

(Mis?)representing LGBTI refugees: instrumentalization strategies in media coverage of asylum policy in Germany

Maryna Shevtsova

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study examines recent discourses and representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) refugees in selected German media. In 2011, sexual orientation and gender identity were both finally added to Article 10 of the EU Qualification directive making LGBTI asylum seekers eligible for refugee status in the European Union. With over 70 countries around the world having laws criminalizing same-sex relations, thousands of LGBTI people every year head towards a “safer haven” looking for asylum in the European Union member states. Germany, which had the highest number of asylum applications in 2015 in the EU (more than 476,000), is one of their main destinations. According to *Schwulenberatung Berlin*, a gay rights organization and counselling center, the estimated number of LGBTI asylum seekers in Berlin alone exceeds 3.500. Yet, despite the increasing number of queer¹ refugees, until recently, this constituency remained one of the most silenced and invisible within the European asylum system as well as ignored by the public discourse surrounding migration issues (Spijkerboer 2013; Gartner 2015).

¹Throughout this chapter, the terms LGBTI and/or queer will be used to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or otherwise queer. This option opts for the shorter acronym to represent the larger community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, pansexual, or otherwise queer/questioning individuals. In the places where other authors' work is cited, I used the acronym chosen by them.

The recent influx of refugees into the European Union has been receiving significant national media coverage featuring rather heated discussions in all member states, with Germany not being an exception. In particular, the issue of LGBTI refugees has come into the focus of media attention. In Germany, as well as in other countries across the EU, Canada, or the USA, the debates related to queer asylum seekers are largely based on the assumption that there are certain “European” or “Western” values as juxtaposed to those of people arriving to Germany from Muslim countries (Guler 2017; Matar 2017; and others). The list of such values would definitely include the principles of tolerance and non-discrimination of others on the basis of one’s sexual orientation and gender identity. The present chapter engages with the image of a queer/LGBTI refugee constructed by German newspapers within this debate. It demonstrates that queer refugees are presented and described by analyzed German newspapers rather selectively making certain groups of queer asylum seekers more visible and present than the others. The chapter argues that this selective description or representation gain political meaning, first, justifying presence of one group over the others, and, second, reinforcing negative perceptions and images of some non-queer refugees, more specifically, Muslims, less informed parts of German population may already have.

The processes of attitude formations toward foreigners and refugees, in particular, have been substantially covered in the literature on migration in the past twenty years (e.g. Augoustinos/Quinn 2003; Triandafyllidou 2013; Hochman 2015). The scholars examining discourses employed in different countries or referring to “us” (the people of the host country) and “them” (newcomers) discuss how conflicting terms are being used to present one side as “normal” and the other as “deviant” or simply “the other” (Pickering 2001; Bartram 2015). The existing works on framing effects of media discourse prove that national media has strong impact on population’s attitudes towards immigration and asylum policy (Knoll/Redlawsk/Sanborn 2010). Multiple studies have shown how the way in which a message about immigration or refugees is delivered to an audience influences the ways in which this audience will think about or perceive a specific issue (Ommundsen et al 2014; Haynes/Merolla/ Ramakrishnan 2016). So far, however, few studies have paid attention to social functions of representation of “normality” and “deviation” when it comes to portraying certain refugee groups in media (Hochman 2015).

The present chapter uses the existing framing theories and homonationalism concept coined by Jasbir Puar (2007) to analyze German media coverage on LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers. It questions the ways in which the topic has been instrumentalized by press and the reasoning behind them. The chapter

argues that the dominant discourse on queer asylum seekers strengthens the division between German population and Muslim refugees while presenting both groups in generalized and homogenized ways. Such simplified representation leads to establishing of an exclusionary order in which some groups are visible and perceived as those in need of help and support and others are overlooked and not heard. While framing effects of German media discourse are yet to be covered by a larger quantitative research, this chapter discusses possible implications for different groups of queer refugees in Germany. This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I briefly introduce existing scholarly debates and allocate present research in literature, then, I discuss the methods chosen. The next section of the chapter presents the empirical findings of the study and discusses them. I conclude with a brief summary and discussion of the implications of study results.

