Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/retn20

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Published online: 05 Mar 2014.

To cite this article: Hadley Z. Renkin (2014): Perverse Frictions: Pride, Dignity, and the Budapest LGBT March, Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology, DOI: 10.1080/00141844.2013.879197

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2013.879197

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Perverse Frictions: Pride, Dignity, and the Budapest LGBT March

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Abstract Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) marches are critical and contentious events throughout post-socialist Europe: key sites of emerging sexual politics, shifting tensions between national and transnational meanings, and competing visions of citizenship. Since 1997 a ‘Pride March’, in 2008 Budapest’s LGBT march was renamed the ‘Dignity March’. Taking this change as its focus, this paper explores debates within and outside Hungary’s LGBT community about the meanings of ‘Pride’, ‘Dignity’, and sexuality. I argue these debates reveal competing efforts to negotiate the perilous boundaries between national and transnational discourses of identity, politics, and belonging. Situating them within Hungary’s shifting political context, including recent violent attacks on the March, I suggest the move from the politics of Pride to the politics of Dignity has failed to escape the frictions of intersecting global and local discourses, instead invoking new cultural-political tensions, exclusionary boundaries, and dilemmas of identity, belonging, and politics for Hungarian LGBT people and activism.

Keywords Pride, dignity, post-socialism, sexual politics, globalising sexualities, Hungary

On 4 September 2010, in an event of some notoriety, widely publicised as the ‘Hetero Pride Day March’, a small group of right-wing, nationalist demonstrators marched through the centre of Budapest, Hungary. Demanding a ‘Faggot-free Hungary!’ and bearing banners with anti-gay slogans and the right-wing’s signature red-and-white-striped Árpád flags, the marchers, mostly skinheads in black combat boots, camouflage, and neo-Nazi gear, followed the traditional path through Budapest of the city’s annual Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) March, long known as the Pride March. In their speeches, the organizers and participants of
Hetero Pride— including Előd Novák, well-known Parliamentary representative of the right-wing Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik Magyarországtársaság Mozgalom—known popularly as Jobbik), resplendent in folk costume, and his wife and fellow Jobbik representative Dóra Dúró, spectacularly feminine in miniskirt and red high heels—proclaimed that, after years of being forced to tolerate the ‘deviance’ of LGBT Pride marches, it was high time heterosexuals in Hungary expressed their pride. Arguing that LGBT ‘Pride’ was just ‘exhibitionism’, and not true political expression, they ended the march by publicly demanding that Parliament deny homosexuals the right to assemble or demonstrate in public spaces.

Ironically, just two years earlier, in the spring of 2008, an event of a different kind took place: with little fanfare, the name of Hungary’s LGBT March was officially changed by its organisers, the Rainbow Mission Foundation, from the ‘Gay Pride Day March’ (Meleg Bukszegnapi Felvonulás) which it had been called since its inception in 1997, to the ‘Gay Dignity March’ (Meleg Melosag Menet).

Both these events were responses to increasing tensions in Hungary over the public visibility of LGBT people, including a dramatic surge in public homophobia in the last several years, most visibly manifest in violent attacks by nationalists and neo-Nazis on the Pride March beginning in 2007. Yet both were also responses to long-standing debates over the meaning of the Budapest March, and especially the term ‘Pride’, in both homophobic and LGBT circles in Hungary. These debates have shaped a wide range of responses to the Pride March, including opposition (violent and non-violent) to it, activist efforts to construct a coherent, politicised sense of LGBT identity and community and build an effective mass movement, and LGBT community resistance to these efforts. Such tensions, and the debates that surround them, thus reveal important social and political divisions, not only between LGBT people and homophobic groups, but within Hungary’s LGBT community itself.

The renaming of the Budapest March was intended to address these complex tensions, escaping the problematic meanings of ‘Pride’ by invoking the concept of ‘Dignity’. In this paper, I examine the March and its changes from its beginnings in 1997 to 2011, to argue that this move has instead resulted in unexpected, and potentially critical, consequences for both LGBT people and sexual politics in Hungary, locating not only ‘Pride’ and ‘Dignity’, but Hungary’s LGBT movement, at the centre of a complex nexus of discourses of identity and community which conjoin competing global discourses with contending national imaginaries, and currently dominate post-socialist politics.
In my view, the movement’s position at the centre of this nexus is deeply precarious, producing profound cultural and political ‘frictions’ (Tsing 2005) for Hungarian LGBT people, vital implications for boundaries of LGBT and national community, and critical dilemmas for LGBT Hungarians’ ability to assert intelligible claims to equal belonging in either.

Much of the literature on globalisation and its complexities has paid little attention to questions of sexuality, focusing instead on (other) economic, social, and political relations. Similarly, while post-socialist studies has drawn attention to the importance of global/local relationships for understanding classed, raced, gendered, and symbolic-geographic forms of belonging in Hungary and other post-socialist countries (Gal 1991; Böröcz 2006; Bukowski 2006; Chari & Verdery 2009; Dunn 2004; Gille 2010), dominant theorisations of post-socialism have neglected sexuality and sexual politics (Kulpa & Mizielinska 2011), while early works addressing post-socialist sexual politics tended to view them in terms of simple oppositions or unities between global models and local realities (Tóth 1994; Essig 1999; Takács 2004). In contrast, building upon the work of scholars of sexuality and globalisation stressing the critical roles of frictions between local and translocal meanings in defining the borders of sexual citizenship and belonging (Rofel 1999; Boellstorff 2005; Massad 2007; Puar 2007; Gaudio 2009), and emerging work on post-socialist sexualities arguing that precisely these tensions currently shape both sexual political activism and resurgent homophobia in post-socialist countries (Stychin 2004; Graff 2006; 2010; Renkin 2009; Binnie & Kresse 2011), I contend here that sexuality and sexual politics are deeply consequential hinges of post-socialism’s complex global/local tensions. ‘Pride’ and ‘Dignity’, I argue, have become key mediators in the efforts of Hungarian LGBT people, as well as homophobic nationalists, to negotiate the broader patterns of contestation within which they are currently caught – between nationalism and global neoliberalism, between heteronormativity and homonormativity, between the politics of being and doing – in order to assert belonging. They are, therefore, also terms which allow us to trace the layered promises and pitfalls of such endeavours.5

