

A collection of interviews with LGBTQ+  
activists in  
Bucharest, 2016

# Family

# Portrait

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## FOREWORD

Between August 2016 and January 2017 I was conducting “fieldwork” for my MA thesis in Bucharest, a piece that –long story short– later turned out focusing on discourses around visibility among LGBT activists. “Fieldwork” is here a fancy word to describe months of making connections; attending events, activist meetings and queer parties; of questioning my own role and subjectivity as a researcher; of being doubtful; of being optimistic; but mainly of speaking to a lot of people; and generally of being amazed at others’ work, passions, creativity.

The results of these months have been academic, hopefully well argued, but undeniably inaccessible and arguably boring reads. How disappointed I was at seeing interesting quotes and insights from long interviews having to be cut out because of word limits, of argumentative needs, of limited scope. Writing my thesis felt more an exercise in abandonment than in creativity.

However, I was never good at letting go, so I hope you will enjoy a selection of these interviews as much as I enjoyed collecting them, keeping them stored and eventually tidying them up for this small publication. In some my voice briefly appears, in others I preferred letting the interviewees’ words flow without interruptions.

All of them refer to the specific time in which they happened, and in this sense their collection is more similar to a family portrait –prone to freeze an age– than a statement of intentions. Family was a contested word over 2016, and sadly it might be for more time to come. However, family is also a word with a lot of potential for evoking irony, caricature, emotions, fragility, tensions and solidarity. And care, which of all of those is my favorite. What to say, I am a femme at heart.

In this spirit I want to care for these words and thank every one of the people featuring here for sharing their time, insights and experience with me, and now with you reading.

**Alice, Bucharest 2017**

## DANI PRISACARIU

Non-binary activist, founder of GenderTalk

Dani sits on the grass, tells me about the struggles of language and gender binarism, community building and being oneself. In their words one can read enthusiasm, tenderness and optimism. They start by telling me about GenderTalk, a meeting and support group for non-binary and genderqueer people:

Yes, it's cool, it's nice to see people thinking about and speaking about it in Romanian. It's funny because if you don't speak about yourself and about this kind of things in your own language it's weird...you're just remaining with English, which is not your language and it's kind of foreign stuff that is out there. We even use so many English words like queer, and non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, gender-whatever!

Probably people in the trans\* community talk about gender sometimes but most of the focus is on transition and how to pass. Which is valid of course, but I couldn't hear any discussion anywhere in the LGBT community about how ...about gender! How we see ourselves, how we perceive others, what are the struggles that we have in terms of how to speak about ourselves, how to interact with others or...I don't know, how hard it is to be sort of here in this world, which is very binary and you kind of don't have a place, you don't know how to explain to other people what's your identity and.. there's no community that can support you for that except some of your friends and stuff like that. So I really wanted to do something.

I know very many people who are non-binary and we have a lot of discussions when we meet at conferences and study sessions and all kinds of things, but in Romania there was no discussion about this. And it started, because the first person I met who was non-binary was like "oh my god, you're here!". So there it's started, they told me there are more people, so let's see where these people are and whether they would like to meet. But then I realized that maybe it's better to have some sort of broader approach to the group and just sort of put the focus on gender, including trans, non-binary, and whatever questioning people who just want to explore their gender.

But the point is that the meetings are not a place for educating other people. The purpose is just to have a safe space where people can be themselves without fear to be judged, and where people can discuss about these things, like discuss about them in Romanian, not just be on Tumblr or whatever kind of internet website whatever... You can learn about these words, but also trying to find the Romanian ones. Kind of looking at how we can speak more neutrally, these kinds of things. So that's what we discussed sometimes.

I'm thinking also about myself. It's really difficult to explain to somebody like... before doing the GenderTalk on language, I wanted to do that topic because I was in the supermarket and I was wearing this pin which had the non-binary flag and said "Non-binary" on it. And then there is this cashier, who was there and he always makes small talk with me and he asked me "what is this pin about?". And it was like, I couldn't! Because I knew that probably...you have to assume that people don't know anything about this, because probably that's the reality for the majority of people. So it was so hard to explain! And I tried to explain that like: you know how people are usually divided between men and women? Sometimes there are other people that are neither men nor women and like...he was a bit confused but he kind of nodded thoughtfully. Yes, so it kind of ended there!

So is this kind of thing... but like I don't know, for parents and stuff like that I don't feel that I could explain to them in this point in life. So I don't do that. Even with friends... I... it's hard because in

Romanian there is no neutrality in language, so even though I explain to them that I don't identify as either, it's still a bit difficult to know how much they actually understand. Probably part of them do understand and part of them are just like "whatever I don't really know". But still I don't have a requirement for them to use the gender neutral pronouns, because there is no such a thing, but what I do sometimes with people, I ask them.. because people here say a lot "how are you girls?" and things like these. This is very usual: "how are you girls?" "girls, girls, girls!" whatever. So it's something people say so often, and sometimes I am like "whatever, I don't care", sometimes I just tell them "please, can you use another word? because not everybody who's here perhaps identifies as a woman and I prefer that you use something else"...and these kinds of small things.

And usually when I talk to people who are not in this context, I just have a lot of gender discussion, which are binary but still very important because there's a lot of sexism that happens through all of these spaces. And like now I was doing a training with like 7 other people, and there were all these discussion, I don't know how to explain it, I even find it difficult to find the words for it, but there is this kind of unspoken agreement about gender, when it comes to women and men per se, and even though it's not blatantly sexist as in "women are whatever and they should do whatever", it's very subtle and made of jokes, really nice jokes and whatever. People are not like aggressive or really clearly sexist. And people just go with the flow and it's like "just a joke", and "it's just a man, he can say this". And I try to have these discussions with people, but I realize that... it's a long way to go. And in this sense, in a way, is useful for me not to be in the LGBT field anymore. It helped me to see the reality. Sometimes I feel that the LGBT community loses the contact with the rest of the world, and we're in our bubble. And of course we suffer from these kind of things like misgendering and people saying shit and stuff like that, but...this is life in a way, so you cannot just expect that the world changes just because ...you have another view. Like I have a view of the world, but I understand that probably I don't know how much time has to pass until the rest of society sees it, so I need now to understand how to build a bridge between this world, and the rest of the world. Because for me now, if people say "girl" or whatever: sometimes it bothers me, sometimes I don't care. But for other people it might be really damaging. So how can I, that I am comfortable now, work towards making the space a little bit better for younger people, or for people in general for whom it's harder to be misgendered. Like of course in an ideal world I'd like people to respect fully my identity... but if it doesn't happen right now, I can't just sit and cry about it. And I think training in being in the "straight" kind of spaces it's useful, because I now feel I have the strength to do it and it's ok. Sometimes it's really damaging me, but it's ok, like, it's decent so far. So now I'm trying to figure this out. It's pretty confusing.

So that's why I think GenderTalk is good. I think binary, non-binary and trans people that come here, they just come together and learn something about each other's struggle. Which is sometimes really funny and nice. Like we had this funny moment with a person who's coming: they were all discussing like, I don't know, about body and stuff...and I was like "oh my god, I cannot tell you how hard it was for me, how many years it took me to have the courage not to shave my legs", I was telling to her. And she was like "you have no idea how many years it took me to have the courage to shave my legs!". It was funny and sweet..

## ADRIAN SCHIOP

Writer

I meet Adrian in his flat in Ferentari. We make tea and start joking and chatting about various topics, from his successful novel *Soldatii. Poveste din Ferentari*, to gay marriage; from the early Gay Prides to the gay parties at the beginning of the years 2000s. In all of those his nonconformist spirit clearly transpires.

### **Do you consider yourself an insider or outsider of the LGBT community?**

Because of Vladuz [referring to Vlad Viski, MozaiQ president] I became more involved. Before I was against, more kind of independent and stuff like this... But because of Vladuz, he convinced me.

### **Ah yeah?**

Hm-hm. Because we lived together, I don't know. He told me about what he was doing, to start a new NGO...I don't know, I got involved. More involved, in a way. But I am still isolated. I mean, I am isolated by myself because it's my way of being, I don't like to be in...I am this kind of guy, you know. I like to be isolated from society, in a way. Not going in the city. I am too lazy! This is the problem. I am too lazy. Now for instance we organize an exhibition, you know. So I've gone twice in town to organize this stuff...you know Adi Paun? So he gathered an archive about the 90s. And it's interesting because it's about homosexuality before the internet. Now it's not like this, but before the Internet it was nice, it was more interesting. Especially in the early 90s.

### **What do you mean more interesting?**

A different situation, like a totally different situation. For meeting with... matrimoniale, you know? In the newspaper.

### **Ah! Yes, yes. But you had to write secretly, or?**

Mmm... Yeah, like for example "I am looking for a friend..." this kind of stuff! "I am alone I am looking for a friend" etc.

### **Oh!**

Pretty interesting.

### **I wanted to ask you about your book, *Soldatii*, how was it received?**

...ehhh like a success. Like a success. It's surprising to me. Because it is then made into a movie and stuff like this, so... that's good.

### **Did you have controversy and stuff? Because I can imagine the reactions are different from people in the queer community and the mainstream society.**

...mmm I had some troubles only in Iași. Because Iași is a bit more religious you know, the people are more religious. And I was invited on a festival there and so I read a fragment from the book. And I chose, I don't know, not a pornographic passage, not a porno one, you know. I mean, it was erotic but not a porno. But anyways, it was about a passage in which the characters meet again and they embrace and the big guy, the big guy embraces and put a finger on the anus of...But you know, only ... anyways, that passage was enough to scandalize the audience!

### **They were like shocked?**

Well, they wrote in a...on a letter, you know, that there were kids there..I mean, you know, college kids!