1.2 MEDIA ROLE IN SHAPING PERCEPTIONS OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Recent social and political developments regarding the global refugee crisis and its consequences for Europe have inevitably become a central theme for the media, provoking extensive and ongoing debates around the issues of new migration flows, state asylum policies, and the integration of refugees and asylum seekers within host societies. Migration and media have produced a substantial amount of literature covering issues of instrumentalization, framing, and constructing images of refugees and asylum seekers (Greussing/Boomgaarden 2017). Several authors claim that refugees are often portrayed by media as either victims or passive recipients requiring to be rescued, protected and taken care of (Horsti 2008; Olivius 2016) or as dangerous and deviant “others” presenting a threat to the safety and well-being of the citizens in the host country (Es-ses/Medianu/Lawson 2013). Szczepaniková (2008) argues that refugees are predominantly depicted as people of no or little choice that deprives asylum seekers from agency and presents them as subjects in the need of governance. Such media practices need to be questioned as they result instrumental for public sphere. For example, victimization of refugees and stressing their need for assistance may be applied by the media to appeal to the emotions and moral obligations of the citizens (Harrell-Bond 1999; Steimel 2010), yet that can also create a one-sided image of the asylum seekers as putting a burden on the state’s budget (Madra/Adaman 2014). Moreover, portrayal of asylum seekers from certain countries or cultures as a threat creates strong public associations between refugees, terrorism, and crime, on the one hand, and makes people doubt the legiti-

macy of refugees' presence, on the other (Bennett et al. 2013). It is important, therefore, to critically approach and challenge the existing frames to understand how media reflects, instrumentalizes, and reproduces existing power structures and inequalities, and what political implications such reflections and instrumentalization may have for instrumentalized subjects, in the given case, different groups of refugees and asylum seekers in Germany.

Jasbir Puar (2007) proposed the conceptual frame of "homonationalism" to discuss complexities of how "tolerance" for lesbian and gay subjects became a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty was evaluated. Introduced in the America's 9/11 context, homonationalism further travelled across the world as "an analytic category deployed to understand and historicize how and why a nation's status as 'gay-friendly' has become desirable in the first place" (Puar 2013: 336). Puar defines a historical moment as "homonational" to mark a shift when a state defines "(some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states" by this dismissing the others, considered less valuable (2013: 337). The concept has travelled across geographic spaces; Ritchie (2014), for example, is very efficient in demonstrating how the concept can be used to explain presenting Israel as gay-friendly as opposed to Arabic states in front of Western democracies (2014: 621). Ammaturo (2015) applies the term to the analysis of the European Court of Human Rights arguing that the concept of European Sexual Citizenship is homonationalist in nature as it reinforces the divide between "tolerant" and "intolerant" EU member states where West is presented "queer-friendly" and the rest of the countries – homo- and transphobic (2015, 1152). For the goals of the present chapter, Puar's work presents an efficient heuristic tool to understand instrumentalization of "tolerance" and "LGBT rights" in German media discourse.

As the United Nations Refugee Agency in 2008 came up with the official guidelines for asylum claims on the ground of one's sexual orientation and gender identity, scholarly interest in the politics, experiences of and legal practices around lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and intersex refugees and asylum-seekers has been persistently growing (Lewis/Naples 2014). Lately, more scholars started engaging with the question of how LGBTI refugees are perceived within national asylum systems as well as by political actors and wider population in different countries (White 2013; Murray 2016). In Matar's view, words "refugee" and "asylum seeker" in Western European media turned into a "fixed and rigid category" within which a clear hierarchy exists defining who are those who "qualify" for protection and who are "unworthy" of being "saved" (Matar 2017). This chapter goes further questioning whether there is an attempt to create

such a hierarchy among LGBTI refugees arriving to Germany and what might be the political reasoning behind it.