**Contentious Contexts**

*Pride 2002, Budapest*: I am standing at *Felvonulási* Square, next to Heroes’ Square and the Millennium Monument, with several friends, waiting as the crowd around us grows. Music – electronica, disco, ABBA – blares from a huge truck packed with speakers in front of us. Looking around at the excited throng, I see sights familiar from a myriad other Pride Marches: pink
triangles, rainbow flags, placards with slogans like ‘Silence = Death’ and ‘The Gay Family’. At the head of the parade other traditional icons wait, already drawing cheers and applause: several cars of glamorous drag queens, waving and flirting; on another truck, go-go dancers gyrate. Despite this I am struck, as always, by how ‘ordinary’ most people look, quite unlike the campily extravagant display of Pride Marches in America and Western Europe: almost everyone is in everyday street clothes. After what seems an endless wait, the moment finally arrives. The music’s volume increases, the trucks and cars begin to roll and, dancing, whistling, cheering, we march off down Andrásy Boulevard, into the heart of the city.

Hungary’s first lesbian/gay organisation, Homerosz-Lambda, was founded in 1988, just before the collapse of socialism. Its primarily social focus soon led more politically inclined members to create the Szívvány Társulás a Melegek Jogaért [Rainbow Coalition for Gay Rights], dedicated to promoting lesbian and gay rights in a way partly modelled on the US gay rights movement. Denied official registration by Hungary’s first post-socialist government, Szívvány quickly splintered. Several smaller groups emerged in its wake: the gay men’s magazine Mások [Others] and its organisation Lambda Budapest, Hátter Társaság a Melegekért’s [Background Support Society for Gays] counselling hotline, the legal aid Habeus Corpus Munkacsaport (Habeus Corpus Workgroup), and the Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület (Labrys Lesbian Association). Since 1997 these groups have organised Budapest’s LGBT Festival and March; in 2001, they formed the Szívvány Misszió Alapítvány (Rainbow Mission Foundation) to coordinate this task. Embedded from the beginning in transnational connections – the first festival in 1993 and the first Pride March in 1997 both received inspiration and assistance from foreigners living in Hungary – as part of the post-1989 proliferation of civil society, these organisations have also relied considerably on Western funding and training (Renkin 2007).

The emergence of these organisations and the March was also embedded in the complexities of Hungarian struggles over post-socialist citizenship. Like other previously socialist countries after 1989, Hungary experienced a resurgence in nationalism, due to its role as a key site of resistance to socialist power, but also desires to assert cultural identity and worth in the face of profound post-socialist transformations in gender, sexual, class, and ethnic relations.

These changes have both informed and been amplified by significant shifts in Hungary’s post-1989 politics. Nationalism gained new momentum from current
Prime Minister Victor Orbán’s once liberal dissident Fidesz (once short for Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége, or Alliance of Young Democrats; now Magyar Polgári Szövetség – Hungarian Civic Union) party’s swing to the right after the mid-1990s. Capitalising on widespread disillusionment with neoliberal economic changes surrounding Hungary’s 2004 European Union accession, a rapidly increasing gap between rich and poor, and perceptions by many of EU cultural, political, and economic domination, Orbán’s move not only enhanced right-wing political power but intensified nationalist hegemony. These tendencies accelerated in 2006, when a major scandal arose over leaked remarks by the then-Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, admitting that he and his Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Part – MSzP – Fidesz’s main political opposition) had lied about the country’s economic situation to win the election. This scandal dramatically increased political tensions, as well as right-wing willingness to express dissent through mass public violence (exemplified by repeated anti-government riots that year).

The result has been not only an increasingly nationalist, anti-EU politics on the part of the once Western-leaning Fidesz, often framed as assertions of national pride, but the transformation of Hungary’s far-right from fringe phenomenon into powerful political force, including Jobbik’s emergence as a party with substantial popular appeal and Parliamentary representation. These developments have also reinforced deep class and ethnic tensions, most visibly through the right-wing’s increasingly open expression of anti-Roma and anti-Semitic sentiment.

Class and ethnic politics have been the most commonly noted pivots of such national tensions. Yet a considerable body of feminist scholarship has placed gender and sexuality at the centre of post-socialist struggles over national identity and belonging. Attempts to reassert ‘traditional’ gender and sexual regimes in reaction to these changes – often framed explicitly as national resistance to alien norms – have made sexual and reproductive politics key sites for the defence of not only national pride but also masculine and feminine respectability (Gal & Kligman 2000). In Hungary, these have taken the form of persistent conservative efforts since the 1990s to curtail women’s abortion rights (Gal 1994), restrict prostitution, and define the gendered and sexual boundaries of family and marriage, including both the explicitly heteronormative ‘Family Policy’ of Fidesz’s late 1990s government (Renkin 2007), and Fidesz’s more recent redefinitions in its revised 2012 Constitution of ‘family’ and ‘marriage’ as specifically heterosexual institutions. Such efforts have depended on right-wing framings of feminist and LGBT politics as anti-national, foreign
impositions (Huseby-Darvas 1996; Renkin 2007), and stimulated renewed right-wing focus on homosexuality as a key threat to the nation; they have also often inspired people identifying with these positions to align themselves more firmly with transnational discourses of gender and sexual politics. Thus, gender and sexuality have been key sites for contests over the boundaries of Hungary’s post-socialist citizenship, and particularly for tensions between national and transnational identities, communities, and politics.

