A Tale of Two Ideologies

A Political Discourse Analysis of How LGBTI Rights are Used to Shape the Identity of the EU in Relation to Sexual Others in the Ninth European Parliament

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Abstract

The European Union and in particular the European Parliament present themselves as defenders of human rights, including LGBTI rights (Gfeller, 2014). However, the European Parliament is not a homogenous actor, in fact, research has been few and far between and provides conflicting accounts of how LGBTI rights are presented, used, defended, and attacked in the European Parliament. In the past, concepts such as homonationalism and leveraged pedagogy have been used to describe the EU's relationships to LGBTI rights, but more research indicated a shift towards a left-right divide. This thesis aims to research how the current (Ninth) European Parliament constructs the identity of the EU in the context of debates regarding LGBTI rights and it aims to uncover how the political groups in the European Parliament currently use this to create sexual Others. By conducting a Political Discourse Analysis inspired by van Dijk (1997), this thesis analyses twelve plenary debates regarding LGBTI rights in the ninth legislative period (up until May 2023) of the European Parliament. The findings of this research show that the majority of Members of the current Ninth European Parliament frame the EU as a liberal protector of Human Rights, threatened by right-wing populists that are framed as an omnipresent, internal sexual Others. Debates about LGBTI rights in the Ninth European Parliament are characterized by an internal conflict between 'the left' and 'the right', which has caused the concepts of homonationalism and leveraged pedagogy to lose most of their explanatory value.

Keywords: European Parliament, European Union, Homonationalism, Identity, Leveraged Pedagogy, LGBTI, Polarization, Political Discourse Analysis, Polarization

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Problem Setting

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the European Union (EU) has developed as a union that not only aims to foster economic integration but also social inclusion. The EU has acquired a deep connection to human rights (Swiebel, 2009, p. 29), part of which relates to the protection of LGBTI[1] rights. In fact, this protection has become an integral part of the EU's identity. This identity as a defender of human rights, in particular LGBTI rights, has also led the EU to position itself against Other actors that are not 'as progressive' (Kulpa, 2013; Colpani & Habed, 2014). The institution that has been argued to position itself by using human rights is the European Parliament (EP) (Gfeller, 2014). Some manifestations of this positioning have been labelled homonationalist (Colpani & Habed, 2014; Ammaturo, 2015; Eigenmann, 2022), to show how LGBTI inclusion is used to marginalize, often racialized, Others (Puar, 2007), and leveraged pedagogy (Kulpa, 2013) to show how LGBTI inclusion is used to create a juxtaposition between Western and Eastern Europe. However, in recent years there seems to be a more pronounced focus on the left versus right schism. Nevertheless, the research does not extend beyond 2019, meaning that the most recent developments are not known. This thesis, therefore, aims to shed light on how the current (Ninth) European Parliament the protection of LGBTI rights to shape the identity of the EU in relation to its sexual Others.

1.2. Research Questions

The research question and sub-questions that will be answered in this thesis are:

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[1] Throughout this thesis, the acronym 'LGBTI' will be used to refer to the community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, and overall queer individuals. The choice for 'LGBTI' over other acronyms, such as 'LGBT', 'LGBTQIA' or 'LGBT+' is due to personal preference. It does not carry further meaning and may also be read as LGBT(QIA+).

Research Question: "How do political groups in the Ninth European Parliament use the

protection of LGBTI rights to shape the identity of the EU in relation to

sexual Others, as of May 2023?"

Sub-Question 1: "How are LGBTI rights connected to the EU in the selected European

Parliamentary debates that took place between 2019 and 2023?"

Sub-Question 2: "Which sexual Othering processes can be identified in the selected European

Parliamentary debates that took place between 2019 and 2023?"

Sub-Question 3: "Which differences are present within and between the political groups?"

      Chapter 2 (Theoretical Framework) and Chapter 3 (Methodology) will provide more context to these questions, but to shortly elaborate upon them; The first sub-question serves to provide some context on how LGBTI rights are regarded and how they are linked to the fundamental values of the EU. When it comes to the influence of LGBTI rights on the identity of the EU and its subsequent Othering processes, having more insights into how these rights are connected to the EU is the first fundamental part of this research. The answer to this question will show how the idea of a sexually exceptional 'Rainbow Europe' is created by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), in addition, it will show which values are deemed 'fundamental' to the EU, and which are not. Knowing how, and even if, LGBTI rights are connected to the EU's identity by MEPs is fundamental for researching the subsequent Othering processes based on this identity.

      Subsequently, the second sub-question will look into which Othering processes can be identified in this context. Based on an analysis of who is regarded as the 'Self' and who is regarded as the 'Other', this second sub-question serves the purpose of revealing which groups are Othered in the European Parliament. The processes of Othering will be discussed in Chapter 2, which includes a discussion on homonationalism, leveraged pedagogy, and Polarization.

Accordingly, the answer to this question will most likely draw on these processes. These processes of Othering are important to see who is Othered and which rhetoric is used to do so.

The third sub-question proposed here serves the purpose of providing the nuance that is required to answer the research question in more detail. Considering the fact that neither the European Parliament, nor the political groups within it, are homogenous actors, the answers given to the first two sub-questions will not cover deviating opinions. To then give a more encompassing answer to the guiding Research Question, this sub-question is essential. By asking and answering this sub-question, the internal tensions will have a place to be discussed, so they will not be ignored.

1.3. Theoretical and Practical Relevance

There have been several scholars who have analysed the identity of the European Union with regard to LGBTI rights (consider: Eigenmann, 2022; Kulpa, 2013, Colpani & Habed, 2014; Ammaturo, 2015), however, they have all focused on different periods or contexts. While this body of work generates a valuable understanding of some of the underlying processes of EU-identity making and Othering, to the best of my knowledge, there is no study that combines these different processes and focuses on their current developments in the European Parliament.

Societally, this thesis is important because the European Parliament, its narratives and its resolutions influence the lives of people both within and outside the European Union. It is the only EU institution that is directly elected by the EU citizens to represent their interests. In addition, the EP claims to fight for human rights (European Parliament, 2023a). Researching LGBTI rights, EU identity making and Othering in the EP sheds light on the co-optation of LGBTI individuals into political agendas. Having more insights into these processes is overall beneficial, as it often feeds into the oppression of already marginalized communities. In addition, the process of Othering affects policy-making and "affects our evaluation of public

policy issues (as cited in Walton & Lazzaro-Salazar, 2016, p. 462). It affects what is recognized or emphasized as a public problem and is subsequently put on the agenda. Lastly, knowing how the EU is framed by different actors is useful as it influences the attitudes that member states, citizens, politicians, policy-makers and policy advisors have towards the European Union.

Scientifically, this work adds to different fields of academia. In particular, researching identity and Othering adds to the work of many International Relations, Political Science, and Gender Studies scholars, but it is important for Public Administration scholars as well. While the EU "has no specific competences in the administrative sphere", they still have "a strong indirect impact on the administrative practice in Member States through the administrative standards set in the acquis, the transfer of best practices with EU financial instruments, the promotion of management practices of its own institutions, etc" (European Commission, 2017, p. 3). When it comes to LGBTI rights and Othering, there are many narratives that "seek to undermine the rights of individuals […] or the rights of minority groups" that the EP seeks to counter (European Union, 2023, p. 26). Researching this under-researched topic, therefore, is relevant for being able to counter these narratives. Considering the fact that these narratives and practices have a real influence on the lives of groups such as the LGBTI community, knowing more about them is crucial for research on the safety and security of these groups, which ultimately ties in well with my profile within my Master's in Public Administration, which is safety and security. In addition, this research will analyse how Members of the European Parliament actively represent EU citizens by looking at whether they advocate for or against certain marginalized groups. This is important since inequities within the public sector continue to persist. For example, in education, health, housing, and police-initiated activities there are many "disparities in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and gender identity […] that result in detrimental harms for subjugated and marginalized communities (Blesset et al, 2019, p. 284).

The reason that the European Parliament, and specifically its MEPs are important for Public Administration is because it influences all levels of public administration. According to Roberts (2019), macro-level strategies of governance, i.e., those by national leaders that "influence the overall architecture of the state" (p. 634), are influenced by different factors, including international politics. International politics, and therefore the EU and the EP carry importance for public administration on all levels. The macro, but also the meso- and micro-level, which are the institutions that "must be built, renovated, or managed to give effect to [macro-level] strategies (p. 631) and the "relationship between people who rule and people who are ruled" (idem) respectively, cannot be understood and explained without research into the international sphere.

This thesis will have the following structure. To start, the Theoretical Framework (Chapter 2) will introduce the important concepts that this thesis is built upon, including a discussion on EU identity, LGBTI rights in the EU, Othering, homonationalism, leveraged pedagogy and the increasing polarization. Second, the methodology of my research will be discussed (Chapter 3). Here the research design, case selection, data selection and data analysis will be discussed. After the methodology, the results of the analysis (Chapter 4) will be introduced. The structure of the analysis is based on the sub-questions proposed in section 1.2. This thesis will end with a concluding chapter (Chapter 5) in which the results of the analysis will be combined to answer the research question that guides this thesis. In addition, this last chapter will contain a discussion on the limitations of the research as well as suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will situate this thesis into the broader academic context by discussing the relevant theoretical concepts that guide this research. By doing so, it aims to explain further the existing knowledge and the gaps within this field of study. Since this thesis deals with the identity of the European Union, this chapter will start with a discussion on identity formation (2.1.). This will be done following a constructivist perspective. Section 2.2. will go deeper into the identity formation of the EU, in particular its emphasized sexual exceptionalism with regard to LGBTI rights. A fundamental aspect of identity is the process of Othering, which will be discussed in section 2.3. Within this section, three different manifestations of Othering with regard to LGBTI rights in the EU will be discussed, namely homonationalism, leveraged pedagogy and Polarization, which will be discussed in 2.3.1. 2.3.2. and 2.3.3. respectively. Lastly, these three forms of sexual Othering in the EU will be combined in a theoretical model that will be presented in section 2.4.

2.1. A Constructivist Perspective on Identity Formation

This thesis adheres to the social constructivist approach to identity. This approach contends that identities are things that do not exist on their own but are discursively constructed (Diez, 2004, p. 321). Social constructivism claims that social realities only exist through human agreement (Christiansen et al, 1999, p. 530), making them "'fragile', 'changeable' and 'contestable'" (idem). Concerning identities, social constructivism argues that they are continuously shaped and redefined. They also cannot "be completely divorced from objectified traits, such as race, ethnicity, religion, history, culture, or political system" nor can they be "changed, re-imagined, and re-constructed overnight" (Rumelili, 2008, p. 99).

In addition, identities involve a relationship between an in-group, i.e., the 'Self', and an out-group, i.e., the 'Other', (Lister, 2004, p. 101; Neumann, 1999) in a process referred to as

'Othering'. The Self, i.e., 'us', and the Other, i.e., 'them', are placed in juxtaposition to each other (Jensen, 2011, p. 64), creating and maintaining a social distance between the two (Lister, 2004, p. 101). The concept of the Self is always contextual and relational, meaning that different identities will emerge "depending on which aspects of the Self/Other relationship are foregrounded in the Othering processes" (Slootmaeckers, 2019a, p. 357). The identity of the Self should therefore be considered as fluid and constantly (re-)constructed based on different Others (Rumelili, 2004).

2.2. The Development of an LGBTI Dimension within the European Identity

When it comes to the formation of a European Union Identity, this construction too depends on the simultaneous construction of 'others', which has led to many different national temporal discussions on what 'Europe' actually constitutes (Christiansen et al, 1999, p. 540). These discussions have been heavily influenced by the competencies of the EU. Consider the fact that when the predecessor of the EU, the European Economic Community (EEC), was created, this was done with the primary goal of fostering economic integration, which is not the case anymore. Over time, the EEC has slowly transitioned into the EU that is known today: a union that is not solely about economic integration, but also about social inclusion, with a deep connection to human rights. These alterations have also changed its relation to other actors, and subsequently influenced its identity.