1.3 METHOD

For the present study, I use critical discourse analysis to study the ways in which “social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk 2001: 352). To analyze discourse is important since it produces knowledge and establishes ideologies that create and maintain power relations in which people – in this case, LGBTI refugees and citizens of a host country (Germany) – are involved. In discourse analysis, the attention is paid not only to grammatical or lexical forms in a text but also to the ways in which a person exercises control over a situation within a society using the genre of this text with specific purposes (Wodak 2002: 11). The newspapers in particular are important objects for discourse analysis as they tend to use various patterns in their discourse “to mediate various ideologies, especially when writing on topical social issues” (Shudson 2002: 150).

Data for this study are comprised of ten newspaper articles selected from five newspapers in Germany: *die Welt* (English: “The World”), a German national daily newspaper published as a broadsheet by Axel Springer SE and presenting as they define it a “liberal cosmopolitan position”; the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* presenting a center-right and liberal-conservative position; the central-leftist newspaper *Berliner Zeitung*; the daily *der Tagesspiegel* and the rather leftist *Die Tageszeitung*. The study uses the online versions of the newspapers since they often have a larger audience. Data analysis has been conducted in two different stages. First, it focused on the portrayal of LGBTI refugee as juxtaposed to the German population. At the second stage, the analyses show how the image of a refugee is being constructed as inclusive for some groups and exclusive for the others. The analyses draw on the lexical features and structures of the argument that the journalists were using in different parts of the articles.

1.4 SAVING LGBTI REFUGEES: GERMANY AS A TOLERANT HOST-COUNTRY

UNHCR (2015) has presented a comprehensive report on press coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis in five EU member states, including Germany. According to this report, the predominant number of articles discussing refugee crisis was referring to Syria as a main source of asylum seekers followed by Iraq, Afghanistan, and Eritrea (2015: 7). The discourse on refugees in Germany, therefore, is shaped around the idea of asylum seekers coming mostly from the

Middle East, i.e. Arab, Muslim countries. The purpose of this section is to illustrate how the language, modality and the selection of the subjects for newspaper articles in Germany lead to the reproduction of existing stereotypes. These stereotypes present Germany as a country with the population friendly and welcoming towards LGBTI subjects as opposed to Muslim people, including Muslim heterosexual refugees. I reckon there are several negative outcomes of such a generalization. First, it overlooks problems, diversities, and complexities within German population itself and silences still existing homophobia and transphobia. Second, it homogenizes Muslim non-LGBTI refugees as a group attributing to them negative characteristics as opposed to “Europeans.” Finally, it positions Muslim queer refugees in a weird condition as while being “saved” by Germans from their “backward” compatriots it does not necessarily makes them more welcomed by local population or preserves them from Islamo- or xenophobia faced by other non-White asylum seekers.

One of the examples of confusing practices of separating dangerous refugees from those in need of protection is maybe an ongoing discussion of the need for a special shelter for LGBTI refugees in some German cities. Such a need was justified by the fact that LGBTI refugees staying in the usual shelters are facing there the same level of danger they had to deal with in their home countries:

» Das Gefühl, in einem engen Zimmer eingesperrt zu sein, umgeben von Menschen, für die Homosexualität eine Sünde ist. „Das war die schlimmste Zeit meines Lebens“, sagt der Syrer. „Ich musste mir mit den Menschen ein Zimmer teilen, vor denen ich mein ganzes Leben lang davongerannt bin.“ (The feeling of being locked in a narrow room surrounded by people for whom homosexuality is a sin. „That was the worst time of my life,” says the Syrian. I had to share a room with the people, from whom I have been running away all my life.) (Source: Berliner Zeitung 2015).