The Pride That Binds

It was amidst this complicated atmosphere of cultural and political contention that, on 7 July 2007, the Budapest Pride March was violently attacked by nationalist and neo-Nazi ‘counterdemonstrators’. From Dohány street on the Nagykörút [Big Ring Road] to the end of the March at the Danube, marchers clustered together, shocked and terrified, under what seemed an endless rain of eggs, bottles, rocks, and smoke bombs. Dressed in black, waving Árpád flags and giving Nazi salutes, the attackers hurled epithets as well: ‘Filthy queers!’ ‘[Throw the] faggots into the Danube!’ The violence did not end with the March itself; that night LGBT people returning home were assaulted. Eleven were beaten, two so badly they were hospitalised.

Public use of the term ‘Pride’ (Bűszkeség) in Hungarian sexual politics goes back to the first Budapest March in 1997, when fewer than 200 people dashed quickly from the gay club Capella along the Danube embankment to Vörösmarty Square and back. For the next 10 years, the March was known as the Gay Pride Day March.

‘Pride’ is one of the most politically significant terms in the history of the North American and Western European LGBT politics that has, to a great extent, provided the model for Hungarian LGBT activism. In this history, pride emerged as a positive, countering concept to the negations of hegemonic heteronormativity, as well as the internalised shame and isolation understood to accompany them, emphasising both private and public affirmation of non-normative sexual identity, and identity-based community (D’Emilio 1998; Halperin & Traub 2009; Warner 2009). Pride was also a key concept through which emerging sexual politics movements in the United States were modelled on the Civil Rights movement’s politics of race and ethnicity, including its strategic assertions of ethnic pride, and similarly strove to link individual and community through the politicised expression of stable, shared identity (Seidman 1995; D’Emilio 1998; D’Emilio & Freedman 2012). Its role in this process was inti-
mately connected to practices of public visibility, including ‘coming out’, but particularly marches and marching: the term became popular in the mid-1970s for describing both the ‘Gay Rights’ movement and its mass, public demonstrations, as a less radical replacement for earlier terms such as ‘Gay Freedom’ and ‘Gay Liberation’ (D’Emilio & Freedman 2012). The term’s emergence thus underscored a crucial turn in these LGBT movements from a universalist, transformative politics to more essentialist views of identity and ‘difference’ as bases for claiming rights (Seidman 1995). It also emphasised that difference’s visibility, and especially its spectacular, mass public performance in events like Pride Marches.

The use of pride was thus consciously intended by the Hungarian activists and US-American visitors who helped plan the first Hungarian public LGBT events to align the Budapest March, and Hungarian LGBT people, with the core imaginary of a global ‘politics of pride’ – connections reflected in and reinforced by the March’s performative practices. Consequently, as they have elsewhere, Hungarian discourses and practices of pride grounded not only Pride Marches themselves, but specific strategies of identity construction. By producing public performances of distinct identity and community aligned with global models of ‘difference’, the Pride March supported activist efforts to encourage imaginings of coherent transnational LGBT identity and community.

At the same time, however, the March also enacted other, specifically national forms of pride through its performative association with nationally significant spaces and symbols. The visible presence of marchers in critical public spaces such as the central nexus of Deák Square and the city’s most celebrated Boulevard, Andrásy út, and symbolic sites like the Millennium Monument at Heroes’ Square, Hungary’s pre-eminent national-historical memorial – the sites and spaces through which national membership is traditionally demonstrated – meant that the March simultaneously framed resonant assertions of national belonging. Fusing global, transnational imaginaries with local, national visions of identity, community, and politics, and thus proposing both a transnational alternative and an alternative nationalness, the March spectacularly enacted ‘the theoretical idea of multiple and intersecting identities, which often provides...an important counter to claims that these identities are mutually exclusive’ (Stychin 2004: 959), binding Hungarian LGBT people to complexly layered senses of belonging and troubling the normative contours of post-socialist citizenship (Renkin 2007; 2009).
Contesting Pride

8 July 2007: Sitting in the Faklya Klub, an old socialist cultural centre, at the LGBT Festival’s traditional post-March workshop, still in shock at the previous day’s terrifying attacks, we analyse and reanalyse what had happened and why, what the police had, and had not, done, and what might happen next. Most of us are scared, but furious: being proud of ourselves is no crime, one woman says. Others, though, are more ambivalent. After listening attentively for a while, Milán, a young, conservatively dressed man, nervously stands up, and announces that, although he has long taken part, he has always felt the March was ‘too provocative’, and that the ‘exhibitionistic’ behaviour of some of its participants incited right-wing anger. People like drag queens, he insists, just make things worse for LGBT people living ‘normal, respectful lives’.

Despite its transnational and national associations, and their potential advantages, however, pride and its politics posed significant problems for Hungary’s LGBT movement, and for the Pride March. Indeed, precisely because it referenced both transnational models of sexual politics and understandings of national sentiment, pride became an important site of contention over the proper relationship of local and translocal meanings.

Right-wing anathematising of the Pride March, for example, has often dismissed the pride proclaimed by LGBT people as a fundamentally foreign concept. For Hungarians, nationalists state, 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 is less like the English ‘pride’, and closer to ‘arrogance’ (a view possibly strengthened, as Zsuzsa, an LGBT activist, explained to me, by the fact that ‘büszkeség’ is also the Hungarian word for the Biblical sin of ‘Pride’) – as in Hetero Pride’s claim that Gay Pride is simply ‘exhibitionism’. As such, it is seen as causally linked to the ‘sexual excess’ of the Pride March. Pride in LGBT identity is thus at once personally inappropriate – since one’s sexual identity is something one is; and not something one has done – an excessive, provocative display of ego, and culturally inappropriate – a foreign invasion of the nation’s linguistic and affective terrain.

