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Walk this Way: Pride, Dignity and Friction in Postsocialist Hungary

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This is a story about the borders, political, sexual, and other, that words and their meanings reflect and create. I want to begin it with the juxtaposition of two seemingly opposed, but actually closely related events. The first of these was an event of some notoriety in Hungary, widely publicized as the "Heterosexual Pride Day March" (*Hetero Büszkeség Napi Felvonulás*). On September 4th, 2010 a small group of right-wing, nationalist demonstrators marched through the center of Budapest. Chanting slogans like "Faggot-free Hungary!" (*"Buzimentes Magyarország!"*) and bearing banners with anti-gay phrases, the marchers, including a well-known Parliamentary representative of the far-right Movement for a Better Hungary (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*)[1], followed the traditional path through Budapest of the city's annual Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT hereafter) March. In speeches and press releases, the organizers and participants proclaimed that, after many years of being forced to tolerate LGBT Pride marches, it was time that heterosexuals in Hungary expressed *their* Pride. They also argued that, because LGBT "Pride" was just self-promotion, homosexuals should be denied the right to assemble or demonstrate in public spaces. At the end of the march, this latter point was presented in the form of a written demand to members of Parliament.

[1] The term *jobb* in Hungarian means both "better" and "right" (as in the term of direction); thus the party's name also means "Movement for a More Right(-wing) Hungary."

The second event was of a rather different kind: with little fanfare, in the spring of 2008 the name of Hungary's yearly LGBT March was officially changed by its organizers, the Rainbow Mission Foundation (*Szivárvány Misszió Alapítvány*), from the Gay Pride Day March (*Meleg Büszkeség Napi Felvonulás*), which it had been called from its inception in 1997 until 2007, to the Gay Dignity March (*Meleg Méltóság Menet*).

Both these events were responses to powerful and increasing tensions in Hungarian society and politics over the public presence and visibility of LGBT people. These have included a dramatic surge in public homophobia in the last several years, including an increase in anti-gay and homophobic statements by public and political figures, but most visibly manifest by repeated, violent attacks by nationalists, neo-Nazis, and right-wing skinheads on the Pride March, beginning in 2007.[2] Yet both events were also responses to long-standing debates over the meaning and implications of the Budapest Pride March, and especially the meanings of the the term "Pride" itself, which have been central to both homophobic and LGBT discourses in Hungary for many years. These tensions and debates have shaped a wide range of responses to the Pride March, including homophobic opposition to it, both violent and non-violent, but also the continuing efforts of LGBT activists to construct a more coherent and politicized sense of "gay" identity and community in Hungary, and build a broad-based and effective mass

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[2] As I have noted elsewhere (Renkin 2009), these attacks brought Hungary for the first time in line with a more general postsocialist East European pattern of public homophobic violence directed at LGBT Marches. Broad surveys of social and political attitudes in Hungary have consistently shown a lower level of acceptance of homosexuality than in most neighboring countries (European Commission 2008 Report, Special Eurobarometer 296: "Discrimination in the European Union: Perceptions, Experiences and Attitudes," chapter 9; Takács, J. (2008) "The situation concerning homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in Hungary." *Sociological Country Report*). It is vital to note, however, that prior to 2007, opposition to such marches in Hungary was both small in scale and peaceful.

movement.[3] A key element in this agenda has been the attempt to increase the size and visibility of the Pride March. These efforts, however, have consistently faced significant resistance from many LGBT people, with the result that relatively few LGBT people actually take part in the March each year, and that Pride Marches from late 1990s until today have never grown beyond about 2000 people. These tensions and debates thus reveal important social and political divisions; not only the obvious and commonly recognized ones between LGBT people and homophobic people and groups, but also those that exist within the LGBT community itself, divisions often drawn along lines of class, education, and political perspective. It was this complex situation that the changing of the name of the Budapest March was meant to address, by avoiding the problematic meanings of “Pride” and invoking the concept of “Dignity” instead.

In this paper I will argue, however, that this move has involved unexpected, and potentially critical, consequences for both Hungarian LGBT people, and for sexual politics in Hungary more generally. I want to suggest that these debates and tensions, and particularly the change in the name of the Budapest Pride March, locate not only the terms “Pride” and “Dignity”, but the Hungarian LGBT movement itself, at the center of a number of intersecting discourses of politics and identity that dominate sexual, postsocialist, and many other forms of politics globally today, at a complex nexus conjoining competing global discourses of identity and politics and opposing national and transnational discourses of identity and community. In my view, this position is deeply unstable and perilous, producing profound “frictions” (Tsing 2005) for Hungarian LGBT people, posing fundamental dilemmas for them and their ability to assert

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[3] The Hungarian word that most closely corresponds to the English “gay” is *meleg* (lit. “warm”). Like “gay” it is used both as a specific term for gay men, and a general term including both lesbians and gays.

culturally intelligible claims for equal citizenship and belonging, and having critical implications for the changing boundaries of belonging of LGBT community. While Tsing and most others writing about the tensions between local and global meanings have largely ignored questions of sexuality, focusing instead on (other) economic and political relations - Arjun Appadurai (1991) raises questions of gender/sexuality in passing, but sees them as effects, rather than central sites at which belonging is negotiated - I want to suggest here that sexuality and sexual politics, too, can be seen as deeply consequential hinges of global/local intersection. My analysis here thus follows, and strives to build upon, the work of scholars like Tom Boellstorff (2005), Martin Manalansan (2005), and Lisa Rofel (1997), who have stressed the critical role played by frictions of citizenship and belonging in the changing relationships between sexuality and processes of globalization. "Pride" and "Dignity", I argue, are key mediators in the efforts of Hungarian LGBT people, activists and others (including homophobic right-wing actors), to negotiate the ambiguities of what Rofel and others have called "cultural citizenship" (Rofel 1997); they are therefore also terms which can allow us to trace the pitfalls of such endeavors.