While the sensitivity of the issue, the fear of an asylum seeker to face violence in the asylum is well-grounded and this paper is not to argue against or to support the need to have separate shelters for LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers, the article, like many others on the topic, present the case in such a way that it seems that the danger of homophobic aggression in Germany or in Berlin is coming from one source only – Muslim heterosexual refugees locked in the shelters. The tone of the article does not make much difference between backgrounds, education, and intentions of these people portraying them as a rather homogenous backward mass. It also seems to overlook the threat of racist and homophobic violence that can as well come from certain groups of the local population of Berlin and assuming that once separated from “bad” Muslims

these LGBTI refugees will automatically be safe (see, for example, Anderson 2016). The newspaper in such a manner reproduces already prevailing messages from the government:

» Doch das war, bevor die Flüchtlinge in riesiger Zahl über die Grenze kamen. Ihre Herkunft und die Tatsache, dass die meisten Muslime sind, erzwangen gerade bei Konservativen ein Nachdenken darüber, was in Deutschlands Wertekatalog denn eigentlich drinsteht oder was man noch hineinschreiben kann. Seither fehlt in kaum einer Rede gerade aus dem Mund von Unionspolitikern der Verweis darauf, dass die Neuankömmlinge Homosexuelle, ihre Partnerschaften, ja öffentlichen Liebesbekundungen nicht nur hinzunehmen, sondern zu respektieren hätten.« (Yet that was before the refugees in huge numbers came across the borders. Their origin and the fact that most of them were Muslims made the conservatives think about the list of German values or about what can be added to that one. Since then, hardly a speech of Union politicians has been lacking the reference to the fact that the newcomers not only had to accept homosexuals, their partnerships, and even public expressions of love, but also to respect them.) (Source: Welt 2015).

While die Welt obviously sounds skeptical about newly tolerant position of German politicians appealing to the differences between a “German” and a “Muslim” mindset, the article presents the story in such a way as if the catalogue of “German values” has been there before and has only been overlooked by politicians while seemingly widely accepted by the larger population. Neither does the article questions the legitimacy of an assumption or generalization of all the Muslims as non-tolerant and lacking respect towards homosexuals.

Quoted parts can be a good example of homonationalist discourse mentioned in the theoretical part. Tolerance towards homosexuality is presented as a general characteristic of the (German) nation as well as a marker of superiority of one nation over other(s). There is an assumption that there exists a universal list of German values including respect towards LGBTI people. Supposedly, it means that there are also abstract Muslim values that are more limited in this regard. One may question whether all the Germans as well as all the Muslims automatically share the same values, and the logical answer would be “no.” There is also a group of LGBTI asylum seekers from Arab countries who, despite their homosexuality, are often also Muslim, including practicing Muslim. The existing discourse does not leave space for them creating two exclusive categories: “Muslim” or “gay.” This can be well supported by the statement below:

»Wir haben ein Vollzugsdefizit, kein Gesetzesdefizit. Im Rahmen unserer gültigen Rechtsordnung muss dafür gesorgt werden, dass die Menschen, die unseren Schutz

suchen, auch unsere Rechtsordnung achten. Wer die Rechte von Frauen, von Christen oder Homosexuellen missachtet, muss auch die Klarheit und Schärfe unserer Rechtsordnung spüren. « (We have a deficit of execution but not of laws. Within the framework of our valid legal order, we must ensure that the people who seek our protection respect our legal system. Those who disregard the rights of women, Christians or homosexuals must also feel the clarity and sharpness of our legal system). (Source: Tagesspiegel 2016).

According to the UNHCR report mentioned above, the key source in news accounts on refugee and asylum seekers in the country were domestic politicians (32.8%) with weak presence of NGOs' (6.7%) and migrants' voices (9.3%, the lowest among countries analyzed). Furthermore, approximately 44 % of the articles stresses humanitarian reasoning behind German asylum policy (2015: 7). It explains, therefore, why parts of media became instrumental in framing a homonationalist image of Germany as opposed to Muslim world. One can speculate on what is the exact reasoning behind employed homonationalist and/or humanitarian discourse. It can be an intention to create an opposition to the current governing coalition and gaining population votes or to unite the nation around homonationalist idea (or both). While humanitarian reasoning mentioned before may be a good way to shape public opinion towards being more welcoming with refugees and asylum seekers, abusing it may also result counter-productive. As this section showed, LGBTI people in this framework are presented as victims in need of protection; there is a clear division between heterosexual Muslim men and LGBTI asylum seekers fleeing the same countries. This division, in reality, is rarely clear and neither is it justified, as one can be a queer Muslim, a tolerant heterosexual Muslim, a (non)tolerant towards homosexuals Syrian or Iraqi person, and other multiple options. I will further discuss the typical portray of a LGBTI asylum seeker in German media against the backdrop of the refugee crisis.

