advocacy networks in the European Union. Lang demonstrates how EU governance structures privilege institutional advocacy over loose, informal alliances and discourage public voice and participation. Therefore, Lang identifies movement building and creating feminist publics as a vital task for the future. Sonia E. Alvarez, another key scholar in the NGOization debate, revisits her earlier work on Latin America. The author maintains that even at the height of the "NGO boom," most women's NGOs continued to produce and disseminate feminist knowledge and served as key nodes in feminist fields that connected disparate actors. Furthermore, Alvarez notes that in the 2000s, numerous NGOs re-focused on public outreach and "movement work."

Read together, the chapters reveal the NGO to be a flexible form crucially shaped but not fully determined by its relations with the state and neoliberalism. They show that although so-called NGOization changed relations between feminism and the state, this impact differs depending on context. Furthermore, it did not only foreclose options available to feminist activists but could sometimes open new possibilities. The volume also shows how involved NGOs have become in the very processes of constructing gender, not just serving or mobilizing women but producing new categories of women through their work, such as "grassroots women" and "trafficked women." The chapters do not speak with one voice, but that can be considered a strength of the book, which sheds light on the relationship between feminism and NGOs from different perspectives. While this slightly older collection of essays can no longer be read as a survey of the current state of feminist activism within NGOs, it remains relevant due to

the continued influence of both neoliberalism and NGOs on feminist organizing and women's lives. It gains particular significance when read against the backdrop of recent "anti-gender" campaigns that often select NGOs as one of their targets.

## References

- Alvarez, Sonia. 1999. "Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO 'Boom.'" *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1 (2): 181–209.
- Lang, Sabine. 1997. "The NGOization of Feminism." *Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminisms in International Politics*, ed. by J. W. Scott, C. Kaplan, and D. Keates, 101–20. New York: Routledge.

Jelena Košinaga  
<https://doi.org/10.52323/209382>

## Borderlands in European Gender Studies: Feminisms of Postsocialist Europe

Teresa Kulawik & Zhanna Kravchenko. *Borderlands in European Gender Studies: Beyond the East-West Frontier*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020.

**B**orderlands in European Gender Studies: Beyond the East-West Frontier, edited by Teresa Kulawik and Zhanna Kravchenko, is a book that arose from a 2011 conference entitled *Why Is There No Happiness in the East? The Making of European Gender Studies*, at the University of Södertörn in Stockholm. The discussions at the conference mainly tackled the duality between Eastern and Western feminisms within the larger scope of gender studies. Aside from the introduction and epilogue, the book is organized into three parts, comprising ten chapters altogether. The volume introduces "a critical analytical perspective of Europe as borderland" (1) by delving into the advantages and limitations of feminist theorizing of the borderlands that go beyond the East/West dichotomy. This way of theorizing represents a form of critical thinking foregrounded on the personal narratives of the contributors as well as their contextualization within "nation-specific contexts and intellectual traditions" (26) that comprise the multiple approaches of gender, temporality, location, sexuality, and so on.

The first part of the book, "Bringing in the second Other," explores possibilities of how we can bridge the gap between the Eastern and Western feminist scholarship and gives voice to the second Other of Europe. In this context, the "second Other" refers to what was initially designated as the Second World, the Cold War conceptualization of the socialist states in-between poverty and wealth. In her chapter, Marina Hughson borrows the ideas from world-systems theory to argue for semiperiphery's contextual perception in

analyzing its gender regimes. Through the dichotomous relationship between “premodern” Serbian masculinities and “modern,” West-influenced Serbian femininities, Hughson proclaims the semiperiphery a crucial “strategic concept” for its implication of the resistance against the deflecting knowledge production (69) that structurally relates it to the center. She adds that this structural approach to semiperiphery can be the foundation of how multiple masculinities can emerge; however, in these semiperipheral societies’ masculinities, there is still a battle between native ideology and encroaching hegemonic, 1<sup>st</sup> world ideology. Yulia Gradszkova tackles the issue of silencing Muslim women living in the Volga-Ural region by doing away with the Russocentric perspective that was dominant in that scholarship. She argues that decolonial theoretical perspectives contribute to a different understanding of gender within Eastern Europe, and will also contribute to the creation of policies of inclusion.