The Uses of Pride

The public use of the term "Pride" (*Büszkeség)* in Hungarian sexual politics goes back to the first appearance of an official, public LGBT March in 1997. While there were predecessors to this event, a World AIDS Day March, and what was called the "Pink Picnic", they were quite different kinds of events, the first having a much more specific focus, and the second being an informal, non-public gathering, and did not use the term

(Renkin 2007a). Since 1997, when fewer than 200 people dashed quickly from Capella, a gay club, along the *Duna Korzó* (Danube Embankment) to Vörösmarty Square and back, however, the March has been known as the Gay Pride Day March (*Meleg Büszkeség Napi Felvonulás*); every year since 1998 the "Pride" March has been the centerpiece of the multi-day Gay and Lesbian Film and Cultural Festival (Ibid).

"Pride" is, of course, a concept and term of great resonance and power in sexual political history more generally, particularly in the history of the American and Western European LGBT politics that has, to a great extent, provided the model for Hungarian (as well as many other countries') LGBT activism. In this sexual political history, "pride" emerged as a positive, countering concept to the systematic negations of a hegemonic heteronormativity, as well as the internalized shame, self-hatred and isolation that are understood to accompany them (Cuomo 2007, D'Emilio 1983, Munt 1998). In its explicit opposition to these things, the concept of "pride" was mobilized as a means of emphasizing the shared, public affirmation of non-normative sexual identity, and recognition of and participation in identity-based community (D'Emilio 1983, Weeks 1985).

"Pride" was also a key element in the set of concepts and techniques through which emerging sexual political movements in the United States were modeled on the U.S. Civil Rights movement and the politics of race and ethnicity (D'Emilio 1983, D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, Epstein 1987, Seidman 1993). Interestingly (and crucially for the purposes of this paper), its role in this process was intimately connected to its deployment in relation to practices of public visibility, and specifically marches and marching: the term began to be used in the mid-1970s as part of a reaction against -

and search on the part of activists for a less threatening and explicitly revolutionary replacement for - the earlier use of terms such as "Gay Freedom" and "Gay Liberation" to describe both the gay rights movement in general and its mass, public demonstrations in particular (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988: 321). As many scholars have noted, the emergence of the term thus underscores a crucial turn in U.S. and western European gay movement from a broadly universalist and transformative politics to more essentialist and normative notions of identity and difference, and the foregrounding of this "difference" in sexuality as a basis for claims to equal rights and social and political inclusion (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988: 323, Epstein 1987, Seidman 1993, Gamson 1998).

In these cultural-political contexts and their discourses, then, the word "pride" has been employed to link individual and community through notions of stable, shared identity and expression. Moreover, the historical emphasis has been not just on the existence of common sentiment, but also on the shared public performance of that sentiment, and especially on the stylized spectacular performance of gay bodies in public space, most particularly through mass public events like Pride Marches.

The Pride That Binds

Use of the term "pride" thus tied the Budapest Pride March, the activist groups who organized it, those who participated in it, and the public visibility of Hungarian LGBT people in general, closely to the global sexual political discourse of "pride." Indeed, this use was meant by both Hungarian LGBT activists and the American visitors who were

involved in planning the first public events to link the Budapest march to similar LGBT events elsewhere and the broader politics of which they were part.[4]

This connection has also been consistently reflected in - and reinforced by - the concrete performance practices that have constituted the March since its beginnings. Besides the stylized form of a public march itself, the Budapest Pride March has displayed the traditional symbols of transnational gay politics: since the first March in 1997, marchers have carried rainbow flags, worn pink triangles, and born placards with slogans like “Silence=Death” and “The Gay Family.” While the vast majority of participants tend to be far more conventionally dressed than in American to Western European Pride Marches, with essentially no nudity or leather to be seen, familiar icons such as drag queens and go-go dancers have had key, though limited, roles (Renkin 2007a, 2009). The visible symbolism of the Budapest March, then, as well as its terminology, have in many respects aligned it with the core imagery of the global politics of pride.

Moreover, as it has for sexual identity politics movements elsewhere, these discourses and practices of “pride” provided a model not just for publicly visible activist tactics such as Pride Marches, but also a means for pursuing a broader strategy of identity construction. By producing a public performance of “difference,” of specific identity and community in alignment with transnational models of essentialist “gay” identity politics, the Pride March has also served as a basis for activist efforts to build a

[4] Author’s fieldnotes.

wider and more coherent imagining of LGBT community grounded in a sense of shared identity and the experience and expression of pride in it.[5]

Finally, both the discourse and performative practice of “pride” have also served as perhaps the primary means of legitimizing the centrality in Hungary’s broader LGBT community of the groups and activists responsible for organizing the March - as well as the event itself and the movement it is seen to publicly represent - precisely because of the connections they signal with these transnational discourses of sexual politics. This is a particularly powerful set of associations in the postsocialist context, in which Western European and U.S. American political and economic discourses and models are often highly privileged, and carry great symbolic and institutional weight.

Attacking Pride

Despite these associations and the advantages they provide to these groups - or perhaps because of them - however, the term “pride” and its politics, have raised a number of significant problems for Hungary’s LGBT movement, and particularly for its most important public event, the Pride March. Precisely because it is a term that references a model of sexual politics widely recognized as transnational in scope, the term and its use have become a site of contention over the proper relationship of local and translocal political and cultural meanings.

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[5] See also Imre 2007. As I have noted elsewhere (Renkin 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2009), at the same time the March has also created other, more specifically national meanings, through performative and symbolic association with a range of nationally significant spaces and symbols, such as the national monument of Heroes Square, and the display - increasing throughout the 2000s, of Hungarian flags by both organizers and ordinary participants. In certain key ways, then, extending beyond these usual sexual-political meanings of the word “Pride”, the concrete practices of the March have constituted and expressed complex notions of multiple identity and community. In this sense, “Pride”, as embodied in the March, has come to mean both a transnational alternative, and something alternatively national.