Yet the concept of pride, of course, is also fundamental to nationalism. Romanticised in national discourses as a foundational sentiment of identity and community, practically enacted in common phrases like ‘Proud Hungarian’ (büszke Magyar), it marks proper awareness and appreciation of national identity. Thus, for the right-wing, pride in one’s nation is both proper and authentic,
as the nation is both outside oneself, and like family. Critical to such notions of national pride are specifically sexual meanings: as George Mosse long ago demonstrated, the emergence of modern European nationalism was intimately linked to notions of sexual ‘respectability’, in which properly gendered and reproductively heterosexual members of the nation were constructed as normal in opposition to non-heteronormative identities and practices (Mosse 1985). By defying the Nation’s needs, the homosexual became the constitutive internal Other of the normative national subject, associated with its transnational enemies. National pride is thus bound to distinctly heteronormative desire and performance. It is this set of meanings which has led the Hungarian right-wing to contest Budapest Pride’s use of pride by reclaiming it through events like the ‘Hetero Pride’ march, and which underscores Hetero Pride’s own spectacular embodiment of Hungary’s resurgent politics of heteronational respectability; it is also, of course, what has led them to attack the March directly and violently.

As Milán’s remarks above reveal, however, such meanings and their tensions are not solely the province of the right-wing; they have long shaped debates about identity and politics within LGBT community, rendering pride a contentious subject there as well. Many LGBT people, including activists, have objected to the term pride, and to the Pride March, in exactly the same terms used by the right, arguing that neither is truly Hungarian. As several of us sat in Eklektika, a gay-friendly cafe, one evening during the 2001 Lesbian and Gay Festival, for example, chatting about the coming Saturday’s March, Péter, a middle-aged man long active in Lambda Budapest, noted his discomfort with the concept:

[Someone once asked me] what I thought about the expression Gay Pride March. And I said I strongly disapproved of it, like 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!’

Nodding, György, a younger non-activist friend, agreed:

Pride 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.

The meaning of pride is thus for many LGBT people, too, connected to the belief that excessive pride can result in provocative sexual display – the sort of thing that one should not ‘show on the street’ – an interpretation frequently invoked by non-activists to explain their unwillingness to participate in the March.

Other LGBT rejections of pride are stimulated by the term’s resonances with heteronational discourses and homophobic practices. Here, pride is a powerfully negative concept, central to nationalism’s destructiveness – a problem of immense historical salience in Hungary. As Szilvi, a young, non-activist woman described her feelings about nationalist reactions to the March, well before the 2007 attacks, ‘It kills your feeling of being proud, if they look at you without smiling, or if you march, and everybody is so negative around you. It just makes you afraid, and not proud’. Not surprisingly, such resistance to pride has been intensified, and personalised, by recent attacks on the March: for some, intimate experience of nationalist homophobia has tainted pride’s potential. Such tensions have concrete consequences for both LGBT political practice and everyday sociality: when in 2008, Ákos, a member of Határ, proposed hanging a Hungarian flag in the organisation’s hallway (littered with rainbow symbols, pink triangles, and other paraphernalia of global LGBT activism), intense debate erupted. Although Ákos argued the flag would prove that gay people could be proud to be gay and Hungarian, others insisted this would proclaim adherence to exactly the kind of pride that, especially now, threatened everything they were striving for. The flag was not put up, but tensions lingered.

**Defending Pride**

Tibor, an LGBT activist since the founding of the Rainbow Coalition for Gay Rights, and I were strolling down Budapest’s busy Nagykörút one day, gossipping about the latest movement scandal. We both suddenly stopped dead as we passed a wedding store, outside of which stood a large sign overflowing with pictures of absurdly, campily extravagant men’s and women’s wedding costumes. Caught between hysterical laughter and outrage, Tibor burst out, ‘They [heterosexuals] get to have Pride every day!’

LGBT activists have attempted to counter the objections and uncertainties that have accompanied pride. Drawing attention to pride’s role in national sentiment,
they note that it is in fact an eminently Hungarian form of affective, and sexual, politics. Like Tibor, they argue, pride is not alien, but deeply embedded in Hungary’s everyday, heteronormative life, and so appropriate for LGBT people as well.

Others have argued that while ‘büszkeség’ is usually defined simply as ‘pride’, its meanings in actual practice are more complex. These other connotations, they suggest, render ‘büszkeség’ a legitimate basis for claiming inclusion. The word, they note, can also mean ‘self-respect’, rather than ‘arrogance’, and thus suggest not exclusionary excess, but healthy LGBT response to heteronormative oppression. Building upon this, some activists have insisted that it is not, in fact, merely one’s self that the concept of pride recognises, but rather a community of active resistance to heteronormativity. Pride is thus not only an appropriately unselfish emotion, but one that reinforces bonds of community. As one activist speech during the 2002 Festival proclaimed:

> 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 recognise all those who dare, and who dare to be proud.

In these views LGBT Pride counters the hegemony of heteronormative, heteronational pride.

Yet the impact of such efforts has been at best ambiguous. One important sign of this has been that, as mentioned, LGBT people have, over the years, simply not participated in the March in significant numbers. Activist efforts to recuperate pride may have had other consequences as well. Some LGBT activists see in the politics of pride an important cause of the movement’s on-going problems building bridges with other minoritised groups. In their view, the foundational assumptions of pride’s identity politics have fostered a specificity of interests that has fractured alternative and minority politics in Hungary, depriving LGBT people of potential political allies. Thus, in contrast to dominant interpretations of the globalisation of ‘gay’ identities and politics, which often assume natural alignment between local and global LGBT identities and politics (Altman 1997), Hungarian LGBT people, much like their right-wing opponents, remain deeply ambivalent about their relationship to the national and transnational tensions of pride.