The body becomes the main focus of the second part, “Conceiving scattered bodies” – with its central role in feminist thought and gender studies – as the medium/border between nature and culture. It emerges as a relevant signifier in the process of “rebordering of Europe” (28) or the disruption of geopolitical polarities. Kathrin Braun critically addresses the praxis of reproductives, which is a research field that aims at creating, storing, and manipulating embryos by combining reproductive technology and genetic methods. She argues that contemporary feminist scholarship has insufficient theoretical capacity for the matter. According to Braun, to overcome these challenges, feminists should first reflect on the postcolonial framework as a relevant lens to unravel the cross-border transactions and the very role of the subaltern in that process. The socio-economic distress of women participating in the reproductives “business” should also be addressed, as well as the stereotyping of them as inferior and agentless compared to their Western counterparts. Next, Elżbieta Korolczuk discusses how reproductive rights and notions of (national and ethnic) belonging are discursively articulated in modern-day Poland. In Poland, human rights discourses are often deployed by those who oppose women’s reproductive rights and often appear extreme. Korolczuk sees this as an attack on women’s rights on the whole and as a limitation of their reproductive freedoms. Subsequently, to resist the notion of backwardness often associated with Eastern Europe, Redi Koobak examines “challenges of feminist theorizing beyond time lag” (29) by focusing on Anna-Stina Treumund’s series of self-representations inspired by the Butlerian concept of performativity. Analyzing Treumund’s photograph *Drag*, Koobak utilizes Muñoz’s concept of “disidentification” to highlight Treumund’s conflicting position, whose “working on and against” the Western hegemonic discourses signifies simultaneous resistance to dominant ideology and its assimilation (184).

The final part, “Citizenship intersected,” explores the praxis of conceptualizing novel forms of citizenship emerging from the intersections among the questions of belonging, agency, statehood, and legal status within the frame-

work of “European and global rebordering” (29). Aleksandra Sojka takes a feminist perspective to analyze the concept of citizenship by reflecting on the case study of Polish female labor migrants in Spain. In her investigation, Sojka uses the theoretical framework of intersectionality to analyze the categories of whiteness, Europeanness, gender, and nationality to unravel the “complex positionality between privilege and disadvantage,” as illustrated in the positioning of the white women in the essentially racialized sphere of the domestic work (195). Lenita Freidenvall and Drude Dahlerup’s chapter addresses women’s (mis)representation in the political scene. Focusing on the electoral gender and minority quotas, their study is based on the postal questionnaires administered to the political parties of Europe and on the interviews conducted in Poland, Macedonia, and Sweden. They question the possibility of inclusion of minorities within the political sphere, especially as resulting of the improvement of women’s positions in politics.

In concluding the volume, Myra Marx Ferree discusses the challenges it poses to readers by taking the perspective of those who are invisible or “erased” (253). The book provokes the readers to come to some differential conclusions and perceptions of the borderlands of Europe and understand the gradation of hierarchies meandering across the “borderlands” between the Orient and Occident. Moreover, focusing on the “excluded” voices allows us to see some other “truths,” otherwise overshadowed by the dominant hegemonic discourses. My only critique would be insufficient empirical coverage in the chapters conspicuously relying on empirical research. Nevertheless, for scholars in the post/decolonial theory, gender studies, and feminist theory in the postsocialist world, the volume is an excellent example of how to address the questions of borderlands critically, vocalize the invisible, and rethink the very transnationalism.