One defining moment in this transition is the end of the Cold War, when the EU was faced with the prospect of a substantial enlargement to former Communist countries. This potential enlargement caused new discussions regarding human rights and social policy (Swiebel 2009, p. 29), partly because EU actors believed these new members needed to be 'socialized' into the EU (Van der Vleuten, 2014, p. 131), and partly because they wanted to discover new ways of strengthening the EU's legitimacy (Smismans, 2010, p. 54). With the

Maastricht Treaty in 1992, "liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law" became foundational principles of the EU, and the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 officially declared them as a condition for EU membership (Smismans, 2010, pp. 49-50). In addition, human rights in the EU are institutionalized in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR) as well as supranational jurisprudence (Schimmelfennig, 2006). Part of these human rights are LGBTI rights, which have come to carry a lot of symbolism in EU politics (Slootmaeckers et al, 2016, p. 22) as the EU presents itself as a stronghold of LGBTI rights (Slootmaeckers, 2019).

In fact, over the past decades, the protection of LGBTI rights has become one of the key indicators of an "allegedly uniquely European qualit[y]" (Szulc, 2021, p. 388). As a result, Ayoub and Paternotte (2014) have named this the idea of 'Rainbow Europe'. This idea of Rainbow Europe, praised for its uniquely tolerant stance regarding LGBTI rights, however, does not solely create a 'European Self', but serves as a function to also create multiple sexual Others (Szulc, 2021, p. 388).

2.3. LGBTI Rights as a Basis for Othering in the European Union

As stated, the idea of Rainbow Europe, which frames the EU as uniquely and inherently LGBTI-tolerant, serves to create multiple sexual Others (Szulc, 2021, p. 388). The framing of LGBTI rights as 'foundational principles', and the integration of LGBTI rights into its accession policies has led to the Europeanization of LGBTI rights politics (Kahlina, 2015) and has influenced the relationship of the EU with actors both within and outside the EU (Kulpa, 2013; Colpani & Habed, 2014). Being a 'modern European' has become inherently linked to the protection and promotion of LGBTI rights (Slootmaeckers, 2019a; Ayoub & Paternotte, 2019). Identity plays a major role in this respect. It defines the values of the EU, and with it also those of others to whom the EU compares itself (rise, 2004, p. 257). In this scenario, the EU frames

itself explicitly and implicitly as 'tolerant', 'modern' and 'progressive', and Others as 'intolerant' and 'backwards' (Slootmaeckers et al, 2016, p. 20), creating a dichotomy between the European 'Self' and 'Others'. The EU emphasizes its sexual exceptionalism and level of modernity by emphasizing its tolerance of homosexuality (Slootmaeckers et al, 2016, p. 20; Slootmaeckers, 2019a; 2019b). This European feeling of sexual exceptionalism generates a feeling of superiority (Ammaturo, 2015, p. 1162) that serves both to affirm the European Self, as well as to create Europe's external and internal Others (Szulc, 2021, p. 388). Important Othering processes that have been researched in the context of the EU are homonationalism (Puar 2007; 2013a; 2013b), leveraged pedagogy (Kulpa, 2013), and the more recent research on left versus right-wing politics (Eigenmann, 2022), which will be discussed in more detail in 2.3.1, 2.3.2. and 2.3.3. respectively.

2.3.1. Homonationalism

The first type of sexual Othering in the EU to be discussed is homonationalism, which creates a dichotomy between the EU and its external sexual Others, in particular Muslims and immigrants. Homonationalism (Puar, 2007; 2013a; 2013b), which is combined of the terms homonormativity and nationalism, is a term to describe how LGBTI rights have become a sign of the modernity of Western countries, which is placed in direct juxtaposition to the homophobia that is framed to be intrinsic to Islam (Akachar, 2015, p. 176). Homonationalism creates and reproduces a narrative of inherent incompatibility between the 'West' and Islam (Késić & Duyvendak, 2019, p. 447), which serves as a base to legitimize violence against the latter (Schotten, 2016, p. 354). LGBTI rights in this context "have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated." They have become a test to select and integrate immigrants (Fassin, 2007). The concept has been introduced by Puar (2007), with a focus on the United States, however, it has been widely applied to West European

countries as well (Puar & Mikdashi, 2012; El-Tayeb, 2012, Ritchie, 2015; Freude & Bosch, 2019).

Where it concerns Europe's external Others, Colpani and Habed (2014) and Ammaturo (2015) build on Puar's notion of homonationalism (2007; 2013) to put forward a European homonationalism in which the rhetoric of the EU's "self-reinvention as essentially and historically LGBTQ-friendly" is used "to cast racialised Others (especially Muslims, migrants and refugees) as inherently LGBTQ-unfriendly" (Szulc, 2021, p. 388). In this narrative, the EU is presented as a "sexual fortress under siege" (Colpani & Habed, 2014, p. 74) that needs to protect itself from "allegedly sexist and homophobic, as well as sexually predatory, external Others (Szulc, 2021, p. 388). Szulc (idem) refers to this view of the EU as 'Fortress Europe'.

The reason why homonationalism can, arguably, be applied to the European Union as a whole, even though certain Member States cannot be considered homonormative, is that 'European' values continue to be defined by Western European states (Szulc, 2021, p. 388). Meaning, that as an institution, the EU strives for a homonormative Europe in which LGBTI rights are guaranteed. So, even though 'the EU' is not sovereign over its territory when it comes to sexual politics, it does have normative power (Colpani & Habed, 2014, p. 78). Disregarding this normative power of the EU as an institution would mean that the EU "is never thematized as a material problematic and as an agent in itself, but randomly registered as a rhetorical device at work in national narratives" (Colpani & Habed, 2014, p. 76).

In an analysis of European Parliamentary resolutions and their preceding debates between 2000 and 2010, Eigenmann shows that "LGBTI rights are often discussed in a way that portrays the EU as modern and progressive" (2022, p. 100). This is in contrast to the "backwards, non-European" (external) Others that in her analysis are Namibia and Egypt. Here homophobia is presented as an endemic phenomenon to their "violent […] and lawless societies" (idem, p. 100). During these debates about Namibia and Egypt, not a single Member

of Parliament (MEP) makes the comparison to homophobia in the European Union. What they did do, however, was compare it to the promotion of LGBTI rights in the Netherlands (Eigenmann, 2022). Szulc has argued that in this process, external Others are racialized and positioned outside Europe. They are considered as "not European at all" (2021, p. 389). Besides framing entire populations as 'backwards', they subsequently also cast Muslims, migrants and refugees in the European Union as inherently 'backwards' (Szulc, 2021, p. 388) because they are often associated with these countries.

Any instance of homophobic behaviour in a 'gay-friendly' state is "reduced to an individualised problem – non-symptomatic for the wider characteristic of the nation" whereas homophobic behaviour of external Others "is essentialised as an inherent cultural characteristic of the nation" (Slootmaeckers, 2019b, p. 257). As a result, alleged 'modern' and 'gay-friendly' states create a spatial and temporal boundary between homophobic Others (Kahlina, 2015, p. 74) and the EU itself, which is framed as a fortress under siege that needs to be protected (Szulc, 2021, p. 388).

2.3.2. Leveraged Pedagogy

The second method of sexual Othering in the EU is leveraged pedagogy, which creates a dichotomy between the EU and some of its internal sexual Others, in particular Eastern and, to a lesser extent, Southern European states. This second form of sexual Othering follows from the fact that the framing of the EU being 'modern', 'tolerant' and 'pro-LGBTI' is rather ambiguous, complex, and fragile (Eigenmann, 2022, pp. 105-107). The reason for is this that LGBTI rights differ drastically between Member States, with more recent members having a generally more conservative stance than older members (Freude & Bosch, 2019). Especially after the 2004 expansion of the EU, employing the idea of a 'tolerant' and 'inherently pro-LGBTI' Europe created an identity crisis (Slootmaeckers, 2019a, p. 351), since many Central,

Eastern and Southern European countries construct their national identities based on the exclusion of LGBTI individuals, rather than their inclusion (Colpani & Habed, 2014). To solve this, Western and Northern European states, who according to Szulc (2021, p. 388) continue to define what are to be considered 'European values', created besides external Others also internal Others via a process named leveraged pedagogy (Kulpa, 2013).

The idea of leveraged pedagogy is based on the argument that the relationship between West European states and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) differs from that of West Europe and Islam. As opposed to homonationalism, where Islam is framed as inherently different from Europeans, leveraged pedagogy frames CEE as "permanently 'post-communist', 'in transition', […] and […] 'homophobic'" (Kulpa, 2013, p. 432). Instead of functioning solely as a whip, as is the case with homonationalism, leveraged pedagogy also entails "a promise of redemption" (idem), even though this redemption often is "strongly conditioned, and an undisputable process that has little respect or interest in the local circumstances of why 'the issue' has arisen in the first place" (idem, p. 440). The West "is rendered as more knowledgeable, consummate, older, [and] wiser", while CEE "is rendered as naïve, younger, and inexperienced" (idem, p. 441).

Why CEE is not framed as an 'absolute Other', as opposed to Islam, is because of their "geographical, religious, and cultural proximity" to the West (Kulpa, 2013, p. 441). Following the 2004 EU expansion, what Western Europe saw as 'external Others' now became 'internal Others' (Slootmaeckers, 2019a, p. 356). This has led CEE to become a more fluid and ambiguous Other than the ultimate Other that is Islam. Whereas homophobia within Islam is framed as an inherent part of its identity that is threatening European values, homophobia in CEE is more regarded as "a curable malady" that is slowing down the self-proclaimed European Modernity (Kulpa, 2013, p. 440). CEE is seen as not yet Western enough to be considered as part of the First World, but they are European enough to be taken care of (idem). The narrative is that as time passes, the 'younger' CEE will mature and be where the West is already. Based

on the fact that CEE, and to a certain extent Southern Europe is framed as 'lagging behind', Szulc refers to this idea as 'Freezer Europe'. In this idea of freezer Europe, CEE and Southern European are put in a state of "perpetual belatedness and continuous transition" (Szulc, 2021, p. 389).

It should be mentioned that this narrative of a Freezer Europe in which CEE is seen as 'not European yet' creates unrealistic expectations for CEE, which is framed as one of Europe's internal sexual Others. The first reason for this is that the West has taken roughly two centuries for what it expects CEE to do in twenty years (Kulpa, 2013, p. 441), and the second reason is that nobody knows 'where' the West will be once CEE 'has matured', meaning that it becomes a rhetorical question whether CEE will ever have a chance to catch up to Western ideals (Kulpa, 2013, p. 442).

2.3.3. Polarization

Throughout the last two decades, the idea of 'Rainbow Europe' that is being used to create a 'Fortress Europe' and a 'Freezer Europe' to create external and internal sexual Others, via the processes of homonationalism and leveraged pedagogy respectively, has been able to explain many developments and used rhetoric with regard to using LGBTI rights to sexually Other certain groups or countries. However, a more recent study has found that the process of sexual Othering has started to change, at least partially. Whereas homophobia in Europe was presented as something to blame on CEE, some MEPs now link homophobia in the European Union to nationalists, conservatives, and right-wing populists, located all over Europe (Eigenmann, 2022, p. 109). Homophobia in the EU is no longer framed as an issue of intolerant CEE, "but increasingly as an omnipresent problem of the presence and possibly the future" (Eigenmann, 2022, p. 109). Even though proponents of LGBTI rights still regard homophobia

as a "backwards" attitude, "they no longer see it as a remnant of the past that will eventually dissipate (Eigenmann, 2022, p. 109).

These radical right populists frame LGBTI rights as an elitist and dangerous 'gender ideology' that challenges traditional family values (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Garbagnoli, 2016). Combined with its often nationalistic rhetoric, which can include explicit racism and antisemitism, they promote 'family values', which often refer to the term "gender ideology" and follow in the footsteps of a "decades-long right-wing resistance to gender egalitarianism as promoted by the United Nations and later the European Union" (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, pp. 798-799). In addition, they tend to bend debates about LGBTI rights to debates about subsidiarity and migration, as well as depoliticize gender by referring to biology, and self-victimizing (Kantola and Lombardo, 2020). Slootmaeckers (2019a, p. 357) argues that as these "anti-gender politics are gaining traction across the EU, one can expect that normative Othering processes which position homophobia outside the EU become untenable" as "the very aim of these anti-gender movements is to redefine the EU's Self into one that is based on so-called traditional values."