**Determining Dignities**

As we sit over coffee at the artsy, ramshackle cafe of the *Bem* Cinema a few weeks before the 2008 Gay Dignity March, Mari, one of the March organisers,
explains that they chose the new name because in Hungary, “*emberi méltóság*” [human dignity] is the basis of human rights’. Through its association with international Human Rights discourses, she says, they intend ‘dignity’ to highlight the common humanity of LGBT people, their fundamental equality, rather than rights claims based on difference. This invocation of common ground, she hopes, will establish a broader political base for LGBT activists’ intensified efforts, in the wake of the attacks on the March, to transcend the boundaries of identity and issue dominating Hungarian politics since 1989, and so encourage coalition-building with other social minorities like Jews and Roma, as well as progressive movements like the Humanists and Young Greens, and Human Rights organisations like Amnesty International. As Mari puts it,

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

The March’s new central term, ‘Dignity’, was thus meant to address both right-wing complaints and criticism by LGBT people of Pride’s non-Hungarianness, as well as sometimes shared perceptions of pride as a site of improper, sexually provocative behaviour – to resolve, finally, the problem of pride. Yet the change was also a conscious attempt by organisers to respond to these (and more direct) attacks by linking the March and LGBT rights more closely to global Human Rights discourses, and their associated institutional structures: NGOs and civil society groups. Increasingly powerful transnationally in recent decades, these discourses and institutions have since 1989 become highly visible in Hungary and other post-socialist countries, through both Western civil society-building projects and efforts surrounding EU accession to integrate post-socialist societies into its institutional structures (Ghodsee 2004; Gille 2010). Dignity was thus intended to link LGBT politics to the specific manifestations of these processes in Hungary.

**Cseberből Vederbe (Out of the Frying Pan and Into the Fire)**

Yet if, in using this new term to reframe sexual politics, March organisers sought to escape the frictions of pride both within and outside the LGBT community, they have not succeeded. For dignity, like its predecessor, is deeply embedded in the conjoined histories of national and transnational politics –
sexual and other. It has thus evoked its own layered tensions, both among LGBT community and those who oppose it.

Like pride, the concept of dignity has a long history in North American and Western European sexual politics. Used in similar fashion to counter negative representations of LGBT people, asserting instead their inherent worth (Cuomo 2007: 79), historically dignity has often figured as a political variant of pride. Yet it has also served as a counterdiscourse to pride and its implications. The first US organisation for Catholic homosexuals, founded in 1969 (it became a national organisation in 1973), was called ‘Dignity’ specifically in response to fears of the new Gay Lib movement’s moral extremism and provocative behaviour (Oppenheimer 1996: 6), while the Mattachine Society’s post-1953 ‘retreat to respectability’ from earlier radical approaches to identity and politics is well known (D’Emilio 1998).

Recent scholarship noting a renewed focus on dignity in Western sexual politics has also characterised this as a move away from the politics of pride and difference, and a normativising turn to a ‘new respectability’, a shift frequently exemplified by recent political emphasis on national concerns such as rights to marriage, adoption, and military service. Some critics link this new sexual politics to the sweeping restructurings of contemporary neoliberalism, warning that it privatises and individualises issues of rights and equality, privileges dominant rather than alternative social values, and produces powerfully exclusionary ‘homonormative’ regimes, through which some LGBT people claim inclusion by policing the identities, behaviours, and politics of others (Warner 1993; Duggan 2002). Others, locating it specifically in the context of current global politics, have termed the new sexual politics ‘homonationalism’, arguing that its terms of inclusion depend on and reinforce dominant post-9/11 categories of exclusion: race, religion, and immigration status (Puar 2007). Such new meanings, these critics note, have reshaped not merely abstract notions of sexual identity and politics, but concrete practices: what are still called ‘Pride Marches’ in many places have increasingly foregrounded hegemonic symbols and behaviours, such as normative masculinities and femininities, visible demonstrations of patriotism, participation in State institutions like the police and military, and commercial over political meanings (Munoz 1999; Adam 2009). In these reconfigured practices, LGBT dignity is still expressed through and confirmed by public spectacle – but it is the respectable, commodified LGBT body and the normative community it represents that are legitimated.

The practical significance of ‘dignity’ [melloság] in Hungary shares many of these meanings. Defined in one major Hungarian Lexicon as ‘a value which is
due to every single being as a person’, the word implies a universal, individual, and inherent quality. This is reinforced by its usage in post-socialist Hungarian political discourses and legal architecture. Especially in the form ‘Human Dignity’ [emberi méltság], dignity has played a crucial role in framing the centrality of human rights in a post-socialist society. A foundational post-1989 Determination of the Hungarian Constitutional Court, for example, defines ‘emberi méltság’ as a quality inherent to all people, based on the fundamental ‘autonomy and self-determination of the individual’ as an independent ‘subject’, connecting the term explicitly to issues of self-identification and privacy (64/1991. (XII. 17.) AB határozat). The concept has also been a key tool through which both Hungary’s liberal left, in the form of civil society groups like the ‘Dignity for Everyone Movement’ [Méltságot Mindenkinek Mozgalom] and international actors such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Helsinki Committee have striven to counter resurgent nationalism, and especially its recent displays of undignified mass violence.

Other, more everyday cultural nuances of méltság, however, also shape its political effects in important ways. Méló, for example, its root, translates as ‘proper’, and can also be used to say one is ‘worthy of’ something – connotations perhaps implying adherence to and dependence on external evaluation and acknowledgement of such worth. The post-socialist meanings of dignity – both cultural and institutional – thus reinforce and complement its effect within global discourses as an individualising term that nonetheless invokes standards of social worth, linking it to both a politics grounded in fundamental distinctions between private and public and an ethic of expressive restraint based on individual obligation to properly negotiate those boundaries.