Alexandria Wilson-McDonald  
<https://doi.org/10.52323/208952>

## A Queer History of Communism: Navigating Sexuality and Gender in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1989

Věra Sokolová. *Queer Encounters with Communist Power: Non-heterosexual Lives and the State in Czechoslovakia, 1948–1989*. Prague: Karolinum Press, Charles University, 2021.

**L**ife under communism is often presented in totalizing and simplistic terms. Věra Sokolová’s book *Queer Encounters with Communist Power: Non-heterosexual Lives and the State in Czechoslovakia, 1948–1989* provides a welcomed and compelling contribution to this history by exploring the experiences of queer and non-heterosexual people’s lives under state-socialism in Czechoslovakia. This review examines this timely work and brings

it into conversation with Kateřina Lišková's recently published book *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–1989* (2018), in exploring queer experiences in Czechoslovakia from different perspectives. Taken together, these two books provide a rich and complex picture of life under communism for queer and non-heterosexual people. The books converge in parsing out the subtle, though no less impactful, political experiences of the queer and non-heterosexual community that opens the door for future explorations. Readers will, however, be confronted by the diversity amongst people's lived experiences through a gender-based lens. While readers might take issue with Sokolová's wide scope in terms of gender and sexual transgressiveness, others will appreciate the broadly inclusive nature of the work. I underscore the importance of Sokolová's book in the current era when far-right actors in the region contest not only rights but the very existence of gender itself.

*Queer Encounters with Communist Power* provides oral history interviews with people who identify as lesbian, gay, transexual<sup>1</sup>, and queer after 1989 but have lived the majority of their lives possessing "queer" and "non-heterosexual" identities during the period of state socialism in Czechoslovakia. Sokolová brings together an impressive amount of data on a group of individuals rarely studied in the historical literature. Drawing on previous work by the Society for Queer Memory (SfQM) as well as her own interviews, the book includes 45 oral history interviews with people who identify as "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "transexual," "homosexual," "transgender," and those who express "lesbian desire," painting a complex and multi-faceted picture of life under state socialism in Czechoslovakia for people who identify as queer and non-heterosexual.

Sokolová pays particular attention to the lives of non-heterosexual women whose stories were underrepresented in the SfQM queer oral history project. In addition, she collects extensive information on the narrators' entire lives from childhood through 1989, allowing her to trace an individual's identity formation over time, examines their various interactions with communist state institutions, and how they navigated their identities with family and friends as they grew up. Unlike the SfQM, which begins the narrator's stories around adolescence or early adulthood, Sokolová captures recollections of the narrators' negotiation of their gender identities beginning in primary school.

In addition to the oral histories, Sokolová provides a discursive analysis of sexological literature, including 120 books and articles from the Bibliographia Medica Českoslovaca (BMČ) database at the National Medical Library in Prague. She contextualizes her analysis using historical literature written about the field of sexology in Czechoslovakia, works on feminism and gender in Czechoslovakia, the history of state laws regarding homosexuality, and discourses surrounding homosexuality prevalent throughout the Eastern Bloc.

<sup>1</sup> This is the terminology used by Sokolová throughout the book, which is problematized later in the review.

Sokolová's book makes three important contributions to both LGBT history in central and eastern Europe and the historical literature documenting life under communism. First, it contributes to scholarly work regarding the lives of queer people in the twentieth century. While there has been much written on life under communism throughout central and eastern Europe, this book fills a gap by looking into the lived experiences of queer and non-heterosexual people, particularly queer women and lesbians, during this time period. Second, while much has been written on the oppressive nature of the communist regimes throughout central and eastern Europe, this book reveals the complexity of life under communism, highlighting not only times and spaces where the narrators acted agentially over their life choices and identities but also the complex nature of the state institutions themselves. For example, Chapter 6 goes into great detail about how a young man, «Josef,» engaged in a year-and-a-half-long struggle with the Federal Office for Press and Information (FÚTI) and the Czech Office for Press and Information (ČÚTI) over the rejection of his same-sex personal ad from the daily *Svobodně Slovo* in 1985, when there was no law against publishing same-sex ads. This represents «a rare moment of open defiance and 'speaking back'» (p. 196). Finally, Sokolová not only highlights sites of agency under state socialism, but she also applies a gender lens to the study of state socialism in Czechoslovakia, offering an alternative to the narrative of the totalizing power of the state by engaging with how «people constructed their subjectivity and negotiated their identities under state socialism» (p. 20). While there has been quite a lot written on women and feminism (or lack thereof) under state socialism, *Queer Encounters with Communist Power* provides insight into the various negotiations of gender and sexuality under state socialism and the uniqueness of the Czechoslovak context.