Right-wing complaints about the Pride March, for example, typically frame the kind of "pride" proclaimed by LGBT people as a fundamentally foreign concept. They state that for Hungarians the word "*büszkeség"* refers to an emotion that is felt for something you *do*, or something outside of you (a commonly cited example is one's family), not something you *are.* In these arguments, the term's meaning in relation to sexual identity is less like the English "pride," and closer to something like "arrogance" (a view perhaps strengthened, as one gay activist noted, by the fact that "*büszkeség"* is also the Hungarian word used for the Biblical sin of "Pride"). As such, it is seen as fundamentally excessive - and causally linked to what is seen as the exhibitionistic excess of the Pride March. "Pride" in one's LGBT identity is thus perceived as at once *personally* inappropriate - since one's sexual identity is something one *is*; and therefore not something one has *done* - and therefore an excessive and provocative display of one's self/ego, and *culturally* inappropriate - because it is essentially non-Hungarian, a foreign invasion of the nation's linguistic and sentimental terrain.[6] Here it is critical that "pride", of course, is also a key term in nationalist rhetoric of the kind strongly espoused by the Hungarian right-wing. In such discourses, it is romanticized as one of the foundational sentiments of national identity and national community and, indeed, as one of the critical links between these, and between them and the nation-state. As such, it is typically taken to be the emotional property of the specifically national community - and of those understood to be its protectors. It is this set of meanings, of course, which has led to the

[6] Interestingly, these critical discourses also seem quite consistently to figure "pride" as something that is fundamentally individual in nature, something that a person, *qua* person, feels or expresses, even though it may be felt about a larger social entity, such as the family. Indeed, one could perhaps say that these arguments thus privilege the family as a social entity that is fundamentally associated with the individual, in implicit contrast to the potential larger entity of "the LGBT community," as well as one that is framed as a phenomenon inherent to a specifically national community - again, in contrast to both the notion of a transnational community, and the LGBT community, neither of which are appropriate objects of "pride."

efforts of some on the right-wing to reclaim the term, through events like the "Hetero Pride" march.

Such arguments, however, have not been solely the province of the right-wing; they have been central to long-standing debates about identity and politics in the LGBT community as well. Many LGBT people, including some activists, have objected to the term "pride", and often to the Pride March itself, in almost exactly the same terms used by the right, arguing that the concept - and especially the public performance - of "pride" doesn't fit in Hungarian society. As one put it,

> [Someone once asked me] what I thought about the expression *Meleg Büszkeség Napi Felvonulás* (Gay Pride March). And I said I strongly disapproved of it, [as do] many people. It is just not the right expression, and not the right approach we should have – or not the approach we have for being gay. It is a very American-style ideology, that, if I'm a hunchback, I should be proud of being a hunchback. I should not be – that's what the average Hungarian person thinks. [H]e will say, "I should accept it as a natural thing, and I should try to make other people accept it as a natural thing, but it is not an achievement, so why should I be proud of it. Why should I be proud of having brown eyes? Did I do that? So, the Gay Pride March is something – it is just not Hungarian!

while another explained,

> "Pride" [*büszkeség*] has a different meaning in Hungarian. You are "proud" of something, in the Hungarian sense, that you do, that you've done. Something in which you are better than the rest. I think if you're gay you're not better than the others, you're just not.... I think that in English "Gay Pride" means that you are not sad that you're gay. But that's not something to show on the street."[7]

[7] Both quotations from Renkin 2007a.

These kinds of arguments against the notion of “pride” may be reinforced by the powerful associations of the term with the ideologies and discourses of national pride, as mentioned above - an association that, especially given both the historical connections and the recent close relationship, displayed in the violent attacks on the March since 2007, between nationalism and homophobia, has rendered the idea of “pride” increasingly problematic for many LGBT people (as well as many on the left of the Hungarian political spectrum). Indeed, for some it is actually the specific experience of the Pride March in Hungary - especially in recent years - that renders the concept of “pride” inappropriate. As one man put it, in describing the homophobic atmosphere that often surrounds the March,

> I mean, here in Hungary, you’re worried about whether you were on TV or not, after the March. … [I]t kills your feeling of being proud, if they look at you without smiling, or just if you walk, but everybody is so negative around you. It just makes you be afraid, and not feel proud.[8]

Here, if “pride” is seen as one of the core terms of national ideology and rhetoric, it is as a powerfully negative concept, central to the notion of nationalism as an historically problematic and destructive political phenomenon. Most typically involving feelings of ethnic/racial superiority over other groups, “pride” in this sense is seen as critical to the construction of community bonds, but in ways that inevitably lead to ethnic/racial/ national conflict. “Pride” is thus primarily something to be resisted. These interpretations have, of course, been especially important in the postsocialist context, given both the

[8] Author’s fieldnotes.

historical experience of Hungary and many of its neighboring countries of national movements and their consequences, but also depend on the overwhelming dominance of Western European and American theories of nationalism in postsocialist political discourses and institutions.

Such objections, however, are complex. Like those of the right-wing, resistance to the use of the term "pride" as the key term of the LGBT movement and its politics may perhaps reflect the specifically national inflections that "pride" often carries in another way: as for the right-wing, they may also reveal the sense of national identity and pride that many LGBT people share with much of the rest of Hungarian society. Indeed, in contrast to dominant interpretations of the global emergence of "gay" identities and politics, which see a kind of natural alignment between LGBT people and global styles, politics, and meanings, the evident purchase of these kinds of reactions within the LGBT community suggests that many LGBT people in Hungary also share a sense of tension and ambivalence about the relationship between local and global, national and transnational.[9]

Crucially, however, as has been so visibly the case with the right-wing, these criticisms and objections have not been merely discursive, but concretely practical as well: in this case, their result has been that LGBT people have, over the years, simply not participated in the March in significant numbers. While the March has grown considerably since its beginning, from roughly 200 people in 1997 to around 2000 people at its peak in the early 2000s, this remains a very small proportion of both the

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[9] For an influential interpretation of gay "globalness", see Altman 1997. Rofel 1997 emphasizes the tensions and ambiguities of identity that characterize the lives of "gay" people in China; for the Hungarian situation see Renkin 2007a, 2007b, 2007c.

estimated number of LGBT people in Hungary, and the number of people who take part in less visible and political forms of gay social life.