As a result of this shift, actors within the EU have started to create a third sexual Other, namely 'the right'. In this case, by emphasizing the unique protection of LGBTI rights in the EU, i.e., Rainbow Europe, these actors aim for a self-affirmation that introspectively continues this view of sexual exceptionalism. Values such as tolerance and non-discrimination are brought up as founding principles of the EU (Eigenmann, 2022, p. 110), while right-wing nationalists and Eurosceptics are constructed as Others within Europe. In this narrative, "the EU is portrayed as saviour and guardian of human rights" that will have to "defeat" its internal Others. This more recent development is speculated to be "a side effect of the current crisis of and the polarization within the EU" (idem, p. 111).

2.4. Theoretical Model

To illustrate the different processes of sexual Othering that have been identified in the literature, a theoretical model has been created (Figure 1). This conceptual model is based on the model provided by Szulc (2021, p. 389), which contains the idea of Rainbow Europe, Fortress Europe and Freezer Europe. However, this model is expanded by including Eigenmann's (2022, pp. 109-111) more recent findings. Since Eigenmann does not give the recent process a name, this thesis will simply refer to the third process of Othering as 'Polarization', which creates the idea of a 'Fragile Europe'. The name has been chosen, because Europe is presented as being in a fight against internal Others that are located throughout the entire EU. It represents a situation in which the core values of the EU are under threat by an omnipresent force that will need to be defeated.

When considering this model of sexual Othering within the EU, as well as the underlying research that has been discussed this chapter, there is one important thing to mention. Namely, the fact that there is a research gap with regard to research on sexual Othering in the EU. The research on homonationalism in the EU is all conducted within the context and
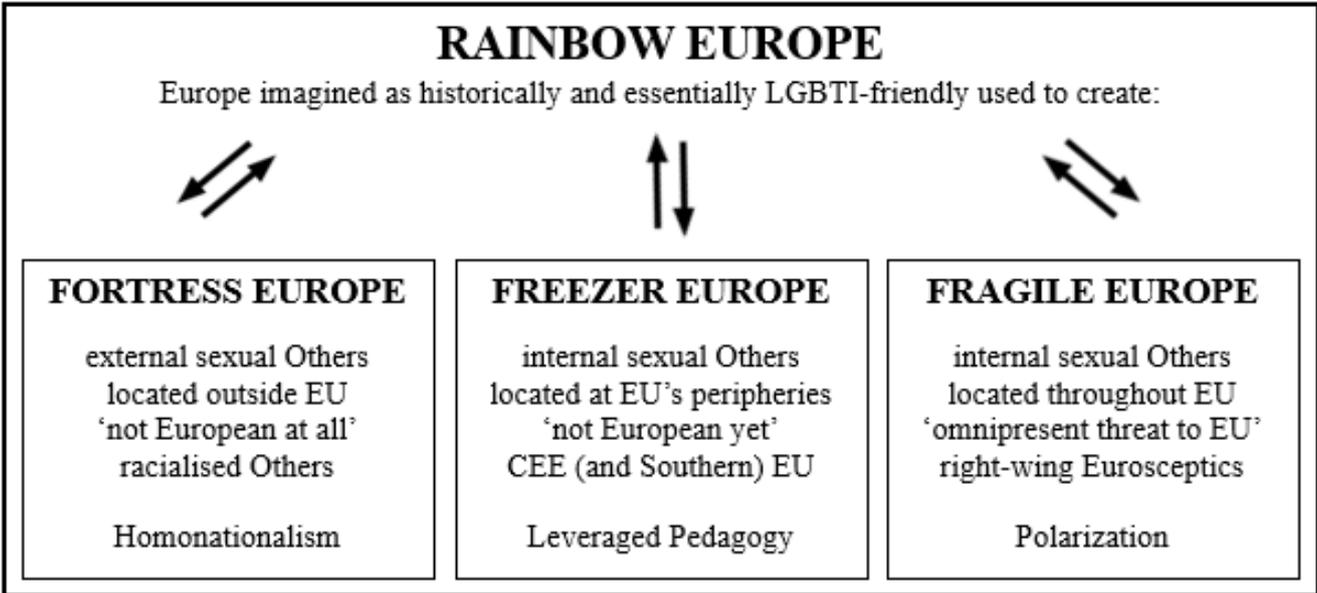

Figure 1: Processes of Sexual Othering in the EU

developments of the first decade of the 21st century (Colpani & Habed, 2014; Ammaturo, 2015; Eigenmann, 2022) and are based on these studies (Szulc, 2021). A similar trend can be established for research on leveraged pedagogy, which is predominantly done by Kulpa (2013), and studies based on Kulpa's findings (Szulc, 2021; Eigenmann, 2022). Eigenmann, however, researches the more recent left-right divide in debates from 2016 and 2019, which is a large jump from the 2000s and does not discuss if and how the other processes of sexual Othering are still present.

One of the questions that thus remains is how the EU creates sexual Others. Are homonationalism and leveraged pedagogy still the main processes of sexual Othering, or has the ideological divide between 'the right' and 'the left' taken over these two processes? Based on this gap, this thesis will answer the research question: "How do political groups in the Ninth European Parliament use the protection of LGBTI rights to shape the identity of the EU in relation to sexual Others, as of May 2023?" The following chapter will discuss the methodology of this thesis in order to answer this question.

3. Methodology

Following Chapter 2, which has established a theoretical framework for this thesis, Chapter 3 will discuss how the research will be carried out. This chapter aims to provide a step-by-step description of how the cases have been selected, how the corresponding data has been collected and how it has been used in the analysis of this thesis. This chapter will start with a discussion on Public Discourse Analysis (3.1.), followed by a discussion on the selected case (3.2.) and subsequently collected data (3.3.). After having discussed this, this chapter turns to the method of analysis, in which a coding scheme that guides this research will be provided (3.4.). Finally, the validity and reliability of this methodology will be discussed.

3.1. Research Design

To answer the in section 1.2. proposed research question, this thesis will, similar to many other scholars researching topics regarding identity and Othering conduct a discourse analysis. Discourse analysis particularly suits this thesis, since it deals with the social construction of the EU's identity and processes of Othering. However, discourse analysis refers to a myriad of techniques to analyse discourse, so to be more specific, this thesis will conduct a political discourse analysis (PDA) inspired by van Dijk (1997). PDA is in a lot of ways similar to other types of discourse analysis (idem, p. 24), including critical discourse analysis (Dunmire, 2012, p. 738), but concerns itself specifically with political discourse such as parliamentary debates and speeches (van Dijk, 1997, p. 24; Kampf, 2015, p. 13). As opposed to other types of discourse analysis, it accounts for the official and relatively formal language often found in political discourse (van Dijk, 1997, p. 24). This allows for "reliable inferences about political context features" that might be overlooked, concealed, or not explicitly stated (idem, p. 41). According to van Dijk, PDA should answer "genuine and relevant political questions" and

should improve our understanding of complex discursive practices and their relation to their political context (idem, pp. 11-12).

Similar to critical discourse analysis, PDA attempts to uncover implicit motivations and sentiments that cannot be discovered by performing a quick scan (Unvar & Rahimi, 2013, p. 13). It does not investigate "a linguistic unit per se", but rather studies "social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach" (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 2). Because discourse is regarded as a form of social practice, a dialectical relationship is implied between the discourse itself and the "situation[s], institution[s] and social structure[s] which frame it" (idem). In addition, van Dijk (1995, p. 7) argues that ideologies are expressed and reproduced in discourse. For uncovering these ideological propositions, PDA is useful. Moreover, the concept of Othering is entrenched in discourse as well (Sosoni, 2015, p. 273). In fact, "there is no creation of language in the discourse that is not influenced by certain social groups, classes, discourses, conditions or relationships" (as cited in Sosoni, 2015, 272). It is therefore useful to explain how identities are (re)shaped, including processes of Othering.

To be more precise about discourse, in particular political discourse, it will be considered here as "a shared set of capabilities which enable the assemblage of words, phrases and sentences into meaningful texts intelligible to readers or listeners" (Dryzek, 1988, p. 710; based on van Dijk, 1985). It is "a form of social action and interaction" (van Dijk, 1997, p. 20) that both constitutes and is constituted by their situational, institutional, and social contexts (Wodak et al, 2009, p. 8). It is a means for groups to (re)produce and legitimize their views (van Dijk, 2006). Through discourses, situations, social roles, identities, and interpersonal relations between different social groups are constituted (Wodak et al, 2009, p. 8). It serves the purpose of establishing or concealing "relations of power and dominance between interactants, between

social groups and classes, between men and women and between national, ethnic, religious, sexual, political, cultural and subcultural majorities and minorities" (idem).

Discourse analysis, including critical discourse analysis and political discourse analysis, are all focused on unmasking "ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use" (Wodak et al, 2009, p. 8). For a thesis that is focused on the social construction of the EU's identity, including some of its Othering processes, PDA suits this thesis. It allows researchers to examine the language used in political discourse, unveil how ideologies and social structures shape identity, and see how groups are Othered.

PDA is not a method that provides a clear framework for analysing political discourse. Rather, it believes the analysis should be catered to the specific contexts of the research. Nevertheless, van Dijk does identify important features of "political text and talk" that can be used in the analysis of political discourse (1997, pp. 23-27). Important for the analysis of European Parliamentary debates are 1) lexicon, which refers to the meaning of words and their implications, 2) syntax, which refers to underlying meanings in sentence structures, such as the use of pronouns, and 3) rhetoric, which refers to special figures of styles such as metaphors. The coding scheme, based on these features as well as the theoretical model proposed in 2.4, that is used in this research will be provided in section 3.4.

3.2. Case Selection

As can be gathered from the research question, this thesis will analyse plenary debates of the European Parliament. There are multiple reasons that the debates of the European Parliament have been selected. The first reason is that the European Parliament is the only institution of the EU that is directly elected by the citizens of the EU, and thus represents the interests and opinions of a wider variety of citizens than the other institutions do (European

Parliament, 2022a), including radical right populists (Brack, 2018). The EP is not a homogenous actor, but it makes decisions based on consensus, which means that the MEPs have to discuss in the plenary to get to the consensus-made decisions. During these debates, radical right populists are also visible, which is important as they are much less visible in the actual policy-making processes within the EU, "because the plenary offers a platform to express visibly their anti-gender equality and anti-human rights views to their electorates (Ahrens et al, 2022, p. 806). This means that the views present within the EP are to a lesser extent present within the other EU institutions but are more representative of the EU citizens. The second reason is that, even though the EU consists of 27 Member States and multiple institutions, it is the European Parliament in particular that has positioned itself relative to the other EU institutions by using human rights (Gfeller, 2014). It has positioned itself as a defender of fundamental rights, including LGBTI rights, both in- and outside the EU (Feliu & Serra, 2015). The third reason is that the European Parliament has significant power within the EU as the European Commission is accountable to it (Kulpa, 2015), arguably making them a powerful institution when it comes to shaping discourses (Kulpa, 2015).

Considering the fact that the Parliament is the only institution that is democratically elected by all citizens throughout the EU and therefore contains a wide variety of views, including those less visible in decision-making processes, as well as the facts that it has framed itself as a defender of LGBTI rights and has significant power within the EU, the European Parliament is an interesting, important, and relevant case to study.

Important to note here is that the EP's reputation as a defender of fundamental rights is contested and at times contradictory (Ahrens et al, 2022, p. 804). The biggest reason for this is that the EP is not one homogenous institution. It contains 705 MEPs as of 2020, organised in transnational political groups based on their political affiliation. These groups decide on which issues will be discussed during the plenary debates and can make amendments to the committee

reports that are put to the vote, but they cannot force their members to vote in a particular way (European Parliament, 2023b). So, even though the EP regularly adopts a common position towards the Council and the Commission, it is characterized by conflicts between, as well as within its political groups (Brack 2018). Currently, in the 9th legislature (2019-2024), these groups are 1) the European People's Party (EPP), 2) the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), 3) Renew Europe, 4) the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), 5) Identity and Democracy (ID), 6) the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), and 7) the Left (GUE/NGL). In addition, there are members who do not belong to any of these political groups and are therefore known as 'non-attached Members' (European Parliament, 2023c). An overview of their political orientation is provided in Table 1 (European Parliament, 2023d; EPP, 2023; S&D, 2023; Renew, 2023; Greens/EFA, 2017; Euronews, 2019; ECR, 2023; GUE/NGL, 2023; Calossi & Cicchi, 2019). Based on this heterogeneity in the European Parliament, I expect to find similar views based on political affinities, and not parliamentary-wide.