1.5 A (MIS?)REPRESENTED LGBTI REFUGEE

For quite some time already, the public debate has been evolving on the legitimacy and rationality of using the developing and growing umbrella term LGBT(Q,I, A, etc.) as mixing together all non-cisgender and non-heterosexual people means overlooking specific problems of particular groups (see, for example, Aravosis 2013). This section may as well work as support for this claim showing how often behind the abbreviation meant to mean "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people" only one or few groups are standing while others are overlooked or left behind. As the analysis of the article has shown, the discourse on LGBTI refugees fleeing to Germany is almost exclusively focusing on gay men rather than covering other groups. While it can be partially justified by the fact

that, indeed, among LGBTI refugees from the Middle East homosexual male are the most numerous group, it does not explain why L, B, T, I refugees from the other countries are not that often – or not at all – mentioned by the press. Most of the articles by German media present an LGBTI refugee as a young Muslim gay man from Syria or another Middle Eastern country who still has to hide his sexuality from his counter-parts in Germany.

»Ich habe mich selbst oft gefragt: „Werden homosexuelle Syrer in Deutschland ihre sexuelle Identität frei leben können – ohne Angst vor Anfeindungen ihrer Herkunftsgesellschaften, ihrer Familien oder der anderen nach Deutschland geflüchteten Syrer?“ Die Antwort lautet offensichtlich: Nein. « I often have asked myself, will homosexual Syrians be able to live free in Germany with their sexual identity, without fear of hostility from the side of their home countries, their families or the other Syrians refugees in Germany? The answer is obviously: No). (Source: Tagesspiegel 2017).

The pictures supporting the articles and imaginaries behind the verbal description of LGBTI refugees is usually the same; young homosexual Arab men. It is barely possible to come across an article in the German national media on trans people from the home countries of LGBTI refugees not to mention lesbians, as well as intersex for whom the task to flee safely is even more problematic; or bisexuals or lesbians who were in heterosexual marriage and now face the problem of proving their reasons to be accommodated in Germany to the migration authorities. The almost exclusive focus on Syria is even more problematic as, in fact, there are astonishing numbers of LGBTI refugees coming to Germany and EU member states from other countries where homosexuality is either criminalized or the level of homophobic violence is disturbing; African countries, Latin America, Pakistan, Russia, Central Asia. Yet even more specialized media sources barely take time to reflect on this topic. It will take a persistent researcher some time to find more material on LGBTI refugees coming from other parts of the world in non-specialized academic literature. The IWWIT blog in Germany presents a rare example of such a source. The article “LGBT-Flüchtlinge in Deutschland: Der lange Weg, bist sie wirklich angekommen sind” (LGBT refugees in Germany, long way until they will have arrived indeed) is one of really few speaking about lesbian and trans people experiences (though briefly) and pointing out that while the refugees from Syria are now in the focus of the media there are many other countries where life is unbearable for LGBT people and the political and/or social conditions push them to flee. They quote a gay person from Russia:

»Im Moment sprechen alle über Syrien und kaum noch jemand über Russland«, sagt Sergiu. „Die Situation für Schwule und Lesben hat sich dort allerdings nicht geändert“. Viele Aktivisten aus dem LGBT- und HIV-Bereich in Osteuropa, mit denen er in den zurückliegenden Jahren zusammengearbeitet hat, sind mittlerweile ins Ausland gegangen. Manche haben ihre Wohnungen in Moskau vermietet und finanzieren so ihr Exil in Ländern mit niedrigen Lebenshaltungskosten wie Thailand oder Indien. Andere suchen Asyl in den USA oder eben auch in Deutschland. « („Currently all are speaking about Syria and almost no one about Russia,” says Sergiu. “The situation of gays and lesbians there, has not changed, though.” Many activists from LGBT and HIV area in Eastern Europe with whom he worked in previous years had moved abroad in the meantime. Some of them rent out their flats in Moscow and so have means to live in exile in countries where the living expenses are low, like Thailand or India. Others look for asylum in the USA or also in Germany). (Source: IWWIT blog 2015).