### Sexological discourse, the state, and queer lived experience

Sokolová's book engages extensively with the sexological literature produced under state socialism and critiques previous histories about the field of sexology in Czechoslovakia. One such important disagreement is with previous studies that argue that the Communist regime was totalizing in its effects on the queer and non-heterosexual communities of Czechoslovakia and the former Eastern Bloc. Thus, *Queer Encounters with Communist Power* can be read in conversation with Kateřina Lišková's 2018 book, *Sexual liberation, socialist style: communist Czechoslovakia and the science of desire, 1945–1989* (Lišková 2018). In this book, Lišková argues that unlike in the West, where discourse around sexuality shifted from conservative to liberal throughout the twentieth century, in state socialist Czechoslovakia, the discourse shifted from liberal to conservative. She separates sexological discourse into two time periods. The first is the long 1950s (1948–the early 1960s), in which the “traditional” family was seen as bourgeois, and men and women were encouraged to see each other as equals. The second is the period of Normalization

from the attempted Prague Spring in 1968 through 1989. During this period, discourses surrounding the benefits of the nuclear family and traditional gender roles were reinstated to address the declining birth rate. Lišková argues that gender discourses were reversed under the period of Normalization, resisting the dominant Western linear narrative of emancipation connected to social movement struggles and highlighting a nonlinear route of liberalization. Rather than liberation coming from below, the Communist state played a large role in gender and sexual liberation in the long 1950s. Lišková analyzes archival sources documenting how sexologists, demographers, and psychologists advised the state on population development, marriage, and family, affecting people's private and intimate lives.

Given that these two books reach different conclusions about the lives of women, gender minorities, and sexual minorities under state socialism, understanding the differences between these two works is informative. Lišková's work focuses primarily on discourses in the official Czechoslovak sexological literature. In contrast, Sokolová's work focuses on the lived experiences of queer and non-heterosexual people and their interactions with state sexological institutions. Lišková states her approach as such,

There are always issues between normative discourses and lived practices. Yet, normative discourses tend to be potent, particularly when they are backed by the power of the state that translates them into laws and policies. Thus, the relationship between norms and people's lives is never symmetrical, the former influencing the latter with much stronger force than the other way around (p. 4).

Lišková asks the questions, "how did the state and sexology intersect? And what were the results of these intersections" (p. 16)? Thus, she focuses primarily on topics related to gender, such as reproductive rights, women's agency within marriages, and the female orgasm, through an analysis of how gender equality shifted throughout the Communist era. The extent of her discussion of non-heterosexual lives is related primarily to the topic of discourses around "deviant" sexuality in the field of sexology. Thus, she examines the ways in which sexological discourse on gender at times intersects with sexuality but does not provide a broad analysis of the various sexual identities present under state socialism as Sokolová does in her work. Indeed, Sokolová states that Lišková, along with other historians of Czechoslovak sexology,

investigated the broader picture of sexology and sexologists as a part of the state institutional authority over questions of sexuality, exploring what opportunities and limits the existence of such a particular sexological framework had for queer people themselves was not part of their endeavor (2021, 68).

Sokolová argues that they have not explored beyond the hetero-homo divide, looking into discourses and experiences of other forms of sexuality, such as queer and transgender sexuality.