**Ahhh! I thought, like, children!**

“Ohhh it’s horrible...the city council spends our money on this rubbish...” But you know, scandal usually makes publicity, so there you go!



**Oh well! ...And do you have the feeling that you wrote the book for the community to have a cultural reference or you didn't think of that..?**

You know, as a writer you want to have success in the mainstream, not in the community. In the community is... nah, you want your work to get mainstream in a way. Because my novels are not activist works. I try not to make explicitly activist work. I am an old school guy, I believe in this old school literature, you know? Not being obviously engaged you know? Being a little bit naughty...subversive, like this. Playing the subversive one.

**Do you go to the Pride?**

Yeah, yeah, I go. I usually go. Started when I came to Bucharest, in 2004, so in 2005 I went....



### **How was it?**

The first was nicer because it was with some scandals. With the extreme right, with more adrenaline. But starting with a lot, a lot of police, you know, it was like, it was like army parade! A lot of huge police vans...like soviet you know? These soviet vans... and lots of covered faces, police even.

### **And that was when?**

2005, 2006, 2007...after, after this there was no scandal anymore, after 2007.

### **Did it become more like a party...?**

...No, it's still more like a parade. It doesn't convince me as a party, you know. Because people feel stressed, to party. The party is after.

### **Because there is still tension? Why is there stress?**

I think is about the fear of exposing, you know. Is more about...the stress to be exposed.

### **Do you feel that this year there was more visibility because of the Coalitia, or...do you feel that it was a year that changed some things?**

Ah, lots of, lots of changes... this year it was the one with the most participants. The Coalitia in a way has its positive effect you know? Made the community more visible, radicalizes the community. They start to... fight.

### **And do you think the referendum of the Coalitia will have success?**

I am afraid yes.

### **Oh shit.**

I am afraid yes. Yeah Romania is still a traditional... it takes time. And it's too much.

### **What is too much?**

Marriage, gay marriage. Adoption of a child. Not in Romania. I mean, the Romanians can understand "ok, you like each other. You need something to inherit", something like this, they can understand it, but marriage! Not marriage! Like traditional? No, it's too much!

### **But in a way also some queer people are against marriage anyways...**

Yeah, it depends, in a way...you know, in a way it could sound like a step backwards because you are the subversive, you are against this traditional union, but then we do the same. We fight against, we ridicule weddings and now, you know, we do the same. I don't know. Anyways, never been married!...no, it was the nightmare of my life to go to wedding parties because of relatives, cousins and stuff...I hate them! I hate wedding parties! Spending money, and I earn small money so why I should spend them on fucking weddings!

### **...What else you would like to tell me about?**

I don't know...about parties.

### **Ahh, yes please.**

In Cluj! I started to go to parties in, I think it was the party of millennium, it was my first...I got completely drunk. And someone told me there's a gay New Year's party, you know. In the city. I had just broken up with my boyfriend from back then. Since I broke with him, I needed, you know, to meet other people. But I felt uncomfortable to go to a gay party so I drank a lot. I arrived at the party at 1 o'clock, you know. When there was no food no alcohol, even if I paid...

**Oh shit!**

Back then in Cluj there was like, every month or twice a month there were parties. And at the parties come people from all the Transilvania, you know, it was the only place. And they rented like a bar for the party, it was the same place, but was eventually closed by police. Even though police sometimes appeared but didn't do anything...I think they already got some "leave them alone..." you know, it's dangerous, even if it was before, before the legalization. Because, you know, I think there was something telling "ok these freaks, there freak guys, let them..." someone at the top telling let them alone because it's a political, you know, there's trouble, international trouble if we do something.

**Before 2001 then...**

Yeah. But there was something changed already. There was lots of manele until then. After 2003 manele disappeared from playlists, but in 2000 and 2001 there was manele, it was like, you know... the playlist started with some disco, techno, after this hip hop, because hip hop was a big trend in the early 2000s, and after 1 o' clock, manele! Manele and greek manele... in 2000 people were still ok with manele, and they were more mixed, it was not... the poor was not so discriminated, you know what I mean? Because the whole society was poor, so... And there was no middle class in 2000. Middle class appeared, I think, around 2004, after the economy recovered.

**But this thing about class is interesting, because for example at Queens, the club, you see also more dark guys, but they look more working class, but I don't think they would go...I've never seen them in MozaiQ or these activist gatherings...**

Yeah yeah yeah, hmm yeah yeah yeah. They are not going political, they don't care about this. Yeah yeah yeah. And also Pride. Pride is about middle class. Yeah. And for instance... I had more affairs when I stayed at Vitan, previously I stayed at Vitan, and I had a lot of, not love affairs, sexual affairs. But here I can fuck only people from Ferentari and from Rahova. The other people from different sectors doesn't...

**They don't want to come here?**

Yeah exactly, definately. So...no sexual...

**Do you regret moving then?**

Ahhh! Yes! Yes because you know... life is passing. Yeah. Yeah. ....Ok, so we talk and I got bored so... I tell "what are you doing what are you looking for, I have a place to fuck but it's in Ferentari, do you want to come?". Not, you know, to...to talk and talk and finally "oh no..."

**So you say it at the beginning?**

Exactly! Exactly, you know. Not to waste my time.

**And people answer...?**

Ah no, "I am not afraid, but I don't have time you know.." "maybe tomorrow..?"

## COSIMA OPARTAN

Organizer of the Queer Night, a “straight friendly party” celebrating its 6<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2017

Cosima is quite tall and multi-talented. I witnessed her singing, deejaying, organizing events and being involved in activism. During our talk, rather than an anthropologist, I picture myself being a journalist from some cool-ass queer women magazine. However, I am not, so never mind my questions. She tells me about the Queer Night, its development, crowds and future hopes.

Actually we don't really wanna make the party very tight in terms of LGBT crowd. Our call was practically to unite people that are of other opinions or you know, straight people, or whatever kind of people that wanna come to the party, but...up to the point that they can be offensive and you know, this is not the case! And you have to be...I mean you have to be responsible for the people you get there so... it's not working. In some places is definitely not gonna work.

The goal is to be sustainable but what we really want is to be able to sustain artists, and to bring artists that are relevant for our party and for the community.

We try to keep it as eclectic as we can and throughout our history of the Queer Night we've invited all sorts of people that played all sorts of music. Even stuff we didn't like that much, because I think it's important at some point to confront yourself with it. And we actually are trying to keep it into some limits; otherwise it would be really chaotic. So party music, like it's supposed to be ongoing for 10 hours at least. I mean, the LGBT scene, the gay clubs... they're associated with techno music, so actually we're trying to keep it in line. Maybe we're having some act at the beginning that is softer, or maybe something else and then once the party starts, it's mostly electronic music or techno.

It has this local flavor, I am sure you're gonna see once you're gonna be there! It's not that openly gay in the appearance. It's softer and, how should I say? people are too nice, you know? You're not gonna see very much exposure. I mean some people they don't even wanna be exposed so... I think there are a lot of people that don't even want to join our Facebook group, because they have, you know, work places, relatives or whatever, so maybe this is one of the reasons. Because the whole atmosphere here is a little bit tight and people are afraid to expose themselves, let go and... Because otherwise I think, and I am hoping, that the environment we've created it's really safe for people.

Another reason for people being reluctant to expose themselves is that in certain venues they're coming into contact with people that are going in from the street like "what is this? it's a ...??" And at some point there was this guy who asked me "is it a fag party here?". And I was: "yeah, I am organizing it!". And he was immediately like: "...oh, no...I think it's nice..." Yeah, he was trying to co-opt me as an ally, you know... he really got it wrong, sorry! Yeah.

And yeah of course I'm glad. I mean, we put a lot of... as cliché as this may sound we put a lot of love into this project. And we party a lot, we go out, so it's actually half of our life revolve around this.

We had some flop of course but we're trying, you know, to learn from our own mistakes, yeah.

And I hope in the future the party is gonna bring a lot of people, but not necessarily, cause I am not into a straight-people party with some LGBT into it...that doesn't...that's not the point, yeah. So this is what I want, I am not sure if we're gonna get it or if we're gonna get there but we work toward this direction, to change it into at least more than half of the people to be from the LGBT community

Something that we actually thought about at the beginning was that maybe we could map the clubs in the city that are gay friendly through this series of parties. Because one of the things that we kept

since the beginning of the party is that we're always touring. Right after the Collective tragedy it's become really really more difficult to find new places.

And it was a little bit hard because we –I didn't ever thought that! I mean, you know the naivety again– none of us thought that people would refuse to come to see it, to be part of something and to listen to music that they like, and you know a DJ -to meet a DJ that they really like just because it's a queer night. And then I heard something, it's actually a rumor but I am not sure if it's ...I mean, I didn't check it. We invited a lot of people from, you know, the techno scene in Bucharest to play, and some of them, most of them refused. "Oh I am busy", not really openly refusing. And at some point some of them- one of them accepted and I heard he was like, really punished let's say by the others...by the community like, he played at...I don't know, I am speculating. And it's really sad. This is because I know the party scene here is very very conservative. And I don't know, we're trying, we're making appearances! I mean, even if you don't have a Queer Night I go out with Paul a lot, and we try to expose people to it. Sometimes I think it needs to be done through love, you know? I don't think we have to do it fast and really aggressive...

Here it's really a traditional society. Very rarely I see people that are above 40 and they go out. But it's like two or three of them, not that much. At some point there were a lot of girls coming, but it's not really predictable. The age...I mean, starting from this year or a year and a half ago there has been a shift in the generation. The new generations started to come at the party. It's like, people that were in high school, 18 or 19 years old. And this was really a fresh start. Because I see that they're really a lot more relaxed. Regardless of the fact that they are LGBTQ or not. They are really a lot more relaxed with whatever happens in the environment. So this is actually a good thing.