In addition, some LGBT people have suggested that the word “pride”, and the particular kind of politics that accompany it, have been important causes of the ongoing problems the LGBT movement has had in building bridges with other minority groups, who have faced similar kinds of discrimination in Hungarian society, especially from the right-wing and its recent resurgence, and who might be expected to be the appropriate partners for political cooperation, alliance, and coalition-building. These voices argue that the grounding assumptions of the kind of identity politics that go along with “pride” has resulted in a perceived specificity of interests and issues that has fractured alternative and minority politics in Hungary.

Defending Pride

LGBT activists, both those who organized the Pride March and other activists and organizations, have attempted to counter these objections, arguing that while in most Hungarian lexicons, the word “*büszkeség”* is defined simply as “pride,” the precise meaning of the term in practice is far more complex and variable. In actuality, they suggest, “*büszkeség”* has other meanings as well, which render it a legitimate basis for claims for inclusion. Some have pointed out that the word can also mean “self-esteem” and “self-respect,” rather than merely “arrogance,” and therefore does not necessarily suggest the exclusionary excess attributed to it by its critics, but rather - as in American and Western European sexual politics - is simply a healthy response to the constant oppressive shame of being gay in a heteronormative world.

Others have noted that the concept of “pride” plays an important and widely accepted role in the discourse and rhetoric of national sentiment, as in the common phrase “*büszke Magyar”* (proud Hungarian), used to evoke the feeling associated with proper awareness of one’s national identity - and thus that it is in fact an eminently Hungarian emotion.[10]

Still other activists insist that it is not, in fact, merely one’s *self* that the concept of “Pride recognizes at all, but instead a fundamentally shared resistance to such oppression, and that it can therefore build bonds of community. As one of the March’s organizer’s stressed at a public event closely linked to the March:

> This working together is something that strengthens us, and of which we can be proud. This pride doesn’t hurt us, but rather brings us closer to one another. We thank and recognize all those who dare, and who dare to be proud.[11]

In these views “pride” is also a critical counter to what some LGBT people see as the unquestioned acceptable visibility of another kind of “pride,” one that is hegemonic and specifically linked to heterosexuality and its public presence. As one gay male activist put it, arguing that the concept of “pride” was in fact not alien at all, but deeply embedded in everyday Hungarian life: “*They* [heterosexuals] get to have Pride every day!”

Thus, in contrast to claims by both nationalists and some LGBT people that its use as a political signifier is deeply problematic, activists have striven to argue that gay

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[10] Author’s fieldnotes.

[11] Author’s fieldnotes.

“Pride” is in fact an appropriate and affirming expression of shared identity and community. Despite these attempts by LGBT activists to defend it, however, the right-wing has persisted in challenging the idea of gay “Pride.” Indeed, as we have seen at the beginning of this paper, certain parts of the right-wing have in fact begun to devote considerable effort to a public reclaiming of “pride” - one specifically grounded in the attempt to deny the right of LGBT people to the term.

Contexts of Change

Critically, these escalating debates coincided with (and, indeed, I would argue, played key roles in) the significant shift in the character and relations of broader Hungarian politics that took place in the mid-2000s. Beginning in 2006, following a major public scandal over the publication of secret remarks by then-Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány admitting that he and his party (the Hungarian Socialist Party (*MSzP*)) had lied to the public about the country’s economic situation in order to win election, Hungary has experienced a dramatic increase in antagonism between left and right, and especially in the right’s public presence and visibility - and in the willingness of certain of its elements to engage in violence. Significantly, these changes have also included an intensification of nationalist ideology and its visibility in the political arena. This is, of course, precisely the ideology that not only currently underpins anti-gay, homophobic politics more generally, but that also has underwritten the specific arguments against the Pride March and, more specifically, against the appropriateness of it and the LGBT community’s use of “pride” mentioned above.

It was in this complex context of both specific linguistic, cultural, and sexual politics debates, and broader political and cultural tensions surrounding them, that the Pride March was, for the first time, violently attacked in 2007. While the March had, since its beginnings, seen opposition, this had previously been both small in scale and non-violent: protestors of the March tended to be isolated individuals or small groups of people, holding placards of banners with anti-gay slogans, or shouting insults. From 2000 the anti-gay rhetoric around the March had begun to grow, with right-wing and conservative figures and groups engaging in more vocal opposition. Remaining primarily discursive, this had consisted for the most part of press releases and increasingly condemnatory coverage in right-wing media. In 2007, and again in 2008, however, organized groups of nationalists, neo-Nazis, and right-wing skinheads engaged in concerted attacks on the March, throwing eggs, bottles, rocks, and smoke-bombs at its participants, and beating up a number of LGBT people after the Marches.

Determining Dignities

It was, then, against a backdrop of escalating rhetoric against the word and politics of “pride,” and the upsurge in mass, public violence against its public performance in the Pride March, that in 2008 the organizers decided to change the name of the annual LGBT march to the Gay Dignity March (*Meleg Méltóság Menet*).

This transformation of the name of the march was intended to address both internal and external debates about the meaning of the term “pride”; both right-wing complaints and criticism by members of the LGBT community of the term’s non-Hungarianness, and

their sometimes shared perception of the concept of "pride" - as manifested in the public display of the Pride March - as a site of improper, sexually provocative behavior.

Critically, the new name, with its new, central term "Dignity," was also a conscious effort by organizers to link the March, and LGBT people and rights, more clearly to general discourses of Human Rights, and their associated institutional structures of NGOs and civil society groups. Increasingly powerful on a transnational level in the past several decades, these discourses and institutions have also in the years since 1989 become central to increasingly contentious debates about postsocialist transformations (Cohen and Arato 1992, Verdery 1996). The adoption of "dignity" was therefore an attempt to link LGBT people and politics to the more specific manifestations of these broader discourses in Hungary as well. *Méltóság*, for example, especially in the form *emberi méltóság* (Human Dignity), has been a very significant term in discourses of rights in postsocialist Hungary, playing a key role in discussions of fundamental human rights in some of the earliest (1991) Determinations of the postsocialist Constitutional Court, as well as civil society discourses and institutions. The use of "dignity" as the foundational term through which the March and its meaning would be publicly reframed was thus a carefully considered move to include LGBT people more visibly within the boundaries of these more generalized rights discourses. As one organizer of the March, in explaining the reasons for the change of name, said, "You know, because in Hungarian '*emberi méltóság*', that is the, you know, human rights are based on that."[12] In this way the new use of "dignity" was specifically meant, precisely through association with general Human Rights discourses, to highlight the common humanity of

[12] Author's fieldnotes.