This means that the unit of analysis of this study is the European Parliament as a whole, but the units of observation are actually the MEPs that are present during the parliamentary debates that will be selected in section 3.3.

Political Group	Political Orientation	Seats (out of 705)
EPP	Centre-Right, Christian Democrats	176
S&D	Centre-Left, Socialist Democrats	144
Renew	Centrist, Liberals	102
Greens/EFA	Left to Centre-Left, Greens, Regionalists	71
ECR	Centre-Right to Right, Conservatives	64
ID	Right to Far-Right, Euro-Sceptics	64
GUE/NGL	Left	38
(NI)	Not Applicable	46

Table 1: Political Groups in the European Parliament

3.3. Data Collection

Selecting debates is, however, less straightforward as there are quite a lot of debates that cover LGBTI rights. Analysing all transcripts of these debates would be too time-consuming and go beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, a selection of twelve debates has been made based on two criteria. First of all, as stated, this thesis concerns itself with the current legislature, as this is where the largest research gap is. This means that debates before 2019 are disregarded. Second, only debates directly dealing with the topic of LGBTI rights have been selected. This is due to the scope of this thesis. There are many debates in which the LGBTI community is referenced, for example in debates about discrimination in general, but since the focus of these debates is not solely on LGBTI rights, they are disregarded here. The website of the European Parliament allows its visitors to look for transcripts of debates by searching for the presence of certain words in the text. For the purpose of this thesis, the following terms were used: LGBT, LGBT+ LGBTI, LGBTIQ, gay, homosexuality, rainbow and homophobia, as these are the terms that are most commonly used to refer to the LGBTI community. The terms "LGBT" and "LGBT+" led to 100 results, "LGBTI" 110, LGBTIQ 72, gay 45, homosexuality 16, rainbow 21, and homophobia 14.

After having generated these results, the transcripts of debates about LGBTI rights in particular have been selected. This resulted in thirteen remaining debates, including three continuations. This refers to debates that have been split in two and have exactly the same topic as their namesakes. There are therefore debates on ten different topics, all directly relating to LGBTI rights. Of these thirteen remaining debates, one has been disregarded because it only contained an opening statement of Commissioner Dali and was immediately suspended afterwards. This debate on 'the new LGBTIQ Equality Strategy' has therefore not been included in the selection, however, its continuation is included.

After having selected the twelve debates, all transcripts of these debates were translated using Google Translate, which contains a function to translate entire websites. Subsequently, a screenshot was made of the translated transcripts by using the Go Full Page extension. These screen captures were printed and were subsequently used to conduct the analysis.

All selected debates, including their date, location, duration[2], number of participants[3], and amount of pages[4], can be found in Table 2. There are two debates about an external country (Uganda), two debates about LGBTI rights in the EU as a whole, two debates on LGBTI rights in the EU, but with reference to specific member states (Poland and Slovakia), and three debates on specific member states (Italy, Hungary and Poland).

3.4. Method of Data Analysis

Because this thesis makes use of PDA, which should cater specifically to the purpose of this research, it is necessary to elaborate on the aspects that will be focused upon in this analysis. To conduct a political discourse analysis of the selected EP debates, the in 2.4. proposed theoretical model will have to be operationalized. All views are built on the idea of a sexually exceptional "Rainbow Europe", which will be analysed in sub-question 1. The three Othering processes of homonationalism, leveraged pedagogy, and Polarization, resulting in Fortress Europe, Freezer Europe and Fragile Europe respectively, will be analysed in sub-question 2.

The summary of the concepts and their operationalization can be found in the created coding scheme (Table 3), which will be further elaborated upon in the rest of this section. It should be noted that the list of keywords/phrases provided in Table 3 is by no means exhaustive

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[2] The duration of the debates is provided in the video footage of the debates. A link to this video footage is provided on every transcript.

[3] The number of participants can be obtained by counting the names provided in the summary of the debates. A link to this summary is provided on every transcript.

[4] The transcripts of the debates are not provided in pages, since it is a webpage. The amount of pages refers to how many pages the taken screenshots generated.

Title of Debate	Date and Location	Duration in Minutes	Amount of Pages	Number of Participants
Situation of LGBTI persons in Uganda	24 October 2019 Strasbourg	36	4	18
Public Discrimination and hate speech against LGBTI people, including LGBTI free zones	26 November 2019 Strasbourg	110	10	46
Determination of a clear risk of a serious breach by the Republic of Poland of the rule of law – LGBTI-free zones in Poland within the scope of the Rete Lenford Case	14 September 2020 Brussels	No data	7	71
The new LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (continuation of debate)	25 November 2020 Brussels	36	5	18
Declaration of the EU as an LGBTIQ Freedom Zone	10 March 2021 Brussels	70	6	73
Breaches of EU law and the rights of LGBTIQ citizens in Hungary as a result of the adopted legal changes in the Hungarian Parliament – The outcome of 22 June hearings under Article 7(1) of the TEU regarding Poland and Hungary	7 July 2021 Strasbourg	103	8	71
Breaches of EU law and the rights of LGBTIQ citizens in Hungary as a result of the adopted legal changes in the Hungarian Parliament – The outcome of 22 June hearings under Article 7(1) of the TEU regarding Poland and Hungary (Continuation of Debate)	7 July 2021 Strasbourg	28	5	
Growing hate crimes against LGBTIQ people across Europe in light of the recent homophobic murder in Slovakia	18 October 2022 Strasbourg	52	5	22
Legal Protection for Rainbow Families Exercising Free Movement in Particular the Baby Sara Case	23 November 2022 Strasbourg	39	4	17
The Rights of Children in Rainbow Families and Same Sex Parents in Particular in Italy	29 March 2023 Brussels	54	4	22
The Rights of Children in Rainbow Families and Same Sex Parents in Particular in Italy (Continuation of Debate)	29 March 2023 Brussels	11	2	
Universal Decriminalization of Homosexuality, in Light of Recent Developments in Uganda	19 April 2023 Strasbourg	46	4	21

Table 2: The Selected Parliamentary Debates between 2019 and 2023

and merely serves as guideline and example to show what has been paid attention to in this PDA.

When it comes to 'Rainbow Europe', the sexual exceptionalism of the EU that is emphasized and reinforced by MEPs will be analysed. This boils down to looking at how MEPs (re)imagine Europe as historically and essentially LGBTI-friendly. This will be done by looking for references to the historical and current tolerance of LGBTI individuals in the EU or mentions of how the protection of LGBTI individuals is a core value of the EU.

When it comes to 'Fortress Europe', homophobia is located amongst racialized external Others, mostly in the form of immigrants and Muslims who are presented as inherently homophobic. Following the underlying Othering process, these groups will likely be referred to as immigrants, Muslims, or other similar terms. Coming across these terms in the context of the selected debates will indicate a likely manifestation of homonationalism.

When it comes to 'Freezer Europe', homophobia is located amongst internal Others in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. Following Kulpa's research on the underlying Othering process of leveraged pedagogy, this thesis will look for subtle hints to these regions. According to Kulpa, this mostly manifested in MEPs referring to 'several' or 'certain' member states, in a context that insinuated the link to CEE. In addition, the comparison between CEE and Russia was emphasized, which is why this is also included here.

Lastly, when it comes to 'Fragile Europe', homophobia is located amongst internal Others throughout Europe, namely right-wing populists. There has not been a lot of research on this manifestation, but Eigenmann (2022) discusses the explicit statements about 'nationalists' and 'conservatives' located 'throughout Europe'.

Theoretical Concept	Explanation	Keywords	Clarification
Rainbow Europe	The EU is emphasized as an exceptional safe haven for LGBTI individuals. The EU is framed through a lens of sexual exceptionalism.	"EU is a protecter…", "Europe is the defender…", "EU is the safest…" "LGBTI+ protection is a core value…"	The keywords, or rather key phrases, are chosen to see how MEPs frame the EU as one homogenous actor that protects or defends LGBTI rights, and is a safe haven for the LGBTI community
Fortress Europe	Following the principles of homonationalism, the sexually exceptional status of the EU is kept up by locating instances of homophobia outside Europe, or communities of these 'outsiders' within Europe.	"immigrant(s)" "Islam", "Muslim(s)" "immigration"	These keywords have been selected based on Puar (2007) because they represent some of the terms or external groups that are often blamed for being inherently homophobic.
Freezer Europe	Following the principle of leveraged pedagogy, the sexually exceptional status of the EU is kept up by locating instances of homophobia in CEE or Southern European states.	"certain members" "Russia" "several member states"	These keywords have been selected based on Kulpa's research (2013) in which she provided examples of MEPs referring to certain or several member states, indicating CEE, or MEPs comparing the East to Russia.
Fragile Europe	Following the principle of Polarization, the sexually exceptional status of the EU is kept up by locating instances of homophobia amongst right-wing circles.	"the right" "extremists" "nationalists" "conservatives" "all over Europe" "throughout the EU"	These keywords have been selected based on Eigenmann (2022) who noticed people framing homophobia as an issue of right-wing nationalist extremists located throughout the EU.

Table 3: Coding Scheme

To conduct the PDA, the data collection method described in 3.3 was applied, which led to a pile of 64 pages of Parliamentary debates. First, a first read-through was done in to get familiar with the context, style, language, and lines of argumentation present in these debates. Afterwards, a second read-through was done to go into more detail, look for the manifestations of Rainbow Europe, Fortress Europe, Freezer Europe and Fragile Europe guided by the generated coding scheme, and note down good examples of these manifestations.

The coding scheme was used to detect manifestations of the different theoretical concepts by looking for keywords. However, the coding scheme was solely used to guide the analysis. As stated, the keywords provided in the coding scheme are only an indication of the type of language that may be utilized by MEPs, which means that the keywords are non-exhaustive, and the context of the debate has to be taken into account to see how the different theoretical concepts manifested during the selected debates. This also means that manifestations of Rainbow Europe, Fortress Europe, Freezer Europe, and Fragile Europe all could be uncovered by other words and phrases as well. In Chapter 4, all these manifestations, both the ones directly based on the coding schemes, as well as the ones that are indirectly based on it, will be discussed and explained.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

As has been discussed in this chapter, this thesis will make use of PDA. The reasons why PDA has been selected to guide this research have been discussed more elaborately in section 3.1. but comes down to the fact that PDA is concerned with political discourse and the use of political language, which both play an important role in shaping identities and reinforcing processes of Othering. It aims to uncover explicit and implicit sentiments that cannot be discovered by performing a quick scan. In addition, for the purpose of this research, other types of research methodologies would be less effective. The reason for this is that (political) discourse contains many subtle themes that cannot be researched, or at least to a lesser extent, by conducting more quantitative research.

Nevertheless, PDA, similar to other forms of discourse analysis, including critical discourse analysis, has been criticised because it is deemed too vague since it does not adhere to specific rules or guidelines to analyse discourse. As a result, the use of PDA may differ from researcher to researcher (Catalano & Waugh, 2020, pp. 219-224). It is therefore important to

discuss potential biases I may have that can influence my research, as being reflexive can help with mitigating the impact of some of this bias (Mackieson, Shlonsky & Connolly, 2018, p. 2). There are three factors that I believe have the most significant impact on this research. The first is the fact that I am born and raised in the Netherlands, which means I am accustomed to Western norms and values. As a result, I will likely recognize and understand more references being made by Dutch MEPs or other Western MEPs than I will MEPs that come from different countries, for example in the South or East of Europe. This stems mainly from the fact that I am not accustomed to their norms, values, culture, history, etc. The second factor that impacts this research is the fact that I am part of the LGBTI community myself, which might influence how I approach, analyse, and interpret statements made by MEPs.