## ANDREI LUCA

Film Critic and FAQiff (Feminist and Queer International Film Festival) Organiser

I meet Andrei at Macaz. It's a sunny and hot summer afternoon. We both order a lemonade because it feels too early for beer. I ask him about himself and about his experience with work and activism. We end up chatting about the link between feminism and queerness, about the opposition to the queer community in Romania and the Pride.

I've studied film criticism and script writing, then I decided to go for an MA in film criticism, and initially I was interested in film writing. Over the years my preference changed a bit and now I am working for a film magazine entirely edited by students.

**Tell me a bit about the FAQiff, the feminist and queer international film festival...**

My colleague Alexandra, she went to a queer film festival in Tel Aviv few years ago as a filmmaker, she had a short film in the competition there. And she was inspired by what she saw there, and she decided to come back to Bucharest and to start her own film festival. Also she came up with the name for the festival, feminist and queer film festival...

**Yeah, about that choice of words for its name...**

Yes yes...when I talked to her she told me that both things are an issue right now in Romania: the queer scene is not well developed and needs attention and visibility, as well as the feminist cause. And also for me it was very relevant because I think that without a feminist revolution there would be no queer revolution... and yes people who fight for the LGBT cause also fight for the feminist cause and vice versa, I don't think there is a contradiction in this moment between these two. They go along very well. Because it was the feminists who started to kind of destroy the classical idea of marriage, they did mess up with the roles assigned to each gender in a family... and yeah I think it worked because the queer movement pushed this forward, they furthered the cause of the feminist movement.

There are some critical voices saying that... not necessarily in Romania, but in general... saying that the initial queer movement intending to somehow change the heteronormative order was diverted, because if initially they wanted to destroy the marriage now they adopted it as their own...but I think in the long term... initially in order to have marriage as your own, as your own institution, you need to destroy it first. So it makes sense for me, for me it's very logical.

**Do you then make a distinction between queer and LGBT?**

Mmm...that's a complicated discussion! You can be queer without being compulsory LGBT, that's not a condition to be queer, so it's a more inclusive term...

**Ok...and that was kind of the thought when choosing the festival name? You know, instead of being like: feminist and LGBT festival, whatever...**

I think it was also somehow related to the abbreviation... it's FAQiff and it sounds better...

**Than FALGBTiff! yeah, definitely! ... Did you have a lot of audience...? How did it go?**

Well, the first edition was a bit confusing for all of us because it was the first time for everyone doing a film festival from the scratch, so basically we did see around 150 films, and we picked the best of what we got. Not all of them were awesome... And also if we found good films, we did not have the money to bring them over. It was a continuous negotiation with the producers and distributors, so we can get the films for lower

taxes and fees. But I think me managed somehow to pull it out, because we opened the film festival with Pierrot Lunaire, a film made by Bruce LaBruce, it's a Canadian Director...

**Oh yeah...**

Maybe that was not a good decision audience-wise... because he's not very audience-oriented. He has a very particular vision. But I thought ok we should take the risk and if we've gone this far we should go even further, you know?

**How was the reception then?**

Well it was mixed. I was somehow surprised because I was not expecting a positive feedback, but many people said that they liked the film, that it was funny, that it was entertaining... and they did understand. So I somehow underestimated the audience, that was a slap for me, it was good! I liked it...so now I don't think that the audience in unprepared for experimental films, I think that they know what they like...

**Did you have any difficulty with the events in general?**

At the beginning we were expecting some opposition to the festival. I mean, we were thinking oh my god. But it was a big fuzz for nothing, nothing happened. It was very calm. It was really really nice, and again that was another slap for us.

**But it's good no? positive awakenings, no it can work...**

It was good for us as well, you know to notice that you can have a queer event without any opposition, it was nice, really really nice... I think people frankly are not that opposed to the queer cause, I don't think they're opposed to that. Yes, you have 3 million signatures, but those 3 million signatures are questionable you know?

**Yeah, yeah, yeah...**

Because they gathered all those signatures through shady means... and in fact I don't think there are 3 million signatures. And the referendum, I hope, will prove that there are not 3 million people voting against the queer community, I don't think they will have 3 million signatures against it.

**So in daily life and whatever it's not a lived experience of discrimination?**

Well, you do have discrimination, for example you do not hold hands on the street, you do not kiss on the street... you are not visible on the streets at all, you know. And... yeah you do have some venues in Bucharest where you can be yourself, this [Macaz] is one of them.

**...and the Pride?**

Well, I...participated actively only this edition, 2016. Because the previous edition I was not in Bucharest, and 2 editions ago I was still struggling with my identity and so on...I mean, I was not out yet. I was out to my friends, I was not afraid to go to let's say queer pubs and to be queer as much as I wanted. But I was not out to my family. I mean I was, I don't know what was that...

**I mean, it's understandable... it's a march so you're gonna go as public as that, yeah. but how was this year then, how did you like it?**

It was nice. Unfortunately I did not have the chance to go to the party...it was stupid, because I was supposed to write something, I don't know. But I went to the Pride. However, I was expecting many more people. As far as I understood there were 1.500, 2.000 something like that. The numbers are still vague you know...some say 1000, some say 2000.

**Yeah depends who you ask!**

Exactly. And... Also I was discussing with Vlad, and you know he said the same thing, that you know the queer pride here should be more political. Because you know you just take the pattern which is exploited abroad without taking into consideration the needs of the queer community here.

**That's very interesting...**

And yes of course in countries like France, England and so on, you do have the Pride conceived as a huge party, but here the needs of the community are slightly different. And of course I am not against parties! I support that thing, it has to be something cheerful, but it also has to be something more aware of the political context.

**So it was a party at the end?**

No, it was a march, you know, but it was not as political as I wanted it to be...but maybe that's only a preference, you know? Also...I went to Tel Aviv and I also was there during the Pride. And I also saw the same thing: very commercial... but it was like huge huge huge, tons of people there, tons of people. And it was somehow different because everybody was half naked, marching down the beach, with music... Of course I couldn't march for more than 20 minutes 'cause I had no sunscreen! It was like more than 35 degrees and I couldn't walk for more than 20 minutes! And also I think that abroad people are aware of this commercial thing, because during the film festival I was at in Tel Aviv, which also happened at the same time with the Pride, there were some people saying ok I am not gonna go to the Pride here in Tel Aviv because of the Israeli policy in regards to Gaza and so on. And also there were some saying "ok this is too commercial for me, I'm not interested". So they were some Israeli people and some foreigners as well. But in a way I went cause, I mean... it was interesting for me to see what's going on, how things are organized.

**You were an anthropologist in disguise, too! And did you encounter some of these arguments about pinkwashing here, too?**

Yeah, yeah. Oh, yes! It was also the case for it when the Israeli embassy collaborated with us... of course there were some voices, not very loud, saying that "pinkwashing, pinkwashing"... So if you're gonna collaborate with the Israeli embassy to any queer event you should expect a critiques about that, because the community here is politically aware, and there will be some voices, even though not very loud, saying this. And I guess any collaboration with the Israeli embassy should involve a strategy to approach such discussion, you know. Because you don't wanna hurt your collaborators, but you don't wanna deny facts that happened you know? There...it's hard, you know.

## PATRICK BRĂILA

Independent Filmmaker and Activist at TRANSform

Patrick offers me covrigi and coffee, we enjoy them sitting in his apartment, having a long chat. Since he's both an activist and an artist, I am interested in hearing what Patrick has to say not only about TRANSform and the trans community, but also about his movies, particularly about Piepțiș/Abreast, his latest work – a short autobiographical movie about transitioning and family dynamics.

### Can I know a bit about TRANSform, how did it happen and how did it start?

In 2013 it was early May when Sasha Ichim, who's the founder and president of TRANSform, started his transition and together with his transition grew his need to become an activist. He wanted to do something; he's that kind of guy. But he didn't know where to start. And then there was me, who...I was before my transition and at a very bad time of my life. And there was Robyn McCutcheon, who is the first transgender woman diplomat to ever serve in the US department state, outside the US, and to have a transition outside...

### And she transitioned here?

In Romania, yes. And we set together and talked about where to start. And first of all, the first idea we got was to reach as many trans people as possible. But I said I cannot be a part of it because I didn't feel up to it then. I suggested that he start as an initiative and support group, at first. Not to throw himself in the bureaucracy of making an NGO, and to settle a bit and to grow a bit so that he could find later the resources to found an NGO. And a year later he founded TRANSform. And after I started my transition in December 2013, slowly but surely I felt the need to be a part of this and to be visible and public because I thought I could help a lot. So I made my publicly coming out in May 2014, even though by then I was already a part of TRANSform by heart! Because we became really good friends, he's my best friend, we're like brothers and all. And we focused mainly from that moment on, we focused mainly on forming a community, creating one, reaching out to trans people, everywhere in the country, or Romanians living abroad. To first of all give them advice and support, put them in contact with the few doctors or psychologists or psychiatrists we knew, or lawyers. And in the meantime educating ourselves on how we should do this. What is the international way of doing this, what are the main priorities. We understood by then, we grew a lot in terms of understanding that we shouldn't be pathologised, that... this is the main battle actually, internationally speaking. But on the other hand on a national level we try to find doctors and to wrap our heads around the laws. And only recently we kind of learned enough in terms of lobbying and advocacy so we can foresee little by little how we can have a gender recognition law. But it's a very long term assignment. So yeah we're just by now 2 people in TRANSform, we're not professional NGOers, we don't know how that actually works! We find it hard to function as an NGO because we are more grassroots and community oriented.