One area in which Sokolová and Lišková agree is on the uniqueness of Czechoslovak sexology compared to their counterparts across the former Eastern bloc. Unlike in the former Soviet Union, where Stalin dissolved the

field of sexology, and in East Germany, Poland, and Hungary, where sexology did not take off as a field until the late 1960s and lacked an institutional home; in Czechoslovakia, sexologists were publishing scholarly monographs, giving talks to the public, and working in their own institutions, namely the Prague Sexological Institute (Lišková 2018, 12-13). Lišková does not conceptualize Czechoslovak sexologists as loyal soldiers of the Communist state but rather as experts who were part of the state apparatus, co-constituting knowledge around gender and sexuality. However, the decisive role of the state is contested by the oral history interviews conducted by Sokolová in which people found both private and communal ways to live autonomous non-heterosexual lives in state socialist Czechoslovakia. Contrary to narratives of the oppressive heteronormative nature of the state socialist regime, Sokolová finds that sexologists throughout Czechoslovakia (technically representatives of the Communist state apparatus) not only provided dignified counseling for queer and non-heterosexual people in their offices and used their offices for queer meeting spaces, they also published papers that framed homosexuality as a lifelong experience rather than a “deviant” and temporary behavior. Sokolová points out the ways in which sexologists would disseminate progressive knowledge about sexuality. In one instance, Dr. Erwin Günther, director of the sexological institute in Berlin, argued in the popular Czechoslovak weekly journal *Zdraví*, quite provocatively for the time, that sexuality occurs on a spectrum and that homosexuality is a natural variation on that spectrum; thus, non-heterosexuals should have the same rights and be afforded human dignity as heterosexuals. He claimed that any disorders a non-heterosexual person might face are due strictly to the intolerant citizens around them. He went further in the article to argue for sexual education, openness in marital advice, and the empathetic upbringing of teenage homosexuals (p. 102). In response to this article, a follow-up article was published by Radomil Resch, J.D., arguing that not all homosexual acts should be legally tolerated because it is the role of the socialist state to protect the mental development of the youth. Antonín Brzek, a renowned Czech sexologist, then responded to Resch by conceding to his critique, underscoring homosexuality as a deviant behavior and distancing himself from Dr. Günther. However, in so doing, he cited Dr. Günther’s article and instructed readers where to find it. A colleague of Dr. Brzek at the Sexological Institute, Ivo Procházka, stated that Brzek’s response was intended to subvert the state censors. Procházka stated that the series of articles was actually published to get Dr. Günther’s article into the journal; the journal was permitted to publish Dr. Günther’s article provided that they provided a critical commentary (p.102-103).

### Czecho(Slovak) queer lives

Many histories are written by and about those in what is historically referred to as “the Czech lands.” Thus, the lives of Slovaks under state socialism are historically underrepresented in the histories of Czechoslovakia, and

Sokolová's work is no exception. She claims her book is a study of "queer encounters with communist power; non-heterosexual lives and the state in Czechoslovakia 1948–1989," however, there is very little, if any, reference to the lives of Slovaks. Instead, the study remains relegated to that of Czechs living in Prague and Brno. She includes material from the *Bibliographia Medica Českoslovaca* (BMČ), which would ostensibly contain articles written by both Czech and Slovak sexologists. She is also explicit about her use of the SfQM, based in Prague. Sokolová's study would greatly benefit from engagement with the lives of queer and non-heterosexual people living in the Slovak region under state socialism. Given that the Slovak region historically has higher levels of religiosity around Catholicism, it would be interesting to know if queer and non-heterosexual Slovaks had different experiences navigating their identity under state socialism and within their communities than their Czech counterparts.