Lastly, I am conducting a PDA of plenary debates of the European Parliament, however, there are currently 24 official languages in which MEPs can debate. Even though English is the most used language, there are a lot of MEPs who use other languages. Since I am only fluent in Dutch and English, I am dependent on translations of the debates. I have opted to use the function of Google Translate function to translate entire web pages, which works well with large quantities of statements that have to be translated. Nevertheless, this does decrease the validity and reliability of this research, as certain nuances can be lost in translation or can be translated incorrectly.

Nevertheless, considering the fact that PDA is suitable for research on the social construction of identities, Othering and other implicit and explicit power relations, makes this the most suitable method for this research, despite its limitations. In Chapter 4, the analysis will be conducted, and the sub-questions will be answered. As stated, the selected debates will be read through twice. The first time to get familiar with them and the second time to go in-depth to answer the sub-questions, guided by the coding scheme (Table 3) to look for manifestations of Rainbow Europe, Fortress Europe, Freezer Europe and Fragile Europe.

4. Analysis

In this chapter, the results will be discussed following the sub-questions that have been introduced in section 1.2. When discussing the first and second sub-question in sections 4.1. and 4.2. respectively, only the relevant statements and narratives will be discussed for clarity purposes. However, any dissenting or contradictory voices and opinions will be discussed in section 4.3. where the third sub-question will be answered. Within these sections, the arguments will be structured based on the findings of this analysis. Lastly, in section 4.4. the answers to the sub-questions will be summarized.

4.1. Reinforcing Rainbow Europe

The first sub-question that will be answered is: "How are LGBTI rights connected to the EU in the selected European Parliamentary debates that took place between 2019 and 2023?" This section will be structured based on the two main methods in which the MEPs that participated in the selected debates reinforced the idea of Rainbow Europe by emphasizing the EU's sexual exceptionalism.

4.1.1. LGBTI Rights Are Human Rights

For a majority of MEPs, mostly from the S&D, GUE/NGL, Green/EFA, and Renew and EPP groups, the idea of Rainbow Europe is created by emphasizing the fact that LGBTI rights are Human Rights, and subsequently also emphasizing the EU's historical and present protection of human rights. This frames the EU as historically and presently defending LGBTI rights.

A common statement that can be observed across many of the analysed debates is that "LGBT[IQ] rights are human rights" (Maria Walsh, EPP, European Parliament, 2019a; Martin Horwood, Renew, European Parliament, 2019c; Monika Vana, Greens/EFA, European

Parliament, 2020b; Tanja Fajon, S&D, European Parliament, 2021a; Sylvie Guillaume, S&D, European Parliament, 2021a; Magdalena Adamowicz, EPP, European Parliament, 2021a; Iratxe García Pérez, S&D, European Parliament, 2021b), which entails that LGBTI individuals must be respected, simply because "each of these people is human" and "no majority can grant these rights, much less take them away" (Magdalena Adamowicz, EPP, European Parliament, 2021a). They are "innate and inalienable" (idem) and "must therefore be protected" (Sylvie Guillaume, S&D, European Parliament, 2021a) and "be respected" (Martin Horwoord, Renew, European Parliament, 2021a). Protecting LGBTI rights thus boils down to "human rights, equality and non-discrimination" (Silvia Modig, GUE/NGL, European Parliament, 2020b), and "the right to freedom, the right to physical integrity, fundamental rights" (Rosa Estaras Ferragut, EPP, European Parliament, 2020b), and "the right to live on [your] own, without fear of violence and discrimination (Sylvia Modig, GUE/NGL, European Parliament, 2022b), because "everyone, regardless of who they are, their skin colour, their religion, their orientation, their language, has the right to dignity and respect, to be treated like everyone else, to have their basic human rights acknowledged and respected" (Maria Walsh, EPP, European Parliament 2019b).

What can also be observed is the emphasis on the fact that "human rights are universal" (Marcel Kolaja, Greens/EFA, European Parliament, 2021b), and the importance of protecting LGBTI rights extends beyond the LGBTI community. Human rights "are a whole. You cannot support them with menus. If you are willing to trample on the human rights of one group, you are willing to undermine all human rights" (Sylvia Modig, GUE/NGL, European Parliament, 2022b). "Human rights are a whole that concern us all. If the human rights of one of us are violated, then the human rights of all of us are violated" (Silvia Modig, GUE/NGL, European Parliament, 2019b). Human rights go further than simply protecting minorities, they impact everyone. Therefore "it is the obligation of every democrat to stand up when anyone's human

rights are being violated" because "when minority rights are being violated, democracy is in danger" (Katarina Barley, S&D, European Parliament, 2021a).

Subsequently, it is emphasized that the EU is built upon human rights and should therefore continue to defend them. Consider the following examples that illustrate this point beautifully: "Europe means the guarantee of fundamental human rights. Europe means solidarity between its people. Europe means all of us living together, irrespective of our differences. Europe means democracy, peace, fairness. Europe means freedom of movement. Europe means liberty" (Cyrus Engerer, S&D, European Parliament, 2021a), "these are our values. We value equality. […]. And above all, we value love" (Cyrus Engerer, S&D, European Parliament, 2022c). These statements show how much importance this cluster attaches to the protection of Human Rights. This cluster argues that "[t]olerance and inclusiveness are the foundations upon which the EU was built and continues to build" (Jackie Jones, S&D, European Parliament, 2019c). These "fundamental values […] of equality, of respect for human rights and of non-discrimination" must be adhered to (Alice Kuhnke, Greens/EFA, European Parliament, 2020b) and "transcend any national laws" (Cyrus Engerer, S&D, European Parliament, 2021b). In fact, one NI MEP that seems to align itself with this cluster goes so far as to say that "Europe's role in the world depends on how strongly it defends human rights within its border" (Antoni Comín I Oliveres, NI, European Parliament, 2021a).

These statements combined show that many MEPs, in particular those belonging to the S&D, GUE/NGL, Green/EFA, Renew, and EPP, assign a lot of importance to the human-right dimension, or normative dimension of the EU. In fact, this normative dimension seems to take precedence over other dimensions such as economic growth and sovereignty. Human rights are universal and nothing can take away from these rights, including a democratic majority or national laws. Many MEPs emphasize or bring up the EU's historical and current protection of

human rights, including LGBTI rights, which can be interpreted as these MEPs perpetuating the idea that the EU is sexually exceptional.

In short, by emphasizing the importance of human rights and the historical protection of them within the EU, the idea of the EU as Ayoub and Paternotte's (2014) 'Rainbow Europe' is created during these debates.

4.1.2. The EU Is a Safe Haven

Nevertheless, this process is not the only way in which these statements reinforce the idea of Rainbow Europe. The second way in which this is done is by emphasizing the fact that the EU is a safe place for LGBTI individuals, which also seems to perpetuate the idea of sexual exceptionalism of the EU. There are two ways in which this narrative is presented by MEPs. The first way is that the EU is safe for LGBTI individuals and therefore does not need to take any further steps to protect them, while the second way emphasizes that even though the EU is relatively safe for LGBTI individuals, further steps are needed to maintain this position. Regardless, both seem to emphasize the EU as an LGBTI safe haven, which creates the idea of Rainbow Europe.

The first narrative of the EU being safe for LGBTI individuals, but further protection is not needed is predominantly presented by MEPs belonging to the ECR and ID groups. Consider the following statements: "in none of the twenty-seven member states of the European Union is your sexual orientation punishable", it does not "matter if you are lesbian, gay, trans, or any of the other sixty sexual orientations", "[y]ou are not forbidden to love anyone you want, you are not forbidden to live with anyone. Here we see pure propaganda" (Jaak Madison, ID, European Parliament, 2021a). This idea of sexual exceptionalism can also be gathered from statements, such as: "[w]e do not need to proclaim the EU as an LGBTI Freedom Zone because

the European Union is already the safest place on earth for LGBTI people (Angel Dzhambazki, ECR, European Parliament, 2021a).

These statements, even though they add to the idea of Rainbow Europe, are arguably rather negative towards the LGBTI community. Saying things like 'or any of the other sixty sexual orientations' can be interpreted as mocking or ridiculing the LGBTI community by exaggerating their identities and orientations. Add to this the fact that it is referred to as 'propaganda' and these MEPs argue that no further protection is needed, it seems far-fetched that these MEPs actually aim to protect LGBTI individuals. Nevertheless, they do emphasize the EU as a safe haven, perpetuating the idea of Rainbow Europe.

The second narrative of the EU being safe for LGBTI individuals, but further protection is needed is predominantly brought forward by MEPs belonging to the S&D, Renew, Greens/ALE, and EPP groups. Common statements that follow this pattern are: "Although the attitude of Europe's societies towards the LGBTI communities has changed in a positive direction, we have once again come to the point where they need protection" (Anna Júlia Donáth, Renew, European Parliament, 2019b), or "No matter our shortcomings, the EU remains one of the most progressive regions in the world. We must continue our fight by promoting LGBTIQ rights and non-discrimination, both within our Union and beyond" (Josianne Cutajar, S&D, 25 November 2020).

These statements can be interpreted as being positive towards the LGBTI community, as they acknowledge the need for further protection of the LGBTI community, which signals a difference with the first narrative. However, these statements, even though they do not ignore internal issues regarding homophobia and transphobia, are simultaneously used to emphasize the sexual exceptionalism of the EU relative to other regions.

In short, both narratives that present the EU as a safe haven for LGBTI individuals have significantly different undertones and are used for vastly different political purposes, but regardless, they both end up reinforcing the idea of Rainbow Europe.

4.2. Sexual Othering within the EP

Having established how the idea of a Rainbow Europe is reinforced during the selected debates, this section now turns to the second sub-question, namely: "Which sexual Othering processes can be identified in the selected European Parliamentary debates that took place between 2019 and 2023?" This section will be structured similarly to section 2.3 in the theoretical framework, meaning that all three types of Othering, i.e., homonationalism, leveraged pedagogy and Polarization, will be discussed in their own section. It will not follow the same order, however, since the most prevalent form of Othering will be discussed first, namely Polarization. Afterwards, leveraged pedagogy and homonationalism will be discussed.

4.2.1. Polarization and the Creation of Fragile Europe

The most apparent and most used Othering process that was present during the selected debates relates to the situation in which members of the S&D, GUE/NGL, Green/EFA, and Renew groups, as well as the majority MEPs of the EPP group, situate homophobia within the EU almost exclusively within right-wing circles, following the process of Polarization.

To start, the MEPs that do this are the ones that frame the EU as a protector of human rights, and therefore also LGBTI rights, following the process discussed in section 4.1.1. In addition, some also follow the second narrative discussed in section 4.1.2. in which the EU is framed as a safe haven, but with some flaws when it comes to the protection of LGBTI individuals. As can be gathered from the fact that these shortcomings within the EU are not ignored, as well as from the titles of the selected debates, the EU is not free of homophobia.

During a debate on whether or not to declare the EU LGBTIQ freedom zones, it was stated that defending LGBTI rights is "actually already laid down in treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. It should be self-evident", "yet there are governments and politicians in Europe who sow hate, who create LGBTI free-zones" (Moritz Körner, Renew, European Parliament, 2021a). The fact that protecting human rights, including LGBTI rights, is claimed to be a fundamental value of the EU that is also included in its policies, but which is not actually successful causes a difficulty when declaring the EU a protector of human rights.

To solve this 'paradox' of a protector of LGBTI rights that is not able to protect LGBTI rights, most MEPs situate the issue of homophobia solely within conservative right-wing circles. When discussing homophobia within the EU, this group makes it apparent that "the kind of hatred that ends up taking lives does not appear […] out of the blue [it] exists in far-right circles where an ideology of hate and an ideology of violence meet each other." (Malin Björk, GUE/NGL, European Parliament, 2022b). This group of MEPs presents the view of "a backsliding and reversion to extreme conservative positions in several member states" (Stelios Kymbouropoulos, EPP, European Parliament, 2021a). This "retrograde ultra-conservatism" that is found "on the right of [the EP's] hemicycle – undermines the rights of Europeans who ask for nothing more than to love and live freely." (Valerie Hayer, Renew, European Parliament, 2021b). It is described as "right-wing populist winds blowing in Europe" that brings with it "an extreme and disgusting intolerance and a distorted view of humanity." (Alice Kuhnke, Greens/EFA, European Parliament, 2020b). It is an ideology that threatens the "moral authority" of the EU (Sophie in 't Veld, Renew, European Parliament, 2020a).