LGBT people, rather than their specific difference as people of a particular sexual identity, and therefore their fundamental and inherent equality with all other human beings.

The term's invocation of this common ground, it was hoped, would help to establish a new and broader base for LGBT activist's intensified efforts, in the wake of the first attacks on the Pride March in 2007, to transcend the distinct boundaries of identity and issue which have dominated postsocialist Hungarian civil society and politics since 1989, when the superficial solidarity that had held together the many different groups and perspectives opposed to the socialist system shattered, and to thereby encourage coalition-building with other, more widely (and officially) recognized social minority groups, such as Jews and Roma, progressive political groups and movements such as the Humanist Movement and the Young Greens, and Human Rights organizations like Amnesty International. An organizer responsible for the change explained it this way:

> After last year [2007] we wanted to emphasize that it's all about human dignity, you know: it's more about what is bridging us together than what is, you know … because "Gay Pride", in Hungarian … *büszkeség* ... has this kind of connotation, that you are, I don't know… a bit big-headed.[13]

Cseberből vederbe (Out of the Frying Pan and Into the Fire)

Yet if, in choosing this new term in order to anchor their new framing of sexual politics, the organizers of the Festival and March hoped to escape the consequences of the politics of "pride" that had emerged both within and outside the LGBT community, it is by no means clear that they have succeeded. For the new term, just like its

[13] Author's fieldnotes.

predecessor “pride”, seems to evoke a certain ambivalence on the part of some elements of the LGBT community, precisely because of its local cultural connotations. As some LGBT people have pointed out, the specific historical associations that méltóság bears may be problematic, resulting in its being perhaps too dignified. One activist described her discomfort with the new term by mentioning that “méltóságos ur" had been an hierarchical title in the old (Habsburg and pre-World War Two) State bureaucracy, used to address high-level government officials; similarly, a non-activist related her similar concerns to me by noting that during this period the same term was the way a peasant was required to address an aristocrat.[14] For some at least, then, “dignity” may bear traces of a similar arrogance to that seen by some to be inherent in the LGBT movement’s use of “pride.”

The Disadvantages of Dignity

Moreover, besides serving as a fundamental concept in discourses of universal human rights, the concept of “dignity,” although less dominant and widespread than that of “pride,” has a long history in Western European and American sexual politics. Like “pride,” “dignity” in this context has commonly been seen as a means of countering hegemonic negative cultural representations of LGBT people, and their reactions to them, instead serving to assert their inherent worth and value. Mohr, for example, asserts that ‘‘Gay oppression is chiefly the denial of gay dignity’’ (Mohr 2005: 85,77, cited in Cuomo 2007: 78), while Cuomo argues that “an important aspect of the fight for

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[14] Author’s fieldnotes. For a fascinating discussion of this and the many other titles and forms of address of this period, see Patai, R. (2000) *Apprentice in Budapest: Memories of a World That Is No More.* Latham, MD: Lexington Books, pp460-1.

gay equality is about asserting dignity, because… homophobic logics often regard queer identity as a sort of debased or degraded essence." (Cuomo 2007: 79)[15]

"Dignity's" assertion of this worth, however, is accomplished in a very different way than that of "Pride": by the demonstration of this worth through a personal ethic of restraint and respectable, "dignified" expression, often specifically defined as normative behavior.[16] In this sense "dignity" historically seems to have figured as both a moral and political alternative, or counter-discourse, to "pride" and its potential repercussions. "Dignity", for example, was the name of the first national organization for US Catholic homosexuals, founded in 1969 (it became a national organization in 1973) specifically in response to the newly emergent Gay Lib movement, and fears of its perceived moral extremism and publicly provocative behavior (Oppenheimer 1996: 6). Thus, since well before the present moment, the concept of "dignity" has accompanied that of "pride" in sexual politics, often as an alternative, critical form.

More recently, a growing body of scholarship of sexual political trends in the U.S. and Western Europe has pointed to a newly resurgent "politics of dignity." Characterized by these scholars as a normativizing move away from the kind of politics symbolized by "Pride", and from the earlier assertions of "difference" often seen as fundamental to

[15] Interestingly, the emphasis on "essence" here suggests that "dignity" - as it often does in discourses of universal human rights - functions on a similarly essential level to that one which "gay difference" is typically understood to operate.

[16] Questions of "respectability," of course, have long been central to the relationship between sexuality and politics. For three quite different yet very influential analyses of its history and political effects, see D'Emilio 1983, Mosse 1985, and Rubin 1984.

notions of identity politics, this shift has involved a turn to a new cultural and political mainstreaming, what might be called a “new respectability.”[17]

Long ago, George Mosse suggested that modern European notions (and politics) of “respectability” were not merely historically associated with nationalist ideology, but fundamentally dependent on the explicit exclusion of non-heteronormative identities and practices (Mosse 1985). The new critics of the rise to dominance of a sexual politics which privileges respectability, dignity, and assimilation argue that both this new model of sexual politics, and its increased social and political purchase, must be seen as part of the new social and political configurations of neoliberalism (Duggan 1998, Manalansan 2005, Povinelli 2006). As a result, it not only places primary importance on alignment with the dominant values of the social majority - in sexual behaviors, lifestyle, and general social behavior - it serves to both privatize and individualize questions of rights and equality.[18] This can clearly be seen, these authors claim, in the current focus in the U.S. and Western Europe on questions of privacy rights, gay marriage and adoption, the right to military service, etc. as the most important goals of sexual political activism. Here, equal access in dominant legal and social structures and institutions, and equal participation in dominant forms of cultural practice, rather than challenges to them or assertions of the value of alterity, are the signs of political success or failure (Cuomo 2007: 83).