### Patriarchy and heteronormativity under communism

Sokolová puts great effort into incorporating the narratives of those with various queer and non-heteronormative identities into the study, which is both a strength and a weakness of the work. On pages 21–24, Sokolová highlights the complex nature of the terminology used in the book. Many of her narrators adopted the terms "lesbian," "gay," and "transsexual" after the fall of the Communist regime but did not refer to themselves as such during the state socialist period or even "hated the terms." Moreover, many people did not see themselves as having "same-sex" desires, given that they identified as "transsexual." She claims, "the only thing that connected all the narrators was their rejection of heterosexual subjectivity, whether in terms of sexual orientation or gender identification" (p. 21).

On the one hand, incorporating the various identities allows her to show how the community supported one another. One example of this was the repeated mention by the narrators of a "queer ashtray." Similar ashtrays appeared in queer-friendly pubs and served as an indication of a shared collective identity (p. 179). On the other hand, Sokolová's study lacks a clear distinction between gender analysis and an analysis of sexual identities. For example, it is unclear how gender-nonconforming individuals experienced life under state socialism differently from those who were non-heterosexual. Judith Butler states that gender acts are "both that which constitutes meaning and that through which meaning is performed or enacted" (Butler 1988, 521). If we take the performative nature of gender into account, one could assume that gender-nonconforming individuals might be more publicly visible than non-heterosexual people, who can practice their sexuality outside the public eye. Thus, gender non-conforming and transgender people would be publicly visible and, therefore, could be subjected to more harassment and state control.

Indeed, Sokolová finds that many interviewees expressed gender transgressive identities, some of which they were punished for. Based on the recol-

lections of the interviewees, this transgressing of gender borders was tolerated and even encouraged in young girls. In contrast, male narrators harbored childhood memories of being rejected and humiliated for their gender transgressions (p.134). In another example, in Chapter 5, Sokolová offers the story of one narrator “Kamila” who was the winner of the Prague regional round of the nationwide competition for “The Perfect Girl” (Správná dívka). Kamila, a lesbian woman, was asked about her decision to participate in “The Perfect Girl” contest, and she answered, “To hide, of course!” (p.146). Thus, in this instance, her overt performance of hyper-femininity allowed her non-heterosexual sexuality to remain hidden amongst her colleagues at Prague City Hall.

Sokolová makes clear that the field of sexology in Czechoslovakia was unique regarding the rest of the Eastern Bloc. Rather than drawing on work from their Soviet and Polish counterparts, which labeled transsexuality as deviant, Czechoslovak sexologists openly dismissed work from their Soviet and Polish counterparts, calling it “inappropriate” and labeled transexual lives as “natural” (p. 83). Nevertheless, the narrators point to greater difficulties in expressing their transgressive gender identities than their transgressive sexuality. In particular, one narrator, “Petra,” a transwoman, discusses the support she received from her sexologist in coming out to her parents as being sexually attracted to males. While, with her sexologist’s help and support, her parents could not only accept but celebrate her sexuality, she never told her parents about her transgressive gender identity. Sokolová states,

While they fully accept their son’s presumed homosexuality, Petra feels transsexuality would be a whole new and qualitatively different matter. Her fears support scholarly arguments that homosexuality is by far the most accepted form of ‘deviance’ from the heterosexual norm. Its acceptance rests precisely in that it is compatible with the heteronormative gender order and dual understanding of homosexuality as a simple inversion of heterosexuality, which does not challenge the stable categories of man and woman. Transsexuality, with its confusing dimensions of both gender and sexuality is unacceptable for many people, even though we have seen that Czech and Slovak Socialist sexologists treated it with unexpected empathy and complexity (p. 129-130).

In the same vein, while Sokolová’s endeavor to complicate the dominant narrative of lives under state socialism is commendable, given that so much has been written on the totalizing effects of communism on the lives of women, queer, and non-heterosexual people, the analysis seems to lack a description of the experience of people who were outwardly non-heterosexual. Her interviewees found ways to subvert the state socialist institutions, hide their sexual identities from their colleagues, and find partners through personal ads. But these interviews indicated that the state was willing to look the other way as long as the outward guise of heteronormativity was not challenged. Utilizing feminist International Relation scholar Cynthia Enloe’s definition of patriarchy as “the structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinity” (Enloe 2004, 4), one can understand how gender

and sexuality are entwined within the patriarchal and heteronormative state, which is premised on the gender binary. Given that many gender scholars from central and eastern Europe have highlighted how patriarchy under communist regimes differed from patriarchy in the “West,” knowing how the state would react if this were outwardly challenged would be an important contribution to understanding the heteronormative and patriarchal elements of communist power in Czechoslovakia.