In reference to the murder of two gay men in Slovakia, one MEP stated that what "started with a word [… 'poofter', 'dyke', 'faggot'] ended with a knife, a fist, or in this case a gun. [… It] is the result of inaction in the face of growing radicalisation of far-right and conservative narratives" (Cyrus Engerer, S&D, European Parliament, 2022b). This cluster argues that within

the (far-) right "there is a tendency […] to exploit the fears, the stereotypes, the insecurities of their citizens for their own short-term goals" (Ivars Ijabs, Renew, European Parliament, 2021c). In reference to a debate about 'rainbow' families in Italy, the "Italian far-right government" is critiqued for "raging against the LGBTI community to actually hide its incapacity on many other issues" (Rosa D'Amato, Greens/ALE, European Parliament, 2023e).

This "anti-gender movement – a movement made up of ultra-hard-core conservative politicians and their followers" stands "for an outdated patriarchal society where women's rights and LGBTI rights have no place" (Marc Angel, S&D, European Parliament, 2020b). These "nationalists and populists" (Petra de Sutter, Greens/EFA, European Parliament, 2019b) continue to spread their "right and extreme right" narratives (Katarina Barley, S&D, European Parliament, 2021a). They are "united […] in hatred" (Lukasz Kohut, S&D, European Parliament, 2021a) and find themselves "in a homophobic crusade" (Iratxe García Pérez, S&D, European Parliament, 2021b) in which they are "using the language of untruth and insinuation" (Andrzej Halicki, EPP, European Parliament, 2021a). Lastly, "everyone who believes in democracy, freedom, fundamental rights and peaceful societies" is called upon "to stand up to this hatred" (Terry Reintke, Greens/EFA, European Parliament, 2022b), since "any form of complicity with the extreme right is directly complicit with the increase in hate speech, leading directly to hate crime" (Juan Fernando López Aguilar, S&D, European Parliament, 2022b). This cluster seems to agree that "it is obvious that if all the Member States of the European Union were governed only by decent people" the EP "would not have to adopt a resolution that is obvious to most Europeans" (Andrzej Halicki, EPP, European Parliament, 2021a). Nevertheless, this is not the case, and the EU is plagued by "the evil of extremism, hatred and intolerance" which will need to be defeated (Ivan Štefanec, EPP, European Parliament, 2022b).

These right-wing groups are located throughout the EU. During debates about Poland and Hungary, the following statements were made that represent this sentiment: "it does not

end with Poland […] it does not end with Poland […], more and more verbal and physical attacks on members of the LGBTI community are being reported from Germany, the United Kingdom, Finland, Lithuania, [and Slovenia]" (Tanja Fajon, S&D, European Parliament, 2019b), and "if nothing is done "it will be a signal to all populists in Europe to attack sexual minorities" (Jiří Pospíšil, EPP, European Parliament, 2021b). In the instances where MEPs did not explicitly locate homophobia throughout the EU, but discussed it in the context of the debates, which were mostly about Poland and Hungary, the vast majority of MEPs made it clear that they distinguished between these countries, their citizens, and their governments. Statements that illustrate this sentiment include: "[w]hat the Polish government is doing is not representative for the majority of people" (Sophie in 't Veld, Renew, European Parliament, 2020b), or "Poland is not PiS" (Lukasz Kohut, S&D, European Parliament 2020a).

This narrative of homophobia being present only in 'far-right' circles that use homophobia for their own political gains, combined with references to attacks on democracy and freedom, insinuates that the far-right is inherently associated with being anti-democratic. The 'right', which never seems to be concretely defined, is presented as a group of indecent people that have to be defeated in order to eliminate homophobia. Following Eigenmann's (2021) discussion on the more recent developments in the EP, most MEPs do not seem to situate homophobia in specific locations or cultures anymore. This group of MEPs, together forming a majority in the EP, does not frame homophobia as an issue of racialized external Others, nor does it situate homophobia solely in CEE or Southern European countries. Rather, they frame homophobia as an issue that is present throughout Europe, but only amongst right-wing circles. This is in line with what has been labelled Fragile Europe in this thesis. In the cases where these MEPs were confronted with debates about specific countries, predominantly Poland and Hungary, they, again, emphasized the role of right-wing groups who force their ideas on citizens who supposedly do not share these views.

In short, in terms of Othering, the vast majority of MEPs seems to emphasize the differences between the values of the EU, which they defend and identify with, and the far-right populists that are situated all over Europe. The latter is framed as inherently homophobic and undemocratic, while the former is basically not critiqued and presented as inherently tolerant and democratic. The idea of Fragile Europe is reinforced, with the Othering of right-wing populists throughout Europe as a consequence.

4.2.2. Leveraged Pedagogy and the Creation of Freezer Europe

When it comes to instances of leveraged pedagogy, there is significantly less to discuss than the process of Polarization previously discussed in 4.2.1. The reason for this is that MEPs predominantly discuss homophobia in the EU following the narratives that homophobia is situated throughout the entire EU and within far-right governments, rather than specific countries or cultures. Nevertheless, there are a few instances where leveraged pedagogy can be argued to be present. Consider the following example of a Slovakian MEP that does reinforces this West/North versus East/South divide by saying that "we have a long-term debt to [LGBTIQ+ citizens…] especially in countries such as Slovakia" (Vladimír Bilčík, EPP, European Parliament, 2022b). He takes a positive stance towards the LGBTI community but emphasizes the fact that countries "such as Slovakia" have more to make up for. Regardless, this narrative was barely present, with only a handful of MEPs making similar remarks.

There is one narrative or comparison that was more present that signals leveraged pedagogy, namely the comparison of some countries with Russia. Some MEPs say things like "[t]hese Kremlin inspired anti-LGBT propaganda laws in several countries" (Ivars Ijabs, Renew, European Parliament, 2021c) or '[i]n too many member states, far-right conservative and populist parties and religious fundamentalists spread LGBTIQ phobia, copying the Kremlin narrative" (Marc Angel, S&D, European Parliament, 2022b). This still creates the idea of West

versus East, without directly referring to CEE. In this manner, the idea of Freezer Europe can arguably be considered to be reinforced. Since 'several countries' are accused of acting similar to Russia, an ultimate Eastern Other that is still invokes the idea of the Soviet Union to which many EU member states belonged in the past, the East/West divide is reinforced. Especially considering the fact that the countries in this comparison are never explicitly stated, which leaves it open to interpretation. It should be noted, however, that since the countries in this comparison are never explicitly stated and reference is often also being made to far-right populists, in addition to the West/East divide reinforced by leveraged pedagogy, the left-right divide following could be argued to be reinforced as well by these comparisons.

In short, leveraged pedagogy is still being used in the EP, although to a much lesser extent than its Polarization counterpart. The idea of Freezer Europe is reinforced by a handful of MEPs that cluster 'certain' countries, and by the comparison of 'several countries' to Russia, which both signal a divide between East and West. Nevertheless, on the whole, this Othering process is much less prominent than Polarization, and in some cases also seems to strengthen the left-right divide that comes with it.

4.2.3. Homonationalism and the Creation of Fortress Europe

The last form of sexual Othering that needs to be discussed is homonationalism. Similar to leveraged pedagogy, it is still present during the selected debates, but it is also still significantly less prominent than the process of Polarization. In fact, there is one small group of MEPs that seems to argue that the EU does have an issue with homophobia but subsequently blames it solely on Muslim immigrants. This group, consisting of four MEPs of the ID group, frames the EU as a place of sexual exceptionalism, i.e., Rainbow Europe, but as opposed to many of their right-wing colleagues, they admit that this status is under threat. In particular by Muslims. No mention is being made of homophobic acts committed by Europeans. Considering

these two facts, the EU being presented as sexually exceptional, while simultaneously solely using this view to critique Muslims, these statements provide a good example of homonationalism. Consider the following statement from MEP Fest:

> "Germany once had a homosexual foreign minister, Berlin and many other major European cities were run by homosexuals, and the leader of my party in the Bundestag is openly homosexual.
>
> But conditions have deteriorated in the west. [..] In many areas of Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, but also in Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam, homosexual couples no longer dare to walk hand in hand through the city. These people are not threatened by Germans. Nor are they threatened by Poles, Hungarians or Slovenes, but by Muslims. But that is the great taboo that cannot be addressed here, because that would raise the question of Muslim migration and whether it will really make society more colourful, better and more liberal.
>
> The 70s, 80s and 90s were a lot better for LGBTQI people in Europe than today. The cancer of homophobia has only spread again in Western Europe in the last 20 years and the cause of this metastasis is well known. As long as you keep silent about the problem of Muslim homophobia, there is no point in declaring Europe and LGBTQI Freedom zone." (Nicholaus Fest, ID European Parliament, 2021a)

This statement sums up the general arguments made by this small bloc. The EU is framed as having been great for LGBTI people, but this is threatened, reinforcing the idea of Fortress Europe. This bloc calls for "naming those who trample on homosexual rights and who like to hang them from construction cranes" but emphasizes that it is "not the European peoples who

deny homosexuals their rights, it's the culture that millions of us import to Europe and that live out their murderous homophobia there" (Christine Anderson, ID, European Parliament, 2019c).

The EU is portrayed as a sexual fortress under threat. The EU itself is framed as a safe haven for LGBTI individuals, but Muslim immigrants are argued to threaten this status. All homophobia in the EU seems to be the result of these immigrants, while the rest of the EU is framed as one homogenous, accepting cluster.

Nevertheless, similar to the manifestations of leveraged pedagogy discussed in section 4.2.2, the manifestations of homonationalism also reinforce the left-right divide reinforced by Polarization. The reason for this is that these ID MEP's believes that instead of addressing "the expansion of radical Islam and massive non-assimilated immigration", the left attacks "the sovereignty of nations and exploit this subject to advance your political agenda" (Annika Bruna, ID, European Parliament, 2021a). The right blames the left for their "angelism in terms of migration policy", which "diverts [them] from the real issues in this area" (Aurelia Beigneux, ID, 2019c). Even though this manifestation of homonationalism Others Muslims immigrants, it also reinforces the left-right division, since the left is blamed for allowing these immigrants to enter the EU.

In short, similar to leveraged pedagogy, homonationalist narratives are still present in the selected debates of the EP, although to a much lesser extent than its Polarization counterpart. The idea of Fortress Europe is reinforced by a handful of MEPs that frames homophobia as a foreign export brought into the EU by Muslim immigrants, who threaten the open and accepting status of the EU. Nevertheless, homonationalism is much less prominent than Polarization, and mostly seems to serve the purpose of increasing the left-right divide by it.

4.3. A Non-Homogenous European Parliament

In the previous sections, the three different forms of sexual Othering that this thesis is concerned with have been discussed. However, the EP is not a homogenous actor, and neither are the political groups within it. This section will discuss important differences within these groups, based on my third sub-question: "Which differences are present within and between the political groups?"

4.3.1. 'The Left' and 68 Percent of the EPP

Throughout this chapter, the membership of MEPs to political groups has been included in the citations, and mentions have been made to certain trends that were apparent. The most apparent is that it were overwhelmingly MEPs from the S&D, GUE/NGL, Green/EFA, Renew and EPP groups that emphasized the fact that LGBTI rights are human rights, and therefore should be protected by the EU. In addition, almost all of these MEPs situated homophobia within right-wing circles. However, a handful of them also located it amongst other political groups, which shows a small internal difference within these groups. Consider the example of one MEP belonging to the Renew group who not only blamed the normalization of hate speech in Slovakia on right-wing extremists, but also called out "top representatives of parties in Slovakia that belong to the EPP and S&D groups" (Martin Hoisík, Renew, European Parliament, 2022b).