In 2014 we went to Budapest together at the Transgender EU council, the EU council. And after that, a month later I interviewed Andrew Solomon, which was really life changing for me to meet him you know, what he wrote and to interview him. After that, came the FAQiff, the feminist and queer international film festival which kept me busy last year. And this year I made Abreast, which has been on my mind for 2 or 3 years. So yes, we're wrapping our heads around having and building a strategy. Because that's our main goal actually. To have a gender recognition law. And after that comes you know, training and having a network of specialists around the country. And having qualified services and giving assistance to trans people. And...growing the community! Because this is the most important thing. And now we're about a number of 150 people. Who communicate constantly, especially on Facebook. There are a lot of friendships starting there, because people finally can meet someone like them. Because most of them through their lives couldn't find anybody like themselves. And lived just like myself with the impression that there is nobody, that they're all alone and they don't know what to do. And thankfully now that it's a bit in the past because...



after every public appearance another one or two trans persons come to us and say "hi, where have you been? please let me in!!". And we're very close somewhat, we're very close to each other. Even if we're very different as people, we're very different, we come from all sorts of background, but we're very connected ...that's amazing for us, yeah. We really are like brothers and sisters. We share information and sometimes food and clothes and...testosterone!

However, the saddest part of this is that we still don't have a trans girl who's visible, who's an activist and who's eager to fight for this. But I understand why. I mean, there are a lot of brilliant girls and women in the community... but the social pressure is just too much. Because it comes with a package... the discrimination and the resources to fight for this. And for them, they're already in a vulnerable position just by being.

To become an activist would mean to get even more vulnerable, and it takes a lot to do that...I mean, sometimes it's hard for us, and we've earned our white man privileges! And you can sense the difference, I mean I did sense the difference, yeah. And unfortunately it's easier for a man than it is for a woman. It's always easier for trans men to be accepted, really. Because we're reaching towards the first place in the pyramid, whereas trans girls and women are perceived as giving away that first place in the pyramid just to... wear dresses and make up. I sense that's the general perception, and that's why we're more accepted.

**Are there any inner struggles in the trans community? Because you say you're very different people and I can imagine people have different aims and visions...**

I don't know, no... most of them just want to set their things straight and they're not thinking very much at the end of the day goal, you know? They're treating everything more of a personal level. So they don't interfere too much with this. Mostly because they're so caught up in finding the doctors, the money, the resources to do all this... and they don't have resources to do anything else, really. And most of them are just struggling to work, earn money, find doctors, start to transition, change documents, live. Instead of surviving. They're in surviving mode and they want just to live. Peacefully.

**Do you see any change, positive changes in this? As in like is it getting easier somehow?**

Yes! I get stubborn on seeing the changes. Because otherwise I would get frustrated. But I see them, every day. There are small changes, but there are, and they are significant. Starting from more and more people attending the Pride, every year. And less and less people attending the anti-Pride. More and more people coming out and being able to stand their ground and stand for themselves and just being out. I see a lot of related projects in the art scene, which is very encouraging. I see more people talking on TV about this. Yes there is change.

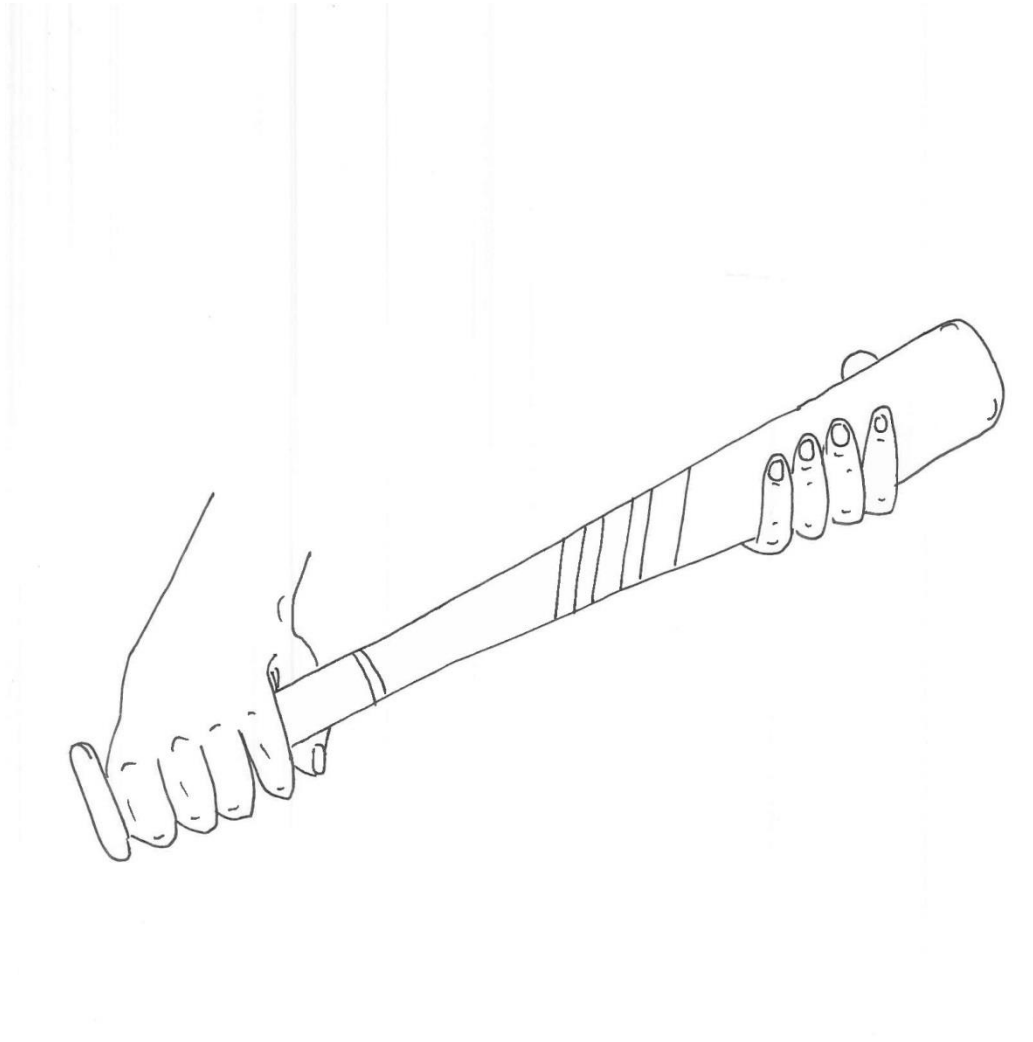
**I want to make you a question that you're already prepared for... the artist / activist tension. How do you see your work, what is the connection between your art and your activism?**

I figured out very early on actually, probably since I decided to become a director, at 15, that stories can really be powerful weapons, it really can change perceptions. And this is my main form of activism, at least so far. Like telling stories and giving the chance for people to find these stories told by the people who lived them. And this is what I tried with Abreast, I thought I'd be the most honest and sincere way to tell my personal story. But I don't want it to become a propaganda tool. I just want it to be an artistic act, a form to reach as many people as possible, as different as possible. And talk about the situation, not the strategies, the activism...so it's more in an awareness sense. Because with awareness comes acceptance and respect. And solidarity and...rights. I think that is the natural course of things.

**But then somehow it is a bit strategical no? As in, every narrative has...**

I don't know if it's strategic or not, I don't have a ...funny thing is I have a strategy regarding my art, I don't necessarily have a strategy regarding my activism. I am more focused and I know precisely what I want to do as a director, as a film director. But I am not very sure how and where I will get with me being an activist. So if I can combine the two without being ostentatious, ok fair enough I'll do that. But I will not use, I will not throw my art into some people's throat just for them to understand the cause.

Yeah because I knew I wanted to be a film director for a longer time I knew I wanted to be an activist! So I am still figuring it out... But I feel more comfortable now as opposed to a few years ago, I feel more comfortable now talking with politicians, and giving speeches, and being at the university, and talking to students. Oh, sometimes it is exhausting. And you always have to go prepared. But sometimes it really gets to you and you walk out after 2 or 3 hours meeting with a very big headache.



**And about the art... how is the reception of Abreast going?**

Very good, very good. It's overwhelmingly good, actually. And I was surprised! And talking about my idea that stories can change perception if they're told correctly, honestly, without censorship: we made a campaign of coming out stories, we raised stories about the community from trans people about their coming out to their parents. It was a campaign accompanying Abreast. And we made a call in the community: if you feel comfortable about your coming out please write it down as you feel it. And we gathered about 30 stories and spread them around Facebook, mostly.

And in my film I was lucky to have Ms Maia Morgenstern. I didn't want anybody else from the role. I knew her back from 2007, she helped me with my Bachelor degree. And I knew how wonderful she was, and I didn't want anybody else. And I was lucky she said yes. And she was really supportive, I mean, really professional. And pro bono! I couldn't afford to pay anybody not even the creatives in the team... And she did a really really big thing for my family as well. Seeing her there in my village, in my house... it was really important for my parents. Especially for my mother, it equaled a few years of therapy!

**All in one, pow!**

Yes, in a weekend, here you go!

**Wow.**

But this is why, I mean, I had this theory...if you come to somebody with openness and courage and honesty, this is what you'll mostly get back. I try to inspire the other people in my community to learn, to learn from their grief and suffering, because this can take you in some places where you can learn a lot from, and can make you very strong. Of course it's very hard when you understand dysphoria is mostly socially generated... it is very hard to put yourself against that and not get radical and start a fucking riot! With a hammer...

**Second strategy, if diplomacy doesn't work.**

Yeah! If the diplomacy one doesn't work then... I keep 10 baseball bats in my closet, just in case!

## VEDA POPOVICI

Part of the Macaz coop., artist, activist and academic.

In her activism, art and academic work, Veda operates from a decolonial, queer and feminist perspective. In this interview she provides a critical analysis of the current situation of queer and LGBT activism in Bucharest, arguing for networks of solidarity, radical alliances and sketching a vision of possible queer politics.