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[17] Of course, turns from more radical political programs based on a notion of defining difference to more conformist models have more than once been central to 20th century sexual politics. See John D’Emilio’s account of the transformation of the Mattachine Society’s vision of politics and identity in D’Emilio 1983 (espec. Chs. 4 and 5), which he describes as a “return to respectability.”

[18] This approach to sexual politics can also be seen in the way the founder of the Catholic organization “Dignity”, mentioned above, (and much of the organization’s subsequent discourse) put primary emphasis on the internalized guilt of individual LGBT people, and the need for action by the Church to “heal” that guilt (see http://www.dignityusa.org/, accessed 10/5/10).

Significantly, this new form of sexual politics has also been widely criticized for producing what has been called “homonormativity”: new disciplinary regimes, paralleling those of heteronormativity, by which some non-heteronormative people prescribe and regulate the identities, behaviors, and politics of others (Duggan 1998, Warner 1993).[19] As these analyses note, this new set of meanings has significantly reshaped not just the goals and techniques of LGBT politics in general, but also the specific and concrete practices of LGBT people and communities. This has included what are still typically called “Pride Marches” in many places, resulting in their more visible foregrounding of hegemonic symbols and behaviors, such as displays of normative masculinities and femininities, the increased visibility of patriotic groups, LGBT members of the police and military, and ascendance of commercial meanings over political ones.[20] In these readings, as in the case of “pride,” the concept of “dignity” is expressed through and confirmed by public spectacle, but here the spectacle is no longer that of a spectacularly transgressive difference, but rather that of the respectable, “normalized” gay body, and the properly assimilative community which it is understood to represent.[21] The politics of

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[19] Other scholars, notably Jasbir Puar (2005, 2007), have suggested that this new emphasis in LGBT politics results as well from the efforts of LGBT people to participate in, and thus necessarily conform to, the intensified hegemony of nationalist ideology that has, especially in the United States, characterized the post-September 11 historical moment and its neo-imperialist projects. She thus suggest instead the term “homonationalism.”

[20] Kates & Belk 2001, Munoz 1999. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that such situations should not be too simply characterized. Both the emergence of these new practices of marching and their coexistence with persisting practices emphasizing difference suggest that here, too, the public and performative meanings of “Pride” are shifting and complex. It is, perhaps, to these intersections that we must look for understanding.

[21] In recent years, these analyses have also led to increased scholarly attention to the concept of “gay shame”, and a still emerging critique that jointly addresses these notions, arguing that the terms “pride” and “respectability”, and their associated politics, in their efforts to counter “shame,” in fact converge in their possible consequences, threatening to erase the profoundly anti-normativizing perspectives, as well as the sense of community, that can grow from the shared experience of “shame.” (Halperin & Traub 2010, Halberstam 2005).

"dignity," then, center on individual expression, and an ethic of normative "restraint" applied to both individual actors and the community imagined as a whole.

The dominant meanings of "dignity" in Hungarian politics appear to strongly share this significance. Defined in a major Hungarian Lexicon as "a value which is due to every single being as a person," the word reflects a sense of a universal, individual, inherent quality.[22] This is reinforced by both its general use in postsocialist rights discourses by NGOs, activists, and politicians, as mentioned above, and by its centrality to Hungary's postsocialist legal architecture. One of the foundational 1991 Determinations of the Hungarian Constitutional Court (*64/1991. (XII. 17.) AB határozat*), for example, defines "*emberi méltóság"* (Human Dignity) as a quality inherent to all people, based on the fundamental "autonomy and self-determination of the individual" as an independent "subject." The Determination further connects the term explicitly to issues of self-identification and privacy. The local meanings of "dignity" as constituted within the postsocialist political context thus reinforce its effect within these global political discourses as an individualizing term, associated with both a politics grounded in a fundamental distinction between Private and Public and an ethic of expressive restraint based on the individual obligation to properly negotiate that boundary.

The Borders of Dignity

Given these critiques of efforts to render LGBT politics "respectable," and the broader resonances that such meanings have in postsocialist Hungary, it is perhaps unsurprising that the new "politics of dignity" in Hungary, as embodied particularly in the

[22] Magyar Catholic Lexicon, 13th ed. 2009. I. Diós (ed). Budapest: Szent István Társulat.

new term “Gay Dignity March,” have powerfully reshaped the practices of LGBT marching - although not always in the ways that its organizers had hoped. The last several years, in fact, have seen significant changes in the practice of the Budapest March.

One visible change has been an increasing number of “allies” taking part in the March. The last few years have seen more straight allies, liberal intellectuals, general Human Rights activists, and members of organizations like Amnesty International attending, as well as more participation from sympathetic foreign groups, such as the anarchists and lesbians who traveled from Vienna to join the March in the past two years. Yet while one the one hand this is a clear indication of the success of the bridge-building strategy of the March organizers, on the other, it has coincided with less positive changes. Tellingly, as the number of allies and visitors has grown, the overall size of the March has stayed almost exactly the same, around 1500-2000 people. As many LGBT activists have noted with dismay, this would seem to suggest that the number of Hungarian LGBT people participating in the March is actually dwindling, rather than growing. This is, of course, no doubt in response to the increased contentiousness and outright violence surrounding the March after 2007. Yet it nonetheless appears to indicate an increasing, rather than decreasing, ambivalence about the March on the part of LGBT people, and an ever greater difficulty for the organizers of the March in encouraging them to participate.