Yet the transnational human rights discourses so influential in Hungarian politics have also been central to contentious debates about post-socialist transformation. Hungary’s right has frequently seen such discourses to threaten national ‘cultural rights’ (despite the fact that these too are embedded in transnational discourses). Similarly, the civil society structures supporting such discourses in Hungary, to which ‘dignity’ was to weld LGBT people, have served as icons of foreign interference for nationalists throughout Eastern Europe since the early 1990s (Einhorn & Sever 2003), making affiliation potentially perilous. Moreover, as Klára, a non-activist LGBT woman informed me, the adjectival méltságos can also refer to a ‘dignitary’; a person of significance. Indeed, Klára pointed out, méltságos uram was in Hungary’s pre-socialist era a required term of address for upper ranks of the nobility; the equivalent of the English ‘Your Lordship’. These past meanings – perhaps even more
resonant for some in light of post-socialism’s growing social and economic stratifications – Klára suggested, may mean that the use of this term to invoke a dignified LGBT subject in fact locates that subject within historically potent hierarchical social and political structures, evoking implications of unequal, not equal, dignities. The sexual politics of ‘dignity’ thus reinstantiates sexuality at the centre of a range of powerful post-socialist cultural and political tensions in potentially contentious ways.

**The Borders of Dignity**

In October 2008, another event, ‘Multicoloured Hungarian’ (*Tarka Magyar!*), was held in Budapest. Defying grey autumn weather, several thousand people – leftist intellectuals, human rights and LGBT activists, ordinary citizens – retraced a familiar route along Andrássy Boulevard to Heroes’ Square, calling for ‘a violence and exclusion-free Hungary’. At the end of the march, participants waved fabric squares in many colours, in a vivid performance of multiculturalism. Equally strikingly, it was a silent demonstration: people marched in solemn dignity, without slogans or chanting. This silence went further: despite the fact that the protest was largely inspired by the attacks on the previous summer’s LGBT March, the demonstration’s speeches and public statements restricted themselves to condemning ‘violence and exclusion of any kind’ and ‘atrocities against minorities’. Homophobic violence and LGBT rights were barely mentioned.

Given the broader resonances of the meanings of ‘dignity’ in post-socialist Hungary, it is perhaps unsurprising that the new politics of dignity has coincided with both profound transformations of LGBT marching, and ongoing tensions.

One of the most visible changes has been the increased number of ‘allies’ participating in the March. Recent years have seen more straight people, liberal intellectuals, Human Rights activists, and organisations like Amnesty International, as well as sympathetic queer-anarchist groups from Austria and Germany, attending. Yet while this clearly indicates a certain success for the organisers’ bridge-building strategy, it has been accompanied by less positive changes. Tellingly, despite the growing number of allies, during this time, up through 2012, the March remained essentially the same size: approximately 1500–2000 people. As many activists noted with dismay, this suggests that the number of Hungarian LGBT people attending the March was actually dwindling. This is no doubt partly in response to the violence surrounding
the March since 2007. Yet it may also indicate an increasing, rather than decreasing, ambivalence among LGBT people about the March and its politics.9

The foregrounding of ‘dignity’ has also occasioned intensified policing of the boundaries of the March. In part, the new borders have been external ones. There have been both practical and symbolic strengthenings of the March’s spatial boundaries: since the attacks in 2007, the pre-March gathering zone has been surrounded by security fences, guarded by riot police; during the March its entire route has been lined by barricades and more police. While these measures have protected marchers from direct homophobic assault, they have also isolated the March from Budapest’s public space, drawing symbolic barriers between marchers, other citizens, and spaces critically constitutive of citizenship. The March has been spatially truncated as well, as police have insisted they are unable to protect its traditional route from attack. In 2010, for example, the March was reduced from its usual course across the city to a mere eight city blocks. As many participants commented to me, its public assertion of dignity was thus further diminished.

But the new policing of boundaries has been internal to LGBT community as well. In 2008, as part of the new system of securing the pre-March gathering area, for example, organisers instituted a policy of multiple entry-checks. Those entering the cordon were first scrutinised by teams of volunteers, who decided whom to allow in and whom to keep out. Those allowed in were then checked for dangerous objects at a second gate. The volunteers based their decisions on visible traits that, in their eyes, revealed ‘proper gayness’, as well as potential pro- or anti-gay attitudes. Such judgments barred obviously heteronormative nationalists intent on interfering with the March. Yet they also excluded others. One of these was a young man, known widely by the nom-de-guerre of ‘Zsófi’.10 A controversial figure, Zsófi was notorious for arriving at the March every year literally reeling with drink or drugs – and for inspiring media frenzies; his sexually suggestive dancing had for years served as one of the March’s most scandalous public representations. To my eyes he was also evidently poorer than most March participants. When, before the 2010 March, Zsófi staggered up to the gate, visibly intoxicated, the group of volunteers there decided that he could not enter. In shock – he had been marching for years, as long as I could remember, since at least 1999 – he stood at the gate and blankly stated, ‘But, I’m Zsófi!’ Regretfully, politely, visibly torn, the volunteers would not let him pass through the gate. Finally, he walked away, unable to do more than repeat in disbelief, ‘But I’m Zsófi. Zsófi!’ Given the very real
violence of the right-wing, these measures seem to many in the LGBT community necessary precautions, like the police actions, critical to protecting the dignity of the March and LGBT people. Nonetheless, they powerfully reinforce boundaries between properly and improperly dignified LGBT people.

These new boundaries have also been reflected in the increasingly respectable performance of the March from roughly 2008 onwards. In 2008, the official theme of the first Dignity March was the right of LGBT people to marry, expressed in the year’s official slogan ‘Spade, Hoe, Big Bell’ [Ásô, Kapá, Nagyharang] – a traditional Hungarian phrase symbolising marriage – and embodied by the presence at the procession’s head of a truck with two ‘married couples’: two men in sober suits, two women resplendent in elegant dresses. That year also saw for the first time the incorporation of the ‘Himmusz’, Hungary’s national anthem, into the opening ceremony of the LGBT film and cultural Festival – a national respectability further underscored by the last several years’ increasing presence of Hungarian flags at the March.

The same factors have also focused renewed attention on the question of whether certain participants in the March are too ‘provocative’. As always, these debates have centred around figures such as drag queens and gogo dancers; now, in light of newly violent reactions to the March, these seem to some, like Milán, above, more dangerous than ever. And although there have been no official attempts to prevent them from taking part, amidst increasingly vehement community debate, and growing emphasis on respectability (as well as greater risks for such visible difference) there has been a notable reduction in the visibility and importance of these once central icons – as well as those of less iconic figures, like Zsófi – in recent Marches.