### **What are you currently involved with?**

Now I am part of the cooperative Macaz, which is partly political, partly a project to sustain us through everyday life. But in more general sense it is political, because also just the idea to build a structure which is kind of autonomous and self-organised to provide incomes through these and some other principles for its members it's kind of a political project in itself. One of the main purposes of Macaz is to serve as a tool for communities that are normally not occupying space in hegemonic public discourses. So it's not only dedicated to people who are engaged politically per se but who are also in a political position of marginalisation or oppression.

### **For example?**

Like very literally the bar is dedicated to LGBTQ scene and it has a politics of encouraging women and queers to make events. Then we also know most of the activist scene in Bucharest, especially the left-leaning one, and we offer them this space to have public events. And then there is also the very important engagement with antiracist politics of having people that identify somehow as non-romanian or non-white, especially roma. To have events that are done through their own conditions. But the idea was more like of being a tool for what people need, really. And guaranteeing it's a safe space from homophobic, sexist, classist, racist, transphobic stuff.

### **And more broadly, how do you see in general the LGBT movement in this moment in Bucharest?**

Ahh! Too much to say! Well, in this moment, in Romania, the movement is very stuck in a 90s-2000s paradigm, which was the paradigm of "we do everything to survive". Which was totally legit, and I think the work done in that period is important and should not be devalorized, and I have total respect for these people. But I think it's high time for a paradigm shift and for really going more into queer politics, like real queer politics. And putting forward more non-binary approaches and the intersection with feminism and antiracist struggle. Talking more about the class issues in the LGBT communities, and refusing corporate and governmental support. I mean, starting to refuse it, at least question it publicly! Not... the American embassy, the government, Google, whatever... nobody questions like "ahh is it ok even to do this???". I am not saying, let's throw all the spaces, the rents, the salaries, but let's at least start the conversation and things will change!

You know, and also... is not only "it's dominated by gay men". Because when I say that, you know I always kind of feel a bit bad, because I am kind of thinking, I have a lot of, you know, gay men friends and they're important people in the movement. But it's not that, it's not them. It's like the subjectivity which is associated with middle class gay men. You know he's proper, he's super clean, he's well dressed, he's styled, he's an intellectual, he knows shit, not just your basic stuff! He can provide a great conversation of any kind. He's an interesting person, you know, he knows how the world works, he's very relaxed, he can be accepted in any kind of context because he's like... he knows how to work. And this is actually at least compatible with neoliberal. At least. So actually what you have is, you know, the whole logic of the movement being driven through this idea of this subjectivity, you know, that concrete people embody. But it's not about the concrete people, it's about the subjectivity. And, what happens, it that everything that is actually dangerous about the LGBT movement, everything that, you know, more structurally would... would pause a risk to

normative and hegemonic discourses is framed as "it's too weird!", it's too, you know, kinky. It's too "we can't put it in the public, what will they say!"

So it's always putting forward a type of subjectivity that is very compatible with the liberal tendencies in hegemonic discourses. This is very sad, and I've seen it at work... it's like, super there, you know. People discipline themselves, it's really... For example Romania has a really great drag scene. Where the fuck is that, man? They should be all over the Pride, and all over the...but they're not, because they're so mm-mm! They're "trashy"! You can't bring something that's trashy...

### **So in this light, what do you think about the Pride?**

The Pride.... The Pride still is not that bad, although it is bad. Yeah, if we don't move quickly, like the tendency globally, all the Prides are appropriated by mega corporations... and they're highly used to pinkwash all kinds of governmental shit. And if we don't do something soon, this will naturally just come about in Romania.

### **Yeah. And what do you mean by "doing something"?**

Starting a counterpride... some sort of alternative event.... As the strategy we had till now was with, you know the queer people in Claca we would kind of, yeah, just set the tone. We organized this group in the Pride with flags. We would have these pink black flags and purple black flags. And like...dressed in black and these banners...we were almost thrown out of two Prides because of the messages!

Another thing is, for 2 years we went to the Pride as a group, we went very radical on this... and like this year we couldn't organize very well because most of us were really taken up by the Macaz project. But what happened is, we discussed really intensely if Macaz should be a part of, you know, the Pride. We decided it should, so we decided to say yes. And then when we negotiated, you know, and we said that we will not accept like, you know, if they want to come with some banners of some institutions or some embassy or stuff like that... And also that we would have a last say, you know, with the events. Luckily they were very sensible and just proposed us events that we are compatible with and it was really smooth. But what we also did, we said we wanna do an event, you know. So I proposed to do a discussion, which we did and it went surprisingly well! It was so good! It's like, I was so amazed... like faith in humanity restored.

### **Yeah yeah, good!**

You know, my idea was kind to put out there some really basic ideas, something like...you know Nazis took the camps, you know, queers, radical activists, radical leftists, roma, jews of course...so this idea of like connections between different oppressions, this simple idea. It's the simplest argument to just say that you know, it has some analogous elements, the historical position of these identities and politics. Ah...and then saying something like "we need to get out from the public the idea that LGBT people are middle class", because it means it's some sort of a hobby, some sort of a you know, a sort of weird thing people with money do, you know...and people were "yeah of course you know! of course"... And then saying something about the links with feminism and how the subjectivity of you know, the heterosexual man, is like the main subject of governmentality and capitalism and so on...you know. Something like that, you know, some ideas. And they were so well received! People were contributing and being all very bubbly and...

### **Oh, nice!**

Yeah, I am actually quite optimistic.

### **Yes?**

Yeah...I am always, you know, an optimist. I think there is not such a long way until younger queer people start to organize in a sort of more political way. But even so I think there's an urgency to make a step in front of this liberal hegemony. Cause it's also, I really think it's our age, you know it's like... it's also the age of the queer. And I think it's super important to have some sort of more clear coherent uncompromised position. I think it's an historical moment, now. And it will show in, you know, 20 years, if we take the right steps now.

And don't kneel in front of Google and I don't know who for some couple of thousands euros. Yeah, I really feel like that, but we'll see.

I think anyway, as I was saying, queer politics and radical leftist ideas...are, they have really good ground with super young LGBT people, really good ground. They don't give a shit about embassies and stuff like that...and gay marriage... That's really important. Yeah, and of course this...like gay marriage it's starting to be the ideological axes of the movement. Big problem, yeah... It didn't help also the whole petition, didn't help at all. The most important thing that this whole event of the Coaliția is showing us, is that there's some radical right mechanisms put at work in society, very efficient, very well structured, that will target communities really randomly. It's like, it's a random thing that they targeted gay marriage and not abortion. Random in the terms of ideology, you know. It's not that they really think that gays are the enemy...so in those terms is random. Because in other terms is like a calculation. You know, the LGBT movement is more vulnerable than the abortion issue. And this kind of makes a lot of sense. The idea is not to feel like some sort of...it's not a siege on the LGBT people. But it's more of a, like a test of these mechanisms, of these radical right mechanisms in society. And then it is a normalization of radical right ideas, doesn't matter if it's gay marriage... it doesn't matter. From this really logically emerges the idea to build long term alliances and radical solidarity relations with other people that are targeted by radical fights. And that is the good strategy, that's the strategy we should take. Aligning the movement with anti-racist and roma rights movement, with housing rights, with all the things...with all the things that are already going on! And if you really want to learn from something from history, this is the biggest lesson that you can get. In any kind of counter-oppressive or counterhegemonic movement the alliances were like everything, and... the composite counterattack or defense, that's always the movement! Whenever it is some sort of isolated group... it just fails!

## VLAD VISKI

MozaiQ founder and president

Vlad is a vocal and public character in the community. Founder of the newest LGBT association MozaiQ, he tirelessly monitors and writes about LGBT issues in Romania. Graduated in Political Science with a thesis on the recent history of the Romanian LGBT movement, he is an informed and prepared activist. Needless to say, we not only ended up talking about MozaiQ, but also about disparate issues such as the US influences behind the Coalition for Family, the tension between the local community and foreign models of activism, the generation of a gay identity, and much more.

### **Can you just tell me then a bit about the creation of MozaiQ and the necessity for it, how did it go?**

MozaiQ started in about 2015, June 2015 or May. And it started with a meeting where you could find current activists, former activists, artists, journalists... so I don't know, about 25-30 people. And in many ways there was this idea of "let's start a new organization". And there was a need, there is a need. Like in every country you obviously need more than one group, the one LGBT group, in order to really represent the community. So we met and we started discussing the main principles of the organization. We wrote together, we had a committee who wrote the statute of the organization. The principles were including all of minorities, all of the vulnerable groups within the LGBT community... having a more progressive, let's say, type of agenda.

### **Was this inclusion unanimous?**

I think on this topic, it was liberal minds that were at the table, so there was no resistance in terms of this... obviously there were some discussions about nuances, like for example the inclusion of intersex. And in the end we did include intersex but queer and other identities were not included, because when you go in front of a judge with the status you kind of have to explain to them what LGBT means... and ok you can explain also intersex but you don't really have international legislation to define queer. Like you can't go in front of a judge and say "queer" and then try to explain to them what queer is and bring in feminist theory, like "let me give you this report on Judith Butler next to the...". So, yeah. But we included sex workers, poor people, immigrants and refugees, people that are differently abled, so it's a complete list.

And slowly slowly... I mean at the beginning there was this sort of struggle about leadership because there was horizontal organization, there was no leadership elected yet. And then it was quite a long process to register as an NGO, usually it takes about 3 months, but I think it took us 5 months, by October - November we were registered. We had 15 founding members.