Moreover, this last statement indicates another internal difference, and it is the fact that the EPP was more divided than the other (centre-)left parties. The reason for this is that there are several MEPs that accused 'the left' of working with a "double standard" (Balázs Hidvéghi, EPP, European Parliament 2020a) as "the socialists and liberals […] remain silent in blatant cases that violate the rule of law" in countries without "a government with characteristic right-wing policies" (idem). In addition, some EPP MEPs seem to criticize the EU for interfering

with Member States on issues on which these states have exclusive competences. This is done by emphasizing how the European Parliament "is lending itself to the political exploitation of some who have transferred a national question […] to Brussels" (Salvatore DeMeo, EPP, European Parliament, 2023e). This internal tension within the EPP is also noted by a NI MEP that argues that the "left and 68 percent of the EPP" "have turned this parliament into a trial court" *(*Enikő Győri*,* NI, European Parliament, 2021b). This thesis does not conduct any quantitative analysis, so the factuality of this statement cannot be discussed, but it does indicate that other MEPs also regard the EPP as less homogenous than the other groups that have been discussed in this section.

One last internal tension that needs to be discussed with regard to 'the left and 68 percent of the EPP' is that in the two debates regarding Uganda, several MEPs seem to be less critical of homophobia within the EU. Especially in the first debate on Uganda (2019a) statements were made such as: "Africa needs us, Uganda needs us" (Monica Silvana González, SD, European Parliament, 2019a) and "[w]e need to remind Uganda that the right to sexuality and to express one's sexuality and freedom from discrimination are based on the universality of human rights and is guaranteed by international rights law" (Phil Bennion, Renew, European Parliament, 2019a). These statements, combined with no mention to the situation within the EU, create the idea that the EU has no issues regarding homophobia. This has led a few MEPs to argue that some MEPs used this debate and this resolution as "self-congratulations to the EU, as if we are some sort of a beacon of human rights excellence" (Clare Daly, GUE/NGL, European Parliament, 2019a). In the second debate on Uganda (2023f), these sentiments in which the EU is framed as a homogenous actor that protects LGBTI rights throughout are used significantly less, and much more reference is made to the role of right-wing populists that encourage homophobia in both the EU and Uganda. In fact, more emphasis is placed on the fact that they cannot "not recognize that this limited view on what or who a person can be, is, in many places

in the world, including Uganda, a result of colonialism and is currently also promoted and funded by Western evangelical churches (Kim van Sparrentak, Greens/ALE, European Parliament, 2023g). This shows that, even though these debates on Uganda do still deviate a bit from the debates on homophobia within the EU, the Othering process via 'Polarization' is also increasingly being applied to Europe's external sexual Others.

4.3.2. 'The Right'

Throughout this chapter, most references have been made to MEPs of S&D, GUE/NGL, Green/EFA, Renew, and EPP. The reason for this is that MEPs belonging to the ECR and ID groups do generally not reinforce the idea of Rainbow Europe. In fact, most of them seem to oppose LGBTI rights entirely, with the exception of the references that have been made to the ID MEPs that emphasize LGBTI rights to critique immigration. In line with Eigenmann (2022), the MEPs of this cluster almost unanimously try to reframe debates about LGBTI rights by shifting the language of protecting 'LGBTI rights' into other discussions. For instance, discussions on protecting people from the 'LGBTI ideology' or 'gender-ideology' that goes against biology and traditional values, or discussions on protecting the sovereignty of Member States.

Common statements of these MEPs are similar to the following example: "Of course, I condemn any discrimination against people because of their sexual orientation. But, in this case, I think it is something else, a criticism of the disastrous gender-ideology" (Gilles Lebreton, ID, European Parliament 2019c). They claim proponents of 'the LGBTI ideology' or 'gender theory' are turning "provocation into their strongest weapon" and slander "those who have a different opinion", all in the name of an "aggressive ideology of minorities, demanding privileges for themselves" (Beata Kempa, ECR, European Parliament, 2019b). In addition, they "poison language and minds" and "obstruct scientific research", insinuating that they have no

common sense (Ryszard Antoni Legutko, ECR, European Parliament, 2021a). Proponents of this gender-ideology "throw science, experience, the achievements of generations in the trash and convert them into" a "political conviction" (idem). In fact, they "have already led many good people astray with [their] propaganda" (Ladislav Ilčić, ECR, European Parliament, 2023f). Opposing the gender theory here "does not mean to suppress gay and LGBTI people, it just means that we don't want those theories taught in schools and universities and made the principle of politics" (Maximilian Krag, ID, European Parliament, 2020a).

To take it one step further, this group of MEPs routinely argues that LGBTI people pose a threat to children. Firstly, it is routinely claimed that children growing up without both a father-figure and mother-figure are disadvantaged, and "every child has the right to grow up in […] a family" that "consists of a man and woman, a biological woman, a biological man, a mother and a father" (Angel Djambazki, ECR, European Parliament, 2023f). Secondly, it is often claimed that "deviant sexual practices and LGBTIQ ideology can and will open the door to child abuse and paedophilia" (Angel Dzhambazki, ECR, European Parliament, 2021a).

Since LGBTI rights, in their view, threaten "all traditional structures […] that have made European civilization" (Jerome Riviere, ID, European Parliament, 2021b), and touch upon "family law", something that is "the exclusive competence of the Member States" (Simona Baldassarre, ID, European Parliament, 2020b), these MEPs claim to defend the sovereignty of these Member States. The general consensus is that the EU is built on "respecting diversity, democracy, identity and sovereignty" (Tom Vandendriessche, ID, European Parliament, 2021b). By saying things like: "It is perfectly possible to believe in equality and dignity for all citizens, but also to believe in the sanctity of the ballot box and the democratic process" (Daniel Hannan, ECR, 2019c) and "it is not up to the EU and its institutions to interfere in democratically made decisions in the Member States" (Jörg Meuthen, ID, European Parliament, 2021b) this cluster emphasizes the values of democracy and sovereignty rather than the EU's commitment to

protecting human rights, including LGBTI rights. This means that these MEPs, on the whole, do not reinforce the idea of Rainbow Europe, and subsequently also do not use it to create sexual Others to the tolerant European Self.

What they are doing, however, is reinforcing two Othering processes. The first one is the left that is Othering the right as internal, omnipresent sexual Other. Subsequently, right-wing politics is linked to CEE and Southern European countries, leading to a West/East divide as described by leveraged pedagogy. MEPs that belong to the ECR and ID groups argue that the European Parliament has been taken over by "left-wing activists" (Patryk Jaki, ECR, European Parliament, 2020a) and "liberal elites" (Angel Dzhambazki, ECR, European Parliament, 2021a) that impose their views on the EU and deem everything that "is not leftist" as "harming the rule of law" (Patryk Jaki, ECR, European Parliament, 2020a). They are a "narrow majority in [the EP]" (Angel Dzhambazki, ECR, European Parliament, 2021a) that have "turned this Parliament into a trial court" (Enikő Győri, NI, European Parliament, 2021b).

This 'leftist, liberal and elitist' majority wants to "bring backward countries to their knees again with brute force and from a sense of superiority" (Tom Vandendriessche, ID, European Parliament, 2021b). MEP Jaki argued that "there is less violence against LGBT people in Poland than in *your* countries" (Patryk Jaki, ECR, European Parliament, 2021b, emphasis added by author), which emphasizes the distinction between left and right-wing countries. However, this division between left and right countries seems to fall alongside the West/East divide of leveraged pedagogy, so it could be argued that this division is simultaneously reinforced.

4.4. Summarizing the Sub-Answers

The following section will provide a brief overview of the answers to the sub-questions that have been discussed throughout this Chapter. In addition, some notes will be made about the ambiguity of the narratives that have been analysed in this thesis.

4.4.1. Answers to the Sub-Questions

The first sub-question that has been answered in this Chapter is: "How are LGBTI rights connected to the EU in the selected European Parliamentary debates that took place between 2019 and 2023?" This question has aimed to research manifestations of Rainbow Europe. This analysis has uncovered two main ways in which this is done. The first is by emphasizing the fact that LGBTI rights are Human Rights, and subsequently emphasizing the normative dimension of the EU, where protection of Human Rights takes precedence over other important dimensions, such as economic growth. The second way in which this is done is by emphasizing how (relatively) safe it is for LGBTI individuals in the EU. This narrative is used both to further LGBTI rights and restrict them, but they all have the same effect of generating the idea that the EU is sexually exceptional. Both the emphasis on the normative dimension of the EU, as well as the EU being a safe haven therefore reinforce Ayoub and Paternotte's (2014) idea of 'Rainbow Europe'.

The second sub-question that has been answered is: "Which sexual Othering processes can be identified in the selected European Parliamentary debates that took place between 2019 and 2023?" This question has aimed to research if and to what extent the three different Othering processes of homonationalism, leveraged pedagogy and Polarization were present during the selected debates. This analysis has attempted to show that Polarization is the main Othering process used by MEPs, since the majority of MEPs seems to emphasize that the EU is inherently tolerant and democratic, threatened by far-right populists that are situated all over Europe. This reinforces the idea of Fragile Europe, where decent people have to defeat the inherently homophobic and undemocratic evil that is right-wing populism. Leveraged pedagogy and homonationalism are both present as well, however, they play a much less prominent role during these debates than Polarization. Leveraged pedagogy, reinforcing the idea of Freezer Europe with an East/West divide, can be detected amongst a handful of MEPs that cluster 'certain'

countries together or make the comparison to Russia, whereas homonationalism, reinforcing the idea of Fortress Europe being under threat by Muslim immigrants, can be detected amongst a handful of MEPs that locate homophobia as an issue solely amongst Muslim immigrants. Even though these latter two processes are still present, they both can also be argued to strengthen the left-right divide created by Polarization, since the right-wing is also compared to Russia, and the left is blamed for mishandling immigration. Ultimately, it is the process of Polarization that has come to define the selected debates.

The third sub-question that has been answered is "Which differences are present within and between the political groups?" Since the EP is not a homogenous actor, this question aimed to take any dissenting voices into account. On 'the left', most MEPs seemed to agree that right-wing populists were to blame for homophobia, but there were a few MEPs that also critiqued other actors, such as MEPs belonging to the S&D and EPP groups. Similarly, the EPP itself seemed more divided than the rest of 'the left' with a few MEPs agreeing with the narratives predominantly found on 'the right'. The last difference is the attitude of many MEPs during the Uganda debates. In the first debate (European Parliament, 2019a), many MEPs were less critical of the EU and treated it as a more homogenous and tolerant actor than during the debates about internal homophobia. However, in the second debate (European Parliament, 2023g), this narrative shifted with right-wing populists in Europe as well as outside Europe received some blame for homophobia. When it comes to the right (ECR and ID), one major internal tension is that most MEPs do not reinforce the idea of Rainbow Europe at all, and therefore do not use LGBTI rights to Other certain actors. Even though most MEPs do not use LGBTI rights to Other, they do frame the 'LGBTI ideology' as something that is leftist, liberal, elitist, and Western, which does strengthen the left-right divide and the West/East divide that follow from Polarization and leveraged pedagogy respectively.

4.4.2. Ambiguities

It should be noted that these findings merely report on what has been analysed, not whether or not the narratives presented by MEPs are coherent, fully logical, or morally sound. In fact, both the left and the right seem to adhere to some ambiguous reasoning that is faulty at times.

One example of arguably flawed reasoning that can be found on the left is that homophobia is almost exclusively found within right-wing circles. Looking at statistics from the Netherlands in 2018, it becomes clear that voters for Christian political parties, in this case the 'CDA', which is a member of the EPP in the EP, are less supportive of LGBTI rights than supports for voters of the 'PVV', which was a member of the ID group when it still had seats in the EP (Kuyper, 2018, pp. 16-17). Yet, right-wing populists are consistently framed as homophobic, while Christians are not, even by Dutch MEPs. A similar observation can be made about people with a non-Western background. Of this group, only 53 percent are positive about LGBTI rights, compared to 76 percent of autochthonous Dutch citizens (idem). What is interesting here, however, is that when the influence of immigration is brought up by the right, albeit with flawed and harmful generalizations, this cluster does seem to ignore it altogether and instead frames the right as an exceptionally homophobic, as well as Islamophobic and racist Other.