**Frictions of Being and Doing**

It would be easy to see the dramatic changes in the Budapest March described here as either a merely linguistic change, between two different terms and their obvious meanings, or a clear shift between two different, and opposed, kinds of politics: an alternative politics of transnational difference and an assimilative politics of normative, national inclusion. This is particularly so in light of the fact that in recent years, Western LGBT claims to national belonging have so often been read straightforwardly as forms of ‘homonormative’ and ‘homonational’ regulation. As this history of ‘Pride’ and ‘Dignity’ in Hungary reveals, however, such oppositions and their meanings are neither universal nor stably locatable as either national or transnational. Rather, LGBT claims to inclusion – whether framed in terms of ‘pride’ or ‘dignity’ – pose
alternatives to and challenge the borders of a range of national and transnational normativities, or confirm and reinforce their hegemonic boundaries, depending on the particular constellations of global and local tensions within which they take shape.

Both pride and dignity tied LGBT people, politics, and marching into complexly cross-cutting discourses of identity, community, and politics. It is the tensions that arose from these intersections and layered meanings, in fact, that made each at once potentially useful, and problematic. While the symbolism of pride bound Hungarian LGBT activism to a political logic of transnational sexual difference and belonging, it also allowed the balancing of that logic with simultaneous assertions of national belonging. Together, these multiple prides posed potential alternatives to the borders of inclusion and exclusion of both heteronormative nationalisms and homonormative transnationalisms. Yet it was precisely the tension between these logics, embodied in diverse discomforts with prides both national and sexual, that created difficulties for Hungary’s LGBT movement and Pride March: powerful frictions between competing visions of belonging, frictions sometimes taking the form of violence.

Similarly, moving to the politics of dignity sought to escape the frictions of pride by shifting LGBT Hungarians into the different, but equally global/local framework of universal rights. Yet while this too promised potential benefits – powerful discursive and institutional support, increased coalition-building – the new term also posed potential dangers: entanglement in post-socialist tensions between transnational discourses and institutions of civil society and rights, and nationalist reactions to them. Moreover, greater incorporation within the framework of universal rights has threatened to erase specifically LGBT oppressions, as in the case of the Tarka Magyar! demonstration. Most significantly, greater engagement with intensifying national and transnational respectabilities has heightened internal and external exclusions and constraints.

The complexity of this history also suggests that it is too easy to view these frictions between pride and dignity in terms of a distinction central to recent anti-identitarian critiques of sexual identity politics – particularly in the Western contexts from which much of sexuality’s theorisation has emerged (Kulpa & Mizlienska 2011). Arguing that the concept of essentialised ‘being’ at the root of both pride and dignity has underwritten assimilationist LGBT politics and its exclusions, these critiques propose that only a contrasting, performative politics of ‘doing’ – exemplified for some by pre-Stonewall gay activism, for others more recent queer politics – can transcend both heteronormativities and homonormativities (Seidman 1995; Howe 2002; Weiss 2008; Halperin 2012).
dilemmas of Hungarian pride and dignity, however, reveal both (like all sexual politics, in fact) as hybrids of these supposedly opposed politics. One may have pride in who one is – a matter of being – yet it is also something one is required to perform (by, e.g. ‘coming out’, or Marching). Similarly, dignity may be a universal human property, but it is one that must be demonstrated by properly dignified behaviour (perhaps, again, in the public spectacle of a March).

The conflict between LGBT Pride (and Dignity) and Hetero Pride (and dignity) also illuminates the fact that LGBT people and nationalists, despite their differences, negotiate strikingly similar tensions of being and doing. Identical ambiguities underpin the homophobic nationalism opposing both LGBT Pride and Dignity: despite claims that Hungarian pride is about ‘something you do’, heteronational identity depends fundamentally on essentialised ‘being’. To achieve social and political authenticity, however, it too must be actively demonstrated, whether through everyday heteronormative masculinity and femininity, participation in Hetero Pride, or homophobic violence. Yet the implications of such hybridity for these groups’ legitimacies differ dramatically. While both LGBT Pride and Dignity, as hybrids of being and doing, may ground credible claims to belonging, the very hybridity which allows them to do so at the same time renders their claims potentially ambiguous and unstable, and thus vulnerable to challenge by those who, despite also being hybrids of being and doing, can mobilise more hegemonic claims to authentic, stable ‘being’: the claims of heteronationalism.

These contests over ‘pride’ and ‘dignity’ in Hungary show how particular layerings of the politics of being and doing are deployed and reacted to on both sides, in the context of intersecting discourses of local and global identity, community, and politics, and how, in fact, new, hybrid forms of both resistance and accommodation emerge from these intersections: in the name of heteronationalism’s resistance to LGBT pride and dignity, and in the name of LGBT pride and dignity’s resistance or accommodation to heteronationalism. They therefore push us to question tendencies to privilege an idealised politics of doing, revealing that neither being nor doing are ‘true’ solutions to hetero- and homonormativities, but rather critically intertwined elements of both their production and resistance, produced in the contingent crucible of national-transnational frictions.

**Conclusion: Perilous Potentials**

into the narrow space of *Alkotmány* Street. Through the police barricade at street’s end, we can just see the Parliament. Clustering together, listening to optimistic speeches, the irony of our almost-inclusion is amplified by masses of chanting skinheads on the fence’s other side – in *Kossuth tér*, in front of Parliament. It is too much for a group of radical Hungarian and foreign activists, who move toward the fence, shouting antifa slogans. Immediately, the March’s escort of riot police form a line, blocking them. Shouting, then shoving, they demand the activists move back, away from barrier and nationalists. Quickly, Balázs, one of the March organisers, jumps into the melee, pleading with the radicals to obey the police, keep their dignity, and not confront the skinheads. After a long, tense moment, the activists retreat, furious with the organisers for silencing their outrage. Bitterly, one cries to Balázs, ‘What kind of a Pride March is this, anyway? You’re making us do exactly what the nationalists want us to do: shut up and go home!’