We had an incident which was horrible but at the same time I think it was good that it happened. The paper - all the paperwork for registering as an NGO has to be signed by a lawyer. We did not have the resources, so we asked someone if they knew a lawyer. And the lawyer showed up and attended our general assembly... and he wasn't really instructed beforehand that he's coming to an LGBT thing so... As well, he drank like 2 bottles of wine. He got super wasted and drunk and he started to really scribble instead of signing. He would just draw faces on the papers... And we were all shocked, and we were all looking at him and debating "oh, is this how lawyers sign??". It was literally like scribbles, it was horrible! But at the same time... communities get formed when attack happens, and that's when the group identity gets enhanced. So in two days we were again with a different lawyer, we were 15 people at the table coordinating schedules, and everything was solved. But it was, it was a moment that, I don't know, I remember quite vividly and it showed the homophobia that still exists in Romania.

With the judge on the other hand, we didn't have any problems. We just had to explain what LGBTI means and then we, we functioned at the beginning with the informal projects, with grants. We started Campus

Pride, which was the first project. It had Ally Week, I would say it was quite a success in the first year. You had social meetings throughout the university year with students, for example.



### **How do you feel about taking up the role of the public face of MozaiQ?**

It's some sort of a problematic issue. It's a very contested role, in the sense that there's a lot of people in the community that do not agree with me being the face of the community, but at the same time you do not have that many other faces to show. And myself personally I've gone through struggles of trying to find solutions, and I do internalize and I do take into consideration all these critiques. At the same time... I think this public image of me comes out as more aggressive than it is. It's because, ok, I am writing editorials for the biggest news platforms, I write constantly Facebook statuses communicating about the LGBT community... and then TV appearances which are not that usual actually. They seem more usual because in the independent scene you always have this rejection of mainstream media, and it's a scare. But I don't know, I can use the media to promote our messages. So yeah I think it's contested. But I personally would love to see more editorials, more I don't know... Facebook statuses or anything! And other than that, homophobic attacks and all that, I don't really care about them. I mean, I... I don't know, they don't affect me. Yeah, I don't really care about them. And it's funny cause in my Facebook I get 2 types of messages: half of them are from, I don't know, men trying to hook up, and the other half is from homophobes telling me I'll burn in hell. You get both sides.

But there was a shift recently with this idea, in the sense that I was in a public debate on national television and I kind of attacked our opposition, and I, I think I managed quite well. And that changed a lot of people's minds, in the sense that they realized at that point that you do have someone that has the skills to debate



publicly. Because for example I prefer to go also not only on moderate debates, but also on debates with, let's say, more aggressive people, or people that come and spread strange hateful messages... Actually, it's very interesting how a lot of arguments in this whole debate about the Coalition for Family, a lot of arguments used by neo-protestant groups in the US, which in the US are considered conspiracy theory, here in Romania they're legitimate. They're taken as legitimate. For example gay conversion therapy: in Romania the Coalition for Family is aggressively promoting this idea that conversion can happen, whereas in the US you have the APA, the American Psychiatric Association, and the American Psychological Association, coming out and saying "you can't convert gays to heteros".

But that's a different discussion about the influence of the neo-protestant groups in this whole process. I mean, this whole Coalition for Family, the Orthodox Church was responsible for raising the signatures, but the rest, the public message, the legal arguments, all of those are done by neo-protestant groups. Groups from here but with the help from organizations from the US. I actually did write an article in which I revealed these connections with Mat Staver and Liberty Counsel. They're one big organization in the US which defended Scott Lively in Uganda, which pressured and succeeded the Peruvian government, which helped the Malawi to criminalize homosexuality, etc. So you have an organization, Liberty Counsel, which this is what they do: they're neo-baptists from the US, and they go around the world and support these sorts of family initiatives. Against abortion, against homosexuals. And they have connections with the Coalition for Family, they wrote an amicus curiae, an opinion to the Constitutional Court of Romania in which they disproved Kinesy's arguments and all these sort of things.

**Partially connected to these influences, I would like to discuss with you some quotes from your MA thesis. Like "gay Prides are a way to institutionalise western standards of sexual politics (...) and it comes as no surprise that in the gay and lesbian movement in Romania we find internal struggles"...**

The thing is that the gay Pride itself, the going out in the streets in more colorful manner is obviously an imported concept. And it's an imported concept which exists and was reproduced by the majority of gay movements throughout the world. Why am I saying that... it's because it created a tension in the gay movement in Romania. First, the lack of compatibility between the Pride itself and, let's say, the local context -and the local gay community- is shown through participation. If in Hungary you have constantly 3000, 5000 participants, in Romania, starting with 2005 up to 2015, so for 10 years, you have under 1000 participants. You have about 600 in the first Pride, in 2005, then in the second Pride you have violence against participants, and the third Pride you also have violence... which lead to a decrease in number in participants. Now 2015 you have 1000, 2016 you have 2500. That's on one hand. The second one is that if we look at the debates in these gay blogs and in all sort of community instances you have a discourse of the LGBT community saying "we don't wanna show ourselves in public, we do not agree with this type of Pride..." so there's a rejection from the community of this idea. But obviously myself I don't agree with this view, because I think visibility is the only way you can go. And then to add some sort of nuance to the whole thing, in Romania at the first Prides the people that led it, they were trans people, and they were drag queens. And me personally, I think it's because, that's how I treat the situation, they were the ones that had the guts to go out and assume a certain identity in public. At the same time the community discourse is "oh, these feathered people are making us look like fools, are making us look ridiculous, caricatures" and so on, like "we're normal, and we wanna be treated like normal people and...". But at the same time these "normals" they would not go out in the streets, too. So you see the sort of schizophrenia, almost, of the community. But I think slowly slowly in Romania you do have more acceptance of these Gay Prides. And I think without the Gay Prides we would not be where we are today. We would not have the media coverage, you wouldn't... I mean, this is post factual history, but I think the importance of Gay Prides is crucial for the gay movement in Romania.

**And, just to continue on this Western-influence debate...I have another quote: "however the gay lesbian identity the gay social movement creates is a Western modernising universalising one" ...I mean I read this as a critical approach to the movement. How do you feel about that?**

I mean, this idea in many ways was first introduced by Dennis Altman who has a, an article called Global Gaze/Global Gays and he's done research in Asia, and his claim is that we have some common features that we see in all gay social movements throughout the world. And more than social movements, in the way the gay identity is constructed. You have the gay bar, you have the gym, you have... there is this sort of universal masculinity, these sort of universal things that he claims he can identify in Budapest, in Hong Kong and in New York. So the sort of universal gay male identity. And I think that's the case in many ways. But I don't think the gay Romanian movement itself has such a power to generate gay identity. Especially in the 2000s, it tried to generate a gay identity that was rather bourgeois and middle class...which it kind of failed to do so because the agenda in the mainstream media or in media in general, was shaped much more, let's say, by drag queens going on TV shows, by trans people...So I mean in many respects, and that's one of the many complaints that the community has, is that "these are these are the people that represent us". And it comes in many respects as an alternative or a parallel to the mainstream, whatever that might mean. Because I don't know having just one organization that has only one person to promote it's not really...you cannot call that creating an image or trying to generate gay identity. But obviously there's certain things, you have lots of these stereotypes. Even though in Romania up to 2001 there were no stereotypes about gays except that they were sick people and they should go to jail. After that you have a sort of elements that... this extreme liking of pop music for example, these kind of elements of gay identity that I can identify and I can see in many ways. They are not imported but they are more mimetic, trying to reproduce elements that you see in Western media, I would say.

## PAUL DUNCA

“Queer physical activist”

It would be shorter to list things that Paul does not do: he's involved in dozens of artistic and cultural projects, among which being co-organizer of the Queer Night party series, director of trans-themed shows such as La Institutul Schimbării and The Institute of Change (two different shows!). He tells me in bits and pieces about these specific projects, touching on issues of representation (and controversies about it), money-making versus community-building, gender-bending and self-confidence...all with the wit and fast-paced rhythm that characterizes him.

yeah, it's kind of fucked up with the constitution...but in another way I don't know...it's...I don't wanna get married, no? I don't know, it's kinda...you know? why would I bother?

I don't really see why we should separate art and activism. I think. I used to not like it at all, the label artist, I was like "I'm a maker". But I think I... I think I also kind of realized since I'm "living on my own"... that it's like a status, you have to wear it, and it's...I used to think always "Oh it's like a hobby, and I'm gonna have a job in two years, and it's... I'm on a project and if it comes another project maybe" but "it's fun", and now I realize, no it's a routine: you have to wake up, you have to sleep, you have to... take care of your things, and it's a job.

but I'm a physical activist, you know? Because I activate with my body! Yeah, yeah cause I have this Facebook profile and I wrote at a certain point, because everyone I'm working with it's like "activist lalala"... so I wrote "physical activist", and then I said "queer physical activist" in it, and then I had to translate my bio in Romanian after putting this so I translated it like "an activist of the queer body".

I came back to Bucharest from New York, and Ion, because he's a DJ, beyond other stuff, because someone was like giving him a space once a week or once two weeks to have a party and he was like "I wanna make a gay party" and I was like "let's make it queer!". That was 2010, December.