Significantly, the new foregrounding of “dignity” has also been accompanied by a new policing of the boundaries of the March. In part, the new borders so marked have been external ones. These have involved an actual and symbolic strengthening of the

March's spatial boundaries: since the attacks in 2007, the area in which people gathered together before the beginning of the March has been surrounded by a cordon of security fences, closely guarded by police. In addition, the entire route of the March has been lined by police barricades and more police. While there is no question that these measures have served, to a certain extent, to protect the marchers from direct assault by anti-gay counter-demonstrators, they have also had the less positive effect of visibly marking off the space occupied by the March from the public space of the city, and therefore drawing a powerful symbolic line between the marchers and the rest of the citizenry.[23] The March has been spatially truncated as well, as the organizers have been compelled to accede to police insistence that they are unable to protect its traditional route from attack. In 2010, for example, the length of the March was drastically reduced from its usual path across the city center to eight city blocks. As many participants noted, the impact of its public assertion of dignity and inclusion was thus dramatically reduced as well.[24]

The new policing of the March's boundaries has been internal to the LGBT community as well. Certain aspects of this have, again, been physical. As part of the new system of enclosure of the pre-March gathering area, for example, in 2008 the organizers instituted a policy of multiple entry checks. People desiring to enter the gathering area were first scrutinized at an initial gate in the cordon by teams of organizers and volunteers, who decided who would be allowed in, as probably friendly,

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[23] For further consideration of the spatial meanings of the Budapest March, see Renkin 2007a, Renkin *nd*. For a very different (and much more optimistic) analysis of the spatial politics of postsocialist LGBT marches in Poland see Gruszczynska 2009.

[24] For further examination of the implications of these spatial restrictions, see Renkin *nd*. For a fascinating discussion of similar issues facing the LGBT March in Latvia, see Dzenovska & Arenas 2010.

and who would be kept out, as potentially threatening. Those allowed in then had their bags and backpacks checked at another gate, to make sure that they weren't bringing in dangerous objects or materials. Such spur-of-the-moment decisions, of course, were based on often arbitrary, individual judgments of the visible traits that indicate pro- or anti-gay attitudes, as well as those that reveal "proper" gayness.[25] And while, like the police actions to protect the March, these measures seem to many members of the LGBT community (and are, without doubt) reasonable and possibly necessary security precautions given the very real violence of the right-wing, they nonetheless at the same time render concretely practical the new sense of boundaries between dignified and undignified behaviors, and their practitioners, and place the power to adjudicate those boundaries in the hands of certain members of the community.

Equally noticeable, however, and perhaps more significant, has been the increasingly "respectable" performance of the March itself from roughly 2008 onwards. This has been evident in several ways. While they had certainly made occasional appearances previously, since that time the March has seen a greater display of Hungarian flags, as well as other traditional cultural symbols, such as, in the 2008 March, a priest marching in full regalia, carrying a large Bible. Too, in 2008 the official theme of the Dignity March was the right of LGBT people to marry, expressed in the year's slogan "*Ásó, Kapa, Nagyharang"* (lit. "Spade, Hoe, Big Bell", a traditional phrase symbolizing the permanence of marriage), and embodied by the presence at the head

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[25] Author's fieldnotes. I should note here that, as a member of one of these teams, I myself took part in such estimations and decisions. I by no means desire to understate their difficulty, or the complexity of the motives of those involved, yet I remain deeply concerned about their implications.

of the procession of an open truck with two “married couples” - two men and two women, dressed for a wedding.[26]

Critically, this increased emphasis on the spectacular performance of dignity and respectability has been paralleled by an intensification since 2007 of the debates, among both activists and non-activists in the LGBT community, about “proper” behavior at the March, and increased attention to the question of whether certain elements of the LGBT community, and traditional participants in the March, are too “provocative” and so more dangerous than ever in light of the newly violent reactions of the right-wing to the March. As always, these debates have centered around the presence of particular figures such as drag queens and scantily clad dancers and marchers. And while there have been no official attempts to prevent them from taking part in the March, amidst the increased vehemence of these community debates in the last few years, and the growing emphasis on respectability and dignity (as well as, of course, the potential physical danger that surrounds the March, especially for such identifiable people) there has quite clearly been a dramatic disappearance of these previously highly visible icons - and their spectacular performances - from recent Marches. And while I in no way mean to suggest that all responsibility for this rests on the conscious decision of the March’s organizers to change its name, or to reformulate its message, there is little doubt that the conjunction of these efforts with the greatly heightened tensions surrounding the March, and broader shifts in LGBT community attitudes in response,

[26] This new emphasis on respectability - and, it should be noted, on respectability of a specifically national kind - has also been demonstrated by the incorporation since 2008 of the Hungarian national anthem, the *Himnusz*, into the Opening Ceremony of the Film and Cultural Festival that surrounds the March.

has resulted in a more normative March, with significantly narrowed boundaries of expression and inclusion.

Conclusion: Frictions of Naming, Frictions of Politics

These dramatic changes in the nature of the Budapest March, as well as both its organization and public reception, suggest that the shift that has occurred is neither a merely linguistic change between two slightly different terms and their meanings, nor a simple, conscious decision between two different forms of politics. Rather, I believe, they reveal something far more significant: the fundamental dilemma in which the Hungarian LGBT movement, and LGBT people more generally, find themselves as they stand at the awkward conjuncture of different discourses and practices of identity, politics, and rights. Indeed, it seems to me that what they indicate above all else is that Hungarian LGBT people - as, perhaps, many other LGBT people elsewhere in the world currently are as well - are, in fact, *trapped* between these discourses and the complex network of their global and local meanings - a perilous position, productive of what Anna Tsing (2005) has called the “friction”, and Arjun Appadurai (1991: 198) “the grinding of gears”, that necessarily accompanies the spaces and moments at which such discourses intersect, and through which they influence, merge, alter, and reshape one another, and people’s lives.[27]

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[27] Yet these particular events do not seem to be taking place in a “post-blurring” moment, as Appadurai (1991: 195) argues. Rather, what seems to characterize these intersections and both their meanings and consequences is a complex blur of sometimes conflicting, sometimes overlapping senses of self, community, and political practice, in which the “sharp debates” Appadurai describes (ibid) as characteristic of this new moment are in fact inextricably entangled in - and determined by - the many other cultural-political debates with which they are linked.