The move from ‘Pride’ to ‘Dignity’ has had powerful consequences for sexual politics in Hungary, consequences raising critical questions about LGBT people’s abilities to successfully negotiate post-socialism’s global and local tensions. Indeed, the story of the changing names of Budapest’s March discloses the fundamental dilemma in which Hungary’s LGBT movement and people find themselves, as hybrids poised between multiple discourses and practices of belonging and politics – being and doing, national and transnational. This is a precarious position, both productive and reflective of what Tsing (2005) calls the ‘friction’, and Appadurai (1991: 198) ‘the grinding of gears’, that inevitably accompanies the intersections of global and local meanings, and through which they reshape one another, and people’s lives. Tsing and Appadurai see such frictions to produce blurrings and hybrids of identity and social relations, with new pressures and inequalities, but also new potentials for resistance and transformation. As we have seen, however, Hungarian activists’ efforts to negotiate these shifting tensions to take advantage of new possibilities have in fact, far from resolving previous frictions, produced newly contentious configurations of LGBT identity and community. In particular, they have resulted in a more visibly bounded, normative March, one apparently less about alternatives to either hetero- or homo-normativities and nationalisms.

The concrete consequences of this for Hungarian LGBT people have been profound. The intensified policing of acceptable expression in the March, and the narrowing boundaries of LGBT community, have been most visible in
the erasure of certain people – drag queens, erotic dancers, people like Zsófi – from the March, and from the public practices which previously confirmed their belonging in LGBT community and politics. These are the most obvious victims of friction, the people most visibly ground in the gears of intersecting sexual political meanings. Yet they are far from the only ones. Ironically, these changes have made the March no more stable in relation to the expectations of distinctness which continue to ground both national and transnational discourses of belonging – and thus no more able to make intelligible claims to either; to be more acceptable to either its enemies, or its friends. Tellingly, in the years of the ‘Dignity March’ it has been the most hybrid performances, those mingling symbols of national respectability with those of global gayness, that have occasioned the greatest fury and suspicion, on both sides: the two ‘married’ same-sex couples, proud smiles frozen as they stand covered in shattered eggs in 2008; marchers holding Hungarian flags high, spat at by skinheads while drawing dubious glances from marchers bearing rainbow flags, in 2009; Balázs pleading with both police and outraged gay activists in 2011.

It is these double-edged exclusions which most clearly reveal the persistently perilous ambiguity of efforts to negotiate multiple belongings. For they, along with the continued threat of homophobic violence, dwindling LGBT participation in the March, and the March’s shrinking physical and symbolic space, suggest that Hungary’s activist movement, and indeed all LGBT people are, in the end, not freed by, but caught suspended in these gears: in the tensions between the old limits of the politics of difference, and the new limits of the politics of respectability; in the no-man’s land between national and transnational belonging; in the perverse frictions between Pride and Dignity.

Epilogue: in the summer of 2012, the name of the March was changed to the Budapest Pride March.

Acknowledgements
I thank Guntra Aistara, Eszter Timár, and two anonymous reviewers for comments and suggestions which greatly improved this paper. Previous versions of the article were presented at the COST/EastBordNet Workshop (WS3) on Gender and Sexuality in Budapest, Hungary and the American Anthropological Association Meetings in New Orleans, LA, November 2010, and at the 2nd EastBordNet Conference in Berlin, Germany, January 2013.
Notes
1. The word *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’.
2. I employ the term ‘LGBT’ throughout this paper because this was the primary political term associated with the March and Festival from 2005 to 2011 (before that the terms ‘Gay and Lesbian’ were used. Unlike some other postsocialist countries, in Hungary ‘queer’ remained a marginal sexual-political term until very recently (since 2012, the March/Festival has officially used the term LGBTQ).
3. The Hungarian word that most closely corresponds to the English ‘gay’ is *meleg* (lit. ‘warm’).
4. Attempts to increase the size and visibility of the Pride March have faced significant resistance from many LGBT people, with the result that from the late 1990s until 2012 the March never grew beyond about 2000 people.
5. In making this argument, I am not claiming that either LGBT Marches (whether framed in terms of Pride or Dignity, or both), as ‘global’ models of sexual politics, or ‘local’, Eastern European (or other) resistances to them, are good or bad, correct or incorrect, forms of politics. Indeed, it is precisely these kinds of evaluations I strive to trouble here, by situating the adaptation of and resistance to both these models within the complexly local and global meanings and pressures that surround and shape them, and thus exposing the frictions both pose for Hungarian LGBT people.
6. While the March had seen opposition since its beginning, previously this had been both small in scale and non-violent.
7. *Méltoság*, of course, had previously appeared in Hungarian LGBT discourse. Indeed, one of the placards at the first Pride March in 1997 bore the word. As merely one element within an overarching discourse of the politics of ‘pride’, however, this presence had very different impact than méltoság’s official deployment as the March’s publicly framing concept.
9. Even in 2013, when for the first time ever the March according to some estimates reached an astonishing 8000 people, some attendees noted that the increase in numbers seemed due to a massive influx of largely straight members of Budapest’s alternative youth culture. And while this shift in support is certainly important, it may also reveal that a larger March is not necessarily indicative of LGBT people’s greater willingness to publicly assert either pride or dignity.
10. ‘Zsőfi’ is short for the Hungarian woman’s name Zsófia. Otherwise apparently male-bodied, in using this name, and in other aspects of self-presentation, ‘Zsőfi’ invokes a transgressively ambiguous gender performance with long associations in both local and global gay cultures. I use masculine pronouns here intentionally to highlight this ambiguity.

References

ETHNOS, 2014 (PP. 1–24)