...yeah...we have an audience and we were thinking like ok we do the party but then people who are showing up are people that are always going to these parties of these DJs, like the groupies of them. But then we were talking to ACCEPT and we were like "look we have this party, can you promote it for us" "oh, yes sure" and then...it was like so many gay people! And even Loredana...the Romanian Madonna showed up and it was like "wow". It's was a slap in the face, bitch look at me! And yeah, we wanted just to have fun, so we never thought of it as a business...I think it's good, we're still keeping it like this...but I think there's people taking the advantage, I mean, there's people who when they do a party for sure they're making money...cause when you do a party you can, there's more stuff, I mean you can take also percentages from the bar or something...and we never do that, we just take the entry which is like minimal and we give it to the DJs and we keep a little bit for us. But I think it's good, we shouldn't make a business, hu? No I think it's ok...

some people from Queens, and there's all these heteros coming, who are more progressive...it's a very sexual vibe, people are getting very sexy, but in a nice in a sort of...I mean it's not mainstream sexiness, but it's like, everybody feels sexy, you know, so it's kind of nice. And we did it in this club where I end up. It's sort of an afterhours club, it's called the Guesthouse and I always end up there after going out or after other parties. And I'm always wearing something... outfits, bodies, skirts. There's a little bit tension when I go there but I actually like it in a way, I am going there and I know there is gonna be this tension, I don't wanna give a fuck... but also, I am also playing with my confidence, and I wanna put it very high, so if I go down it's just slowly...

the Institute of Change is in English but the new show it's called La Institutul Schimbării and it's in Romanian. It's not the same show, it's a new one. We had like the institute of Change and the trans people that I know,

they came to see...it was very...it was a "fantasy" show. And they were like "oh my god, it's so good that you're doing a show about this subject, but why don't you do it in Romanian? Our parents need to understand it's not TV, it's not a TV show but it's like a thing", and I was like, well this is fantasy, let's do another one with real interviews! So I had interviews with 6 trans people, I think, over a year or less...and I had to transcribe it all and take out what is good and what it's bad.

since the Institute of Change is in English we can travel with it. We went to Copenhagen and we had a discussion afterwards. There was like this 60-years-old trans woman...Well, we don't have trans people performing in the show, it's obvious that the show it's using trans as a concept to show how fluid everybody is somehow...and it's very like, for the straight audience it's ok, like: "i'm gonna make you a little bit fluid". Yeah in Romania everybody was like, there were all these hetero guys and everybody was like "oh yeah yeah...I mean, identity can be very fluid...it's true" and they're, yeah opening up. But I'm not representing the trans people, I'm just using their....not their actual stories because it's fake stories, but it's like we have these stories... and so this 60years old woman in the discussion, she was like "well I felt offended in the show, being trans it's not this fantastic stuff ...it brings a lot of suffering and here we don't see it". But she also said "well I'm glad I didn't go out of the show", because she stayed and in the end it's very nice, we bring the audience together, it's this darkness and we go in the audience for applauding and we never show up for applause, it changes the...

and then there was this really nice trans poetess in the audience, I really liked her, and she was like "well...it's a bit like...we don't feel represented, but also this thing like who represents who it's also a closure, if you are like you're not black, you're not trans, you're not a sex worker why should you represent black trans sex workers?". So, that was the discussion and it got...I was listening, and I was... I didn't know, it's new territory, I don't want to... I don't know. And if you're honest I think you know exactly how you did it, or why you did it. So I was like "ok, ok..." and I explained also what it means for us, cause we did it in Romania where there is no visibility, they don't know the subject, what trans means, and we wanted to raise awareness of that. And this with the straight people.

But we did the other show...and it's strange because people come to the new show, knowing the other one and being like they wanna laugh...and they cry.

## FLORIN BUHUCEANU

ACCEPT President

Current president of ACCEPT, the first NGO supporting LGBT rights before it was even legal to do so, Florin meets me in the association headquarter. Sometimes the sound of munching biscuits and sipping tea interferes with the recording. He discusses the dangers posed by the *Coaliția pentru Familie*, the lack of public community voices, and the internal community difficulties.

### **What changes are you observing in the last years at a community level?**

Well there are a number of changes. The opposition is becoming much more structured and much more politicized: being able to attract the support of the Romanian Orthodox church is quite something, and shouldn't be underestimated. And as just a simple note, the involvement on different levels of the Orthodox Church was, unprecedented and has created this base of success for this type of religion-based opposition. Because let's face it, the Family Coalition is a religion based network engaging various actors...and ...without the direct support of the Romanian Orthodox Church they couldn't succeed. So this is a rather interesting situation. Actually it's not completely new because their previous success in criminalizing homosexuality till the end of 2001 was based on the capacity of the Romanian Orthodox Church to act and exercise pressure upon the Romanian politicians. Among the actors of the newly created *Coaliția pentru Familie*, you can easily identify actors that managed to keep the anti- legislation alive, that sent hundreds of people to prisons even after the collapse of communism in Romania. So those heavy actors are still there, they are still influential. And their successes in the past were based, again, on the direct support offered by the Romanian Orthodox Church. So for them it's a winning solution.

As well, they managed to attract credible voices from society at large, not just religious voices. This is rather new. They are better in media campaigning by looking to what they had done previously. They also managed to create connections with a number of interests groups, such as groups of parents, groups of physicians, groups of lawyers and judges that are invoking conscience to take on board this type of subjects. And this is a very risky development for us, because we do know that their agenda is much more comprehensive. Their agenda is focused also on abortion, guarding obstacles in front of women in need for abortion. They are also against sexual education in the public education school. And all these types of groups of interest are extremely important for them and that's why they invest so much into the empowerment of these groups. Are they successful? Yes, they are. And religious arguments are an extremely important type of argument in such a society. And the fact that there is no liberal religious alternative in Romania explains the proportion of their success. So our religion-based opposition somehow became more diverse, more fluid, more strategic in their work, in their attempts to change legislation and mentalities. And we should take them seriously. There is a rather strange mistake some of us are doing: neglecting their power and neglecting their capacity to mobilize other people. Too many human rights activists didn't take them seriously for way too long, and I think that was rather a mistake, a solid mistake. And I notice that some of us are doing the same kind of mistake. Same old "they are not credible, they are just religious people and their voice should not be heard". Well that's, that's not the case. And that's not exactly democratic by the way.

So we, we have this type of difficulty to go out beyond our bubble, our ghetto. And we seek now to find ways to get out of that bubble, because this bubble is just one of the bubbles. Their bubble is larger and much more comprehensive and we have also to diversify our tactics and use the same type of language, emotions, mechanism they are using in our favor. There is not just one way of doing advocacy. And yeah, even on our side, I think it's a more diverse... representation. Until very recently ACCEPT was the only LGBT voice. Things are changing and it's good to have multiple players and multiple voices. Still, those LGBT voices that are present on the market of ideas and are heard are extremely few. And this is an unfortunate reality. Still you cannot hear voices of women from this minority group, voices of transgender people, very few, not to say one or two. So, again, yes we have diversified in terms of organizations but we didn't so far managed to

attract public figures, public intellectuals. Especially from the LGBT side. I mean, the fact that so few known LGBT people are vocal, are visible, are embracing their identity in public, continues to remain a big minus. So unfortunately this is still part of our reality today. And that's why it's so important to have this public gathering once, twice, as many times per year, like Pride marches, public events that are related to the LGBT, queer culture.

As well, as a human rights organization with a tiny budget. I mean we are in a survival mode. And a lot of our resources, which is basically human resources are basically sucked by this very intense public debate on what's family, what's not family in Romanian society.

But it's, it's good that there are younger and younger generations speaking up about themselves, identifying themselves in a different way. And I think this will create a new wave of activism in the near future. Because hopefully more and more young people will understand that have to occupy their space, no one will offer you rights for free, they have to find their way to be themselves and make themselves knowledgeable in the public space. That's not an easy mission. And their rights should be accomplished day by day. And I am glad to see actually more and more younger people feel relatively sure about who they, are and sometimes their voices are heard, especially during Pride. But even at other marches, if you look at the audience, there are a lot of young people. Well a lot of them might not be gay or lesbian or bisexual but, you know, they are there to make a statement. And their voice counts and their voice will be more and more heard, I am quite sure about that.

**I have a question on the community at large, whether you noticed over the last years some internal struggles, as in sexism, or religious discrimination or racism like...if there are such things, even like monitoring a bit blogs or Facebook groups, if there are different clashes.**

Yeah. Hmm..I don't think that we are better than the larger society, I am sorry to say that. We share the same prejudices. We tend to think that we are kind of special, a nation within the nation, but we are not. And we are constantly trying to educate ourselves, actually. Because we do have, each of us is having his or her own prejudices. And I think it should be intentional to go beyond what you have inherited or what you have acquired somehow, because of your education, belonging, whatever. I think sexism is explosive in the gay community. And, I suspect, it's one of the reasons why lesbians are not exactly public. Because they are confronted quite often with their male...mmm colleagues and friends. I am not so surprised to see how feminism is perceived in the larger Romanian society or even within our own community. It's like a bad word, a bad...for so many of us. I am not generalizing here. But it's still something we have in common with the society we are criticizing. Very very often. And look to the way some of us are disturbed by the appearance of those who are not conforming to stereotypes in terms of their public appearance. They are completely negative about those who are perceived to be transgender or transvestite, so it's like "no, no no we are not like that". This reflects an internal division we do not speak so much about and that's regrettable. And I noticed this from the very first Gay Pride I organized in 2005, I mean, a lot of people said "we will not come if they will come". So, what do you mean? Who are we to say you will enter and you will not enter into this march because you're not well dressed, you're not conforming to I don't know what kind of code of respectability, who are you to judge them? And actually we've completely rejected this type of criticism.

And it's still an issue for so many people if you look too blogs and other social media channels you can notice a type of uneasiness among some of us, in relation to those that do not conform, that do not look respectable or manly, or womanly enough. And that's not just bullshit, that's perpetuating stereotypes that are highly divisive and highly toxic. This type of conformity model is still pervasive and it's completely understandable if you prefer not to be out, to live in a comfortable, discrete life in your own closet, of course you are disturbed by those who are considered to be agents of provocation! And I have little tolerance to this type of negativism. Which is, again, so spread among us. Yes, we have a heavy problem with racist. I mean ...we definitely are not better than the general population when we deal with people of color, with Roma people, with Muslim people. There is a tendency now that might be radicalizing in the near future to accuse, you know, Islamism of occupying Romania ideologically and we have to "be prepared". Really?? This is the way we should be prepared?