Much of the recent literature on the processes of globalization has argued against earlier notions of the overwhelming “Westernization” of local identities, practices, and meanings, and instead foregrounded the complexity of local reactions to transnational concepts and pressures, and the adaptations and modifications through which local actors seek to negotiate these intersections - negotiations often fraught with tension and ambiguity (Appadurai 2001, Burawoy 2000). Building on these interpretations, a growing number of scholars has suggested that these kinds of tensions and the frictions they produce are currently of particular salience in postsocialist Eastern European politics.[28] As others have pointed out, such tensions have also become especially powerful forces shaping both postsocialist sexual political activism and the recent resurgence of public, violent homophobia in many postsocialist countries.[29] The example of the changing title of the Budapest LGBT March, I believe, shows that such efforts to adapt and change global discourses and politics for local purposes can indeed be fraught with peril, and carry with them the potential for dangerous frictions for those caught between different discourses and the diverse, and often conflicting, reactions of actors to them.

Both “Pride” and “Dignity”, of course, tie LGBT people, politics, and marching into both transnational and national discourses of identity and politics. It is, in fact, the tension that arises from the intersection of these discourses, and their conflicting meanings that, paradoxically, makes them at once so potentially useful, and so potentially problematic. While the symbolism of “pride” locked Hungarian LGBT activism into a global logic of sexual identity and politics, it also provided it with the means to

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[28] Buchowski 2006, Böröcz 2006.

[29] Renkin 2009, Graff 2006, Schwartz 2005.

balance that logic, by framing its assertions through a rhetoric which, potentially at least, connected it to that underlying Hungary's dominant discourses of national identity and community. Both of these offered undeniable political utility, of course. Yet, as I have argued here, in many ways it appears to have been precisely the tension between these logics that was responsible for the difficulties of the LGBT movement and Pride March; that stimulated such powerful responses, and inevitably produced a range of "frictions" - specifically, frictions between competing notions of citizenship and belonging; frictions sometimes taking the form of violence.

Similarly, the move to "dignity" - made in response to exactly these kinds of frictions - strove to escape the problem of "pride" by moving LGBT Hungarians more firmly into a different global framework: that of universalizing neoliberal discourses of sexuality and rights, as well as its more specific, local meanings and manifestations. Yet, while this too clearly holds the promise of certain benefits - potentially powerful discursive and institutional support, an increased likelihood of coalition-building across identity and issue boundaries - it does so in ways that also raise potential dangers. This is, in part, because the very associations that the organizers strove to emphasize by their use of the new term were, like "pride" and its associated sexual identity politics, already entangled in very similar, and equally powerful, postsocialist tensions: those between the transnational discourses and institutions of civil society and "rights" and local, often nationalist, reactions against them. As much research has noted, there is considerable skepticism, and even suspicion, throughout much of postsocialist Eastern Europe, especially on the part of nationalist groups, of these kinds of "global" discourses of rights, and especially of the ways in which they have been newly embodied in and

deployed by the structures and institutions of “civil society” - also frequently perceived by such groups as the creation of an interfering “West” (Verdery 1996). Indeed, it is these associations which are perhaps reflected in the reactions of the anti-gay right-wing to the March’s transformation - which so far have been far from encouraging. While direct attacks on the March have, for the most part, been prevented in the last two years by the kinds of security precautions described above, as well as by massive police protection, large groups of neo-Nazis and nationalists have continued to demonstrate against and attempt to violently assault it and its participants. And, tellingly, as I have written elsewhere, in the last several years it has been precisely the March’s most “dignified” performances, those which have mingled images and symbols of national respectability with those of gayness, that have resulted in the most intense fury on the part of its attackers (Renkin 2009).

Furthermore, the efforts by the organizers of the Budapest March to invoke the concept of “dignity” in order to locate LGBT people more clearly within the framework of universal human rights also raise the specter of the specificities of LGBT oppression being erased by the techniques of a “generalized” “Human Rights” strategy - a danger perhaps most clearly revealed by yet another mass public demonstration. Held in October of 2008 in order to protest against the attacks on the LGBT March the previous summer, and called *Tarka Magyar!* (Multi-colored Hungarian), this event drew large numbers of people from Hungary’s left intellectual groups, human rights organizations, LGBT activists, and ordinary citizens. Yet, strikingly, the event was conceived as a “silent” demonstration, without slogans or audible protest and, even more strikingly, the specific issues of LGBT rights and anti-gay violence were barely mentioned: rather, the

speeches given at the demonstration, and writings about it, for the most part referred only to the fact that they were protesting against "violence and exclusion of any kind", and against all "atrocities against minorities."[30]

Finally - and perhaps most significantly - the move to escape "pride" in the name of "dignity" seems to have have had powerful, and disturbing, consequences for sexual politics in Hungary - consequences that are consistent with the warnings raised by the critics of the neoliberal sexual politics of respectability more generally. As mentioned above, the new discourse and its practices have resulted in a stricter policing of what is considered "acceptable" LGBT public expression in the Budapest March, and thus in a narrowing of the boundaries of identity and belonging of the LGBT community itself more generally. Once again, this can be seen most strikingly in the erasure of drag queens and scantily-clad dancers from the March, and thus from key public practices which have, until now, functioned to confirm their visible membership and specific status in the community. These, then, are the most obvious victims of friction, the people most visibly ground in the gears of a newly limited politics of respectability, generalized rights, and re-bordered belonging. Yet, I would argue, they are far from the only ones. Rather, as the continuing public homophobia and anti-gay action, the dwindling participation in the March by LGBT people, and the shrinking physical and symbolic space of the March itself suggest, Hungary's organized activist movement, and indeed all LGBT people as well may be in the end just as trapped in these gears; in the tensions between these

[30] Author's fieldnotes. These changes also run the risk that LGBT activism has, in effect, ceded the terrain of "pride" to the right-wing, thus leaving LGBT people ever more clearly outside the borders of national identity and community that currently appear to be becoming more and more important to not only the right-wing, but to Hungarian politics in general.

intersecting discourses of sexual, national, and transnational politics; in the friction between Pride and Dignity.

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