Moreover, many of Sokolová’s oral history interviews were conducted with people who identify as women, highlighting the experience of lesbian women under state socialism. As Sokolová points out, these women’s experiences were very different than men’s due to attitudes around lesbianism versus male homosexuality. Both Lišková and Sokolová point to the number of instances in which gay men were sentenced to treatment in psychiatric institutions throughout Czechoslovakia from 1948–1989, during which time, not one woman was sentenced by the state for such treatment. Valerie Sperling argues that homophobia is rooted in misogyny, which she describes as the perceived inferiority of women relative to men in her analysis of Putin’s use of masculinity to maintain political legitimacy in Russia. She states,

While the familiar binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality is a mid-twentieth-century innovation of the middle class, describing sexual practices as “masculine” or “feminine” (appropriate to men and women, respectively) is a longer-standing way to categorize people and identify their relative status and power. The dual notions of “topping” (a way to describe traditionally male or “insertive” sexual practices) and “bottoming” (the receptive or penetrated position traditionally affiliated with women) predate homo- and heterosexuality as concepts but likewise draw on misogyny for their meaning (Sperling 2015, 17).

Examples such as this attest to the patriarchal nature of the state and seeing male deviance from heterosexuality as a deviance of traditional notions of masculinity which must be highly policed by the state in the way in which female deviance from heterosexuality and traditional notions of feminism (which is already devalued) is not. The necessities of teasing out the analytical categories of gender and sexuality become all the more important as scholars attempt to understand better the role of patriarchy and heteronormativity in both domestic and global politics.

## Conclusions

Students of Czechoslovak twentieth-century history will find Sokolová’s book insightful. Her data and analysis enrich our knowledge of the complexity of this era of Czechoslovak history. In addition, this book contributes to the literature on gender and sexuality outside of the Western context. Thus, students of gender and sexuality studies would find her work useful in expanding their conceptions of how gender and sexual identity are understood and negotiated in diverse contexts.

Additionally, Sokolová's book is an invaluable contribution during the current period of far-right, anti-gender politics prevalent throughout Czechia, Slovakia, Europe, and indeed around the world. In recent years, gender studies as a discipline, gender scholars as individuals, and the very term "gender" has faced severe opposition from the so-called "anti-gender" movement. Anti-gender actors are an amalgamation of conservative politicians, Church leaders, and men's rights activists who have connected "gender" to their opposition to LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality, reproductive rights, and sex education in schools. These conservative actors argue that "gender theory" and LGBTQ+ rights are a Western import that threatens the traditional societies of central and eastern Europe (Graff and Korolczuk 2021). Sokolová's work, which highlights how queer and non-heterosexual people navigated their identities historically in Czechoslovakia and the role of sexologists in not only defining concepts of identity but also in accepting and supporting queer and non-heterosexual people under state socialism, is crucial today in demonstrating how these identities have been negotiated within the Czechoslovak context historically, resisting anti-gender actors' claim of LGBT politics and gender as a "Western" import without a local history and struggle.

## References

- Butler, Judith. 1988. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" *Theatre Journal* 40 (4): 519–531.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 2004. *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire*. University of California Press.
- Graff, Agnieszka and Elżbieta Korolczuk. 2021. *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*. Routledge.
- Lišková, Kateřina. 2018. *Sexual liberation, socialist style: communist Czechoslovakia and the science of desire, 1945–1989*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sperling, Valerie. 2015. *Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia*. Oxford University Press.