This section’s title is “a (mis?) represented LGBTI refugee” as referring to who can be imagined as a “typical” LGBTI refugee in Germany by a person familiarized with the topic only based on non-specialized German press. Such a reader will most probably imagine an Arab, preferably Syrian or Iraqi gay men, who is eager to be “out and proud”, engage in LGBTI activism – but possibly cannot easily do so due to the fear of persecution from his family members or relatives or other refugees in Germany. The explanation for this selectiveness is simple; as Koller (2004) argues, media discourse usually reproduces the dominant public discourse. In other words, since the dominant public in Germany in 2015 was refugee flow from Syria, media reflected it supporting and reproducing existing stereotypes surrounding it. However, the selective presentation of LGBTI refugees in the media made mostly from the perspective of male homosexual Syrians rather than including other multiple discriminated groups leads to marginalization of other groups or their being overlooked or ignored. These groups include other non-heterosexual identities (lesbians, transgender people, bisexuals, intersex and other queer people) as well as non-Arab LGBTI people.

The “out and proud” or at least wishing to be proud is another point worth attention. There is no doubt that Germany does provide those willing it with an option to engage actively into visible life of LGBTI community and be integrated there. There is nothing said, however, in the media about those LGBTI people who may not want to be out due to number of reason or even not self-identify as “gays” while demonstrating homosexual behavior. The dominant discourse does not seem to have space for such people who remain out of two categories – “gay” or “Muslim” the previous section mentioned. Sticking to this discourse may create false expectations from all LGBTI asylum seekers to be “out and

proud” to prove their homosexuality and vulnerability in front of the immigration authorities. The latter, in fact, is very often truth.

Giving more voice to one group while not representing the others is, first, political as it gives signal to both LGBTI refugees and general population of who is supported. Second, more specific implication maybe creating a wrong image of who is in safer situation or comes from a safer country. This may have impact on court decision on granting refugee status to an applicant or on policy makers and donor organizations deciding where to channel financial and technical support. While analyzing material for the present chapter, I have been told by several activists and volunteers working with LGBTI refugees from Russia and Ukraine that it became almost impossible to get the refugee status in Germany as those are considered “safer” countries compared to MENA region. Those statements have not been confirmed by any statistical data and do not reflect the real situation within the asylum system in Germany, of course, yet they can be an illustration on how opinions are influenced by media. A lesbian or a bisexual person can also be misinformed in such a way by media discourse feeling they will not be supported in the same way. This is not to say that there are not enough male gay Syrians men in Germany who need help and support. I argue, however, that narrowing down an image of an LGBTI refugee in Germany is highly likely to have political implications on the ground and to affect other, less visible and unrepresented groups. Koller (2004), quoted above, also claims that it is in power of media to change existing discourse bringing news topics or subjects to the discussion, however, it is not happening in German press so far (2004: 176).

1.6. CONCLUSION

The present chapter offered the findings of critical discourse analysis applied to a number of articles (see the full list in appendix) in the leading German online newspapers. The chapter addressed instrumental role of media in portrayal of LGBTI refugees in the domestic discourse focusing on role of LGBTI refugees in creating a contrast between German population and refugees from the Middle East as well as questioning what image occupies central place in presenting an abstract or maintained as more visible or representable “queer refugee.” It also speculated on the effects such media discourse may have in the nearest future.