When it comes to the right, we can see flawed, and at many times contradictory, reasoning as well. The most striking example is the fact that MEPs on the right stress that they are backed by science, while simultaneously framing LGBTI individuals as posing a threat to children. When it comes to the repeatedly made accusations of paedophilia, "there is no scientific basis for asserting that [homosexual and bisexual men] are more likely than heterosexual men to [molest children] (Herek, 2018), and when it comes to the widespread argument that growing up in a family with a father and a mother is best for children, studies

have consistently shown that this is not the case (consider Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Crouch et al, 2016). Nevertheless, many MEPs on the right continue to spread these harmful and incorrect narratives while claiming to protect the 'dignity of all citizens'.

However, even though it is important to acknowledge that the narratives analysed here are ambiguous, morally questionable or contradictory, this thesis is more concerned with the narratives themselves, rather than their factuality, rationality, or morality, which is why these ambiguities will not be further elaborated upon.

5.   Conclusion & Discussion

5.1. Conclusion

This thesis has focused on how political groups in the Ninth European Parliament use LGBTI rights to shape the identity of the EU in relation to sexual Others. In this thesis, first, the identity of the European Union and its identity vis-à-vis the protection of LGBTI rights has been discussed. Based on the different literature in this field, I have discussed homonationalism, leveraged pedagogy and the more recent Polarization, which are used to frame the EU as Fortress Europe, Freezer Europe and Fragile Europe respectively. After having reviewed this literature, the research question that this thesis set out to answer became: "How do political groups in the Ninth European Parliament use the protection of LGBTI rights to shape the identity of the EU in relation to sexual Others, as of May 2023?" The reason for this is that there is limited research on the different concepts combined, and this research does not go beyond 2019, which means that there is limited information on how the European Parliament currently functions and which narratives of sexual Othering are used by MEPs.

In Chapter 4, the proposed sub-questions have been answered through a political discourse analysis. Based on these answers, the main research question can be answered. As has been elaborated upon in Chapter 4, the idea of Rainbow Europe is reinforced by emphasizing the link between Human Rights, including LGBTI rights, and the EU, and by emphasizing that the EU is a (relatively) safe place for LGBTI individuals. By framing the EU as a sexually exceptional 'Rainbow Europe', some internal tensions arise, as there are still numerous instances and examples of homophobia throughout the EU. To solve this tension, the majority of MEPs, mostly those belonging to the S&D, GUE/NGL, Green/EFA, Renew, and EPP groups, allocate homophobia almost exclusively amongst right-wing circles, following the process of Polarization. Throughout the analysed debates, these right-wing populists are framed as inherently homophobic, indecent, and dangerous. A handful of MEPs, however, still seems

to locate homophobia in either CEE or amongst Muslim immigrants. Nevertheless, the most prominent process of Othering is Polarization, reinforcing the idea of what has been labelled 'Fragile Europe' in this thesis. There are two noteworthy differences between MEPs. The first difference is found in the Uganda debates, where this group is less critical of homophobia within the EU. Although, the second debate about Uganda does also signal a shift towards Polarization. The second difference is found between 'the left' and 'the right'. Whereas the left seems to support LGBTI rights and shape the EU based on its ability to protect them, the right seems to not support LGBTI rights at all. The right frames LGBTI rights as leftist, liberal and elitist, enforced upon Eastern states by Western states. Despite not being pro-LGBTI, it does seem to strengthen the left-right and West/East divides following Polarization and leveraged pedagogy.

A concrete answer to the question: "How do political groups in the Ninth European Parliament use the protection of LGBTI rights to shape the identity of the EU in relation to sexual Others, as of May 2023?"is then that the S&D, GUE/NGL, Green/EFA, Renew, and allegedly 68 percent of the EPP, uses LGBTI rights to shape the EU as being a liberal protector of Human Rights as a whole. These groups claim that this normative aspect to the EU takes precedence over, for example, economic growth or sovereignty. In addition, these groups frame 'the right' as threatening this liberal status with their hatred, their homophobia, and their indecency. This leads to the idea of 'Fragile Europe' in which 'the decent left' has to defeat 'the indecent right'. The right itself, on the whole, seems to not support LGBTI rights, but does critique the left for having taken over the EU and enforcing their leftist, liberal, elitist and Western ideology on them. This arguably also reinforces the idea that the EU is liberal, even though they seem to regard this as a negative thing. In short, in debates about LGBTI rights, the EU is framed as a liberal protector of Human Rights that is characterized by an internal conflict between 'the left' and 'the right', in which the left regards the right as the internal sexual Other that is indecent and dangerous because they do not seem to support LGBTI rights.

5.2. Contributions of the Findings

The findings of this thesis show that the left-right divide within European politics has become much more prominent than assumed. In Eigenmann's (2022) research, she discussed homonationalism, leveraged pedagogy and the recent shift towards 'Polarization'. However, this shift towards Polarization, researched using debates in 2016 and 2019, was said to be a partial shift. This thesis indicates that this shift to Polarization has become more than 'partial' since 2019, as it seems to have taken over debates about LGBTI rights almost completely.

Research on homonationalism and leveraged pedagogy within the European Parliament is based on debates held throughout the early 2000s (Kulpa, 2013; Colpani & Habed, 2014; Ammaturo, 2015; Szulc, 2021; Eigenmann, 2022), which are not representative of today's debates anymore. As Eigenmann (2022) already indicated, the process of Polarization seemed to partially replace narratives of homonationalism and leveraged pedagogy, but was not very concrete. This thesis has shown that Eigenmann was correct in her claims that the left-right divide started to play a more prominent role, but it does also show that this role has become much larger since Eigenmann's research. The left-right divide seems to have completely taken over the debates on LGBTI rights. Homonationalism (as researched by Colpani & Habed, 2014; Ammaturo, 2015) and leveraged pedagogy (as researched by Kulpa, 2013) have not fully disappeared, so their claims are not entirely incorrect and can still provide useful insights, but they are no longer able to explain many of the narratives presented by MEPs during the plenary debates of the Ninth EP. Moreover, the already limited examples of leveraged pedagogy and homonationalism, often seemed to serve the purpose of deepening the left-right divide. Leveraged pedagogy, which manifested itself by MEPs comparing CEE to Russia, was accompanied by comparisons of far-right governments to Russia, which extends leveraged pedagogy to Polarization. In addition, homonationalism, which located homophobia within

immigrant communities, was accompanied by blaming the left for bad immigration policies, ultimately shifting the focus to Polarization as well.

Several theoretical concepts that have been discussed in the theoretical framework, such as homonationalism and leveraged pedagogy therefore seem to have a limited explanatory value when it comes to LGBTI rights and EU identity forming in the context of current plenary EP debates. Both are still present, but they seem to be overshadowed by an increasing left-right divide that is taking over politics. This Polarization seems to carry much more explanatory value than either of the other two discussed concepts, which should be taken into account when using these concepts to analyse the EU. This importance extends also outside the world of academia, as "[s]evere polarization makes democracy vulnerable" (McCoy, 2019, p. 1). Politics becomes characterised by increasing "distrust, bias and enmity" and can lead to people tolerating "more illiberal" and "undemocratic" in order to counter the political Other (idem).

5.3. Limitations

This research has several limitations that should be addressed. First of all, as has been stated in Chapter 3, PDA has been criticised for not being concrete enough since it does not adhere to specific rules or guidelines to analyse discourses. The interpretive nature of PDA makes it very dependent on which researcher is conducting the research (Catalano & Waugh, 2020, pp. 219-224). If other students or scholars would set out to conduct the same or a similar study, their findings may differ from the findings in this thesis. This means that the results of this study are not necessarily reproducible. I have attempted to provide my reasoning throughout the analysis, including tensions in the debates and my findings, in order to sketch a view of the debates that is as all-encompassing as possible. In addition, as has also been touched upon briefly in Chapter 3, the international and intercultural nature of the parliamentary debates combined with the interpretive nature of PDA, also reduces the reproducibility. Coming from a

Dutch background, and being gay, influences how I approach and analyse the selected debates. Not being able to know everything about the many different cultures and norms throughout the EU may have prevented me from picking up on tendencies or discovering certain narratives within the selected discourse that other researchers possibly would have picked up on.

The second limitation concerns the multilingual nature of the plenary debates of the European Parliament. As has also been mentioned in Chapter 3, there are 24 official languages in the EP. This means that analysing these debates has limited me to translations of many statements made by MEPs, as not every single MEP speaks English during these debates. I have utilised the function of Google Translate to translate entire web pages, as this was more convenient for the number of statements and debates analysed. The translations seemed credible, as sentences almost exclusively made sense. In the cases that they did not, other translating sites were utilised. This dependency on translations has possibly decreased certain nuances that may have been discovered by researchers that would be able to read in these languages. Not only does this decrease the reproducibility, but it also could have made my findings less accurate.

The third limitation that I want to emphasize here is that I have only analysed the twelve selected debates. In Chapter 3, I have elaborated on how these debates were selected, but in this selection process I have made the conscious decision to only focus on debates that had as its topic specifically LGBTI related issues, such as LGBTI rights or homophobia. This does not mean that the selected debates represent all the discourse there is within the EP regarding LGBTI rights. It is likely that LGBTI rights were also mentioned when having discussions during debates on minority rights, discrimination, or immigration. Analysing all these debates that touch upon LGBTI rights would go beyond the scope of this thesis, but might have generated different findings, as the context of these debates may lead to some Othering narratives being present over others. Similar to this point is the limitation that only one debate

was about an actor external to the EU. As elaborated upon in section 4.1.5 the debate on homophobia in Uganda resulted in partly different findings than the debates on homophobia within the EU. Therefore, if there had been more debates about actors outside the EU, the results may have been different.

The last limitation to touch upon in this section is that the analysed statements by MEPs are not always representative of entire political groups within the EP. For example, as has been touched upon throughout the analysis, a significant portion of the EPP group, as well as the S&D group seem to take a different stance. However, these MEPs do not seem to take part in these debates, which means that their voices are not represented. At least not by the party they belong to. If the voting is considered, different patterns may be discerned concerning the homogeneity within the different political groups. Based on my analysis, including certain statements made by MEPs, it is in particular the EPP group, and to a lesser extent the S&D group that are more heterogenous. The fact that only MEPs that participated during these debates have been analysed, does subsequently mean that the findings of this thesis only pertain to the narratives directly presented during these debates, rather than the variety of narratives that may be present when considering the entirety of MEPs in the EP. In particular, the voice of MEPs that do not belong to any group, also called NI MEPs, is not emphasized in this research. The ones that participated in the analysed debates would predominantly fall either in cluster one or two, but because the idea of Non-Inscrits is inherently because they do not want to associate themselves with one party, no conclusive or generalizing statement can be made about them.

5.4. Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this thesis warrant further research into this topic. The first suggestion is conducting a retrospective longitudinal analysis of how LGBTI rights have been used in the

EP to shape the identity of the EU throughout the twenty-first century. The reason for this is that the research regarding LGBTI rights, and the narratives created and used in the European Parliament is limited and spread over different periods. Combined with the results of this thesis that indicate a major shift away from homonationalism and leveraged pedagogy, towards Polarization, the question that arises is when this shift started to occur and how it developed over time. As stated in section 5.2, research on homonationalism and leveraged pedagogy within the European Parliament is based on debates held throughout the early 2000s (Kulpa, 2013; Colpani & Habed, 2014; Ammaturo, 2015; Szulc, 2021; Eigenmann, 2022), whereas Eigenmann's research about what this thesis has named Polarization is built on debates from 2016 and 2019. This thesis has in turn considered debates from the current Ninth European Parliament, which contains debates from 2019 through 2023, and highlights large differences with twenty years ago. This creates a gap about what has happened in between the researched periods and how the narratives have changed.

In addition, further research may also delve deeper into tensions within political groups. This research is limited to debates specifically on the topic of LGBTI rights, and solely the narratives presented by MEPs during these debates are considered. However, as indicated by some MEPs, the EPP and to a lesser extent the S&D seemed to contain more internal conflict than was present during these debates. Taking a broader stance by considering debates where LGBTI rights are merely mentioned or by considering voting behaviour may shed more light on internal tensions within political parties. This also concerns tensions within right-wing groups, as there are a few MEPs that do support LGBTI rights. By focusing on these different aspects that have not been included in this research, future research can create a more comprehensive view of how political groups use or approach LGBTI rights.

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