As it is stated in the chapter, the discussion of LGBTI refugees in German media has evolved against the backdrop of general refugee crisis involving asylum seekers arriving from the Middle Eastern country and, thus, the central place in the discussion took the so-called ‘clash of values’ where progressive German values were persistently juxtaposed to the more ‘backward Muslim’ ones. In or-

der to be allowed to stay in Germany, the refugees would have to learn to respect the “German list of values” which inevitably included respect and tolerance towards LGBTI people. The findings also demonstrated that the image of an LGBTI refugee mostly represented in the German media in the last 2-3 years appeared to be rather selective, describing a “typical” or imagined by a reader LGBTI refugee in a manner that excludes many other categories, such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexuality. The “typical” refugee is usually portrayed as male homosexual, typically young, Muslim, of Syrian or other Middle Eastern origin. More importantly, the asylum seekers are expected either to be out and proud or at least have expectations or hopes to do so in a new, freer environment, even though there might be obstacles (like potentially homophobic relatives or compatriots surrounding them) preventing them from doing so. I argue that maintaining such a discourse is problematic, first, because it is very exclusive and overlooks many other groups of queer refugees and asylum seekers in the need of help. Apart from creating wrong imaginaries in the public sphere, encouraging growing Islamophobia and narrowing LGBT(Q,I+) group to only “G”, this may lead to wrong perception among the power actors who have a say in deciding the future destiny of asylum seekers such as judges in the immigration courts, policy makers, donor organizations, etc.

To conclude, even though, indeed, Germany has been so far one of the most generous hosting states both for LGBTI refugees providing them with much friendlier legal environment than any Middle-Eastern country, this should not prevent one from being critical on whose account an image of refugee-friendly host-state is being created and by whom. The focus on the danger for the LGBTI refugees coming from the Middle East shifts the audience’s attention to the problems with lack of acceptance, Islamophobia and homophobic violence within German society itself presenting it as an issue of other cultures while there is still a large room for improvement both on the level of the society and among the major political actors.

Furthermore, one of the likeliest implications of simplified contrast between homophobic Muslims and queer refugees in the same shelter is growing Islamophobia and xenophobia among less informed population groups. It may be useful to consider the case of the Netherlands, where respect towards LGBTI rights turned into a key issue of heated debates between right wing groups and supporters of multiculturalism (Duyvendak 2011). As the consequence, the country became a central topic for feminist and queer studies critique blaming the Dutch government for being Islamophobic and justifying its Islamophobia with the need to protect rights of LGBTI citizens (Butler 2008). While the critique was fair, the homophobic attitudes and aggression towards homosexual people in the

Netherlands also had documental confirmation (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011) and can, therefore, not be ignored.

In other words, to address critically reproduction of the stereotypical opposition between a “tolerant German” and a “conservative Muslim” is not enough anymore and may even result counter-productive preventing efficient work with homophobia and transphobia among both European and non-European groups of refugees and population. A more nuanced and complex media representation, though, could become an efficient tool to make public understanding of the problems related with queer migration to Germany more informed and balanced. A possible solution to the problems discussed in this chapter would be giving more voice to underrepresented LGBTI refugee groups (lesbians, bisexuals, religious queer people, queer people of different ethnic backgrounds) as well as to the experts (NGO staff, legal practitioners, etc.). The efforts not only of the activists and NGOs and of policy makers engaged within the field but also of the journalists should be aimed at bridging the gap between the convenient perceptions and reality to compensate the lack of understanding of how selective description or representation gain political meaning.

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APPENDIX 1. ARTICLES USED FOR ANALYSIS

Berliner Zeitung

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Autorinnen und Autoren

Shevtsova, Maryna, holds a PhD in Political Science from Humboldt University, Berlin. She is currently a Senior Non-Resident Adjunct Fellow at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation in Kyiv, Ukraine and a Project Supervisor at the LGBTI parents’ organization TERGO. Among her recent publications is a co-edited volume “LGBTI Asylum Seekers and Refugees from a Legal and Political Perspective – Persecution, Asylum and Integration” with Arzu Guler and Denise Venturi, upcoming with Springer in 2018.