**So are you overall a pessimist or an optimist?**

An optimist: it's a professional duty. Otherwise I would get rapidly demotivated in such a country in which homosexuality is still a cosmic perversion or a national threat or an anti-god mission, or whatever. So you have to find your own resources to remain, yeah, to remain an optimist. It's an induced infusion of optimism if I can say so, but it's... a must. Otherwise you will not resist, basically. You will be covered by hostile messaged and you'll personalize this, which is normal, is rather...it's rather human. But you have to identify ways in which you can extract yourself from this hostile environment and look beyond what's going on right now.

N.

Activist at MozaiQ and CampusPride

I talk with N. on the day before the Sustin LGBT march, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2016, which was preceded by an online campaign of small videos of people sharing their motivation for supporting LGBT rights. The talk verges on the march –which aims at challenging the Coaliția pentru Familie initiatives; but most of all, on enlightening the practicalities and struggles of doing student-oriented LGBT activism, and on the motivations behind it.

I've been an LGBT activist since the beginning of this year, so like 10, 11 months let's say. I started with MozaiQ and in January. I was attending their events. Actually, I was stalking them on Facebook, seeing what they were doing since their beginnings. I wanted to be more involved in other quite time consuming project. But then I got out of that so I could. More specifically then, with a couple of other people, I took over with the Campus Pride project...for the University. And now, since the elections, I'm a member of the MozaiQ board. I'd describe myself as an organizer I guess.

By the way, I love the word queer. However I think I use more often "LGBT". Because it's at the same time more specific and broader. Also, in Romania a lot of people don't know about LGBT, so by repeating it I think it's creating itself. At least MozaiQ consciously does that. In every, in everything written, events descriptions and stuff like that, we put in parenthesis the explanation, so to educate.

Anyways, about the activities...Campus Pride was already started in autumn last year, before MozaiQ, actually. But last year they couldn't quite get the community part, they couldn't get the students to meet up regularly and know each other. However, the part that they really did a wonderful job with was organizing a lot of different events, social events but most importantly trainings, workshops and stuff like that.

For example there's the GSA format that we wanted to, let's say copy from outside, from other countries, the Gay Straight Alliances: informal meetings for socializing, meeting new people... so for spreading information about certain topics and creating a place where people can discuss and ask questions and stuff like that. And we're gonna start the meetings this Monday I think. It will be the first GSA sort of ...on the trans topic.

So right now Campus Pride it is at the state of a project within MozaiQ. And the aim of this year is to make it a self-sufficient autonomous student association. So that we can use funding specifically for students and students initiatives, because MozaiQ is not an NGO for students, for youth... it's a general association, for everyone, and they can't get funding for us. Also, MozaiQ does political campaigns, and ...we had complaints about that... Even though Campus Pride is completely not political. And of course with other students associations this is the go-to excuse so they don't partner with us. Because they can't officially say "we're not gonna partner with you, collaborate with you because you're LGBT", because that's discrimination. But they can say like "ahh you...are associated all the time with political stuff..." But it's pretty much bullshit because there are lot of people in other associations that are actually in parties and stuff like that.

And also right now we're like, we just started so we're like under 20 people. But when we raise our numbers and people get to know us, we want to make separate hubs in each university faculty so that people with the same interest will meet and network, and stuff like that. Because that's also a part of Campus Pride, so it's about students, regardless that they're LGBT or not, we want to encourage them to better professionally, to flourish.

We also promote the safe space idea, but that doesn't exclude being in contact with other people. And there were actually some people who critiqued this. Well, like always there are people who critique the safe space idea, but the way I see it... when you have a garden and you have seedlings, you just planted the plant, you have to put a jar on it or something, to protect it, at least when it grows a few leaves, then you can leave it,



you can get it out. I think that's the role of the safe space, for people to get a sense of their sense of stability and to be sure of themselves and then they can do whatever.



We also started something new, something experimental. Just in the faculty of foreign languages for now but we're thinking of doing in the other places as well... secret groups, LGBT groups on Facebook. For all years, but only for LGBT. And surprisingly a lot of people joined. Cause the admin went on the normal groups of that faculty and they announced "hey, I made this LGBT secret group, whoever wants to join contact me privately". And that evening 50 people or so were on it...surprisingly!

Yeah, and my personal motivation is that this is what I wanted to see in my high school, a GSA. And of course we don't have any kind of stuff like that so... it was something that really stuck to me. I saw them in movies and I was like "Oh my god I so need something like that". Yeah, and I one day I woke up and I was like in my 3rd year at university and I still haven't got something like that...and I was like "high school students still haven't got it...why am I not doing anything about this?" Like, now that I know how to do shit, I have resources!

And concerning the march of tomorrow...the march it's not only for LGBTs, everybody is invited because it's basically against the *Coaliția pentru Familie*, their initiative. And we tied it to, this week was Tolerance Day, so we tied up to that because also a lot of politician mention tolerance, and it's basically to voice the other side of it, because they're marching a lot on the idea that everybody's singing to their tune and it's not true.

There's always gonna be people who are afraid of going public like this, but it's fine, that's why we go out and do stuff like that, so we do it for also, for the people that are still afraid or are not able to talk like that, and they still have the same concerns, or even greater concerns. I've seen this thing actually, this phenomenon, that some people that are in the closet or outside the community, so basically people that are not up to date and have not seen the community at work, they imagine things to be way more grave and...I don't know, they are very alarmist and they distrust everybody like "oh my god, it's gonna ruin everything

and the world is gonna end..." No, it's not. Because people have a lot of imagination and that can go against them.

And concerning this, the video campaign we made...I think that a lot of people took part, so I think it's a great idea for the future. Those videos themselves are helpful maybe for the people that are still in the closet or too young to know anybody. So they're helpful because they make the support system visible. And that's what I was thinking today, that maybe that's an idea next year to do another campaign strictly on support, on "ok we're here, we're queer".

## OVIDIU ANEMȚOAIȚEI

Founder of Hecate and board member of MozaiQ.

Sitting outside in the garden of the new location of Hecate, a feminist and queer publishing house, Ovidiu chats freely and eloquently. It's a pleasure to listen to his many insights into the aims and visions of his publishing house, on the queer movement in Romania, on feminism and on solidarity in between minoritarian groups.

The library and the publishing house, Hecate is basically a social economy enterprise: so it's the publishing house and the book store. From March this year I also started to look for another place to open a bar or a cafe, something. To enlarge the space for the events and all kinds of stuff.

So, the publishing house and the bookstore had two objectives: one was to promote a specific type of literature, mostly focusing on critical thinking, feminist and queer culture, themes, issues and experiences. But also, and it's not secondary, on other minorities or vulnerable groups. But the main focus I would say it's feminist, queer, leftist type of position. The events and projects we usually do are connected to the feminist anarchist queer communities or to the LGBT community.

Another objective of this project was to create networks of solidarity among specific type of minoritarian groups and that's why I focused a lot on the space, because we needed to have a safe space, a friendly safe space and to organize events, projects. So basically it's community building, networking, structures of solidarity from a specific type of cultural and political agenda, in terms of editorial objectives.

As far as I'm concerned I think we did it somehow, I mean, as a publishing house... we are known as a niche type of publishing house. And basically everybody knows, at least in Bucharest mainstream publishing agents, that Hecate is a kind of niche. Basically it is known, even though it was mainly advertised as a feminist publishing house, or as leftist publishing house...it is known as an LGBT publishing house. Yeah, actually I applied for a national fund for culture and one of the projects was rejected because the guy, the evaluator, saw "feminist and LGBT", and "it's LGBT!!!!!!".

Actually we're invited to Chisinau to talk about Hecate by our colleagues from GenderDoc. It's an LGBT organization, the single one there. They invited us because there is this LGBT week of allies and we're invited to talk about our project. And it's nice! It's the first time, and it's explicitly connected to this feminist queer agenda.

Basically is the single publishing house in Romania who is doing this, and we had courage 'cause we had money from the European Union, I mean... the complicity with the system is inevitable. Yeah, my strategy is to do some mimesis with the system and diverge the money and resources to our projects.

Hecate is a goddess, a Greek goddess, almost forgotten and associated with negative issues, like witchcraft, all kinds of negative thing... So it's the negative, let's say the devalued and negative feminine histories... that we're trying to re-value. Actually Hecate's function was to guide and offer alternatives.

Yeah, so I think the main argument is that Hecate is part of a larger movement, let's say, feminist queer movement, but with a leftist position and so on. Explicitly in these term!

Each movement has the gurus and the idols and the divas. So that's why I'm interested in spreading the power centers... no power figures!

There is a rupture in terms of a leftist type of agenda, which is an anarcho-queer one, and a liberal feminist, which dominated the 90s. I paid attention to all these developments. Because as somebody said, given the proliferation of power, we need to proliferate our strategies.

I'm also for the time being board member in MozaiQ. At the beginning there was like 5, 6 people who tried to build this organization. It's true that it was in response to a specific reluctance with ACCEPT. It was an anti-movement, let's say. But then, we actually started to collaborate with ACCEPT more or less in an organized way... but we are now collaborating, I think pretty well. With small tensions, but it transformed from that anti-movement type of organization, into a one with its own agenda, its projects and so on. And obviously MozaiQ is having a not so powerful but explicitly leftist social agenda. In terms of raising the issues with Roma LGBT people, with sex workers, with HIV and AIDS prevention and so on... On class issues, meaning that we have young brothers, coming from the other cities because they were kicked out from their homes and they don't have where to stay. Actually my dream was to transform a place here in Hecate in a community center with integrated services against domestic violence, focused more or less on LGBT youth and so on. So my next project would be a community center.

...we have to be unstoppable. We don't have time anymore. 'Cause the conservative forces are regrouping very strangely, at extreme far right. I mean, the right is completely fucked up. And it got mainstream... there is no ideological barrier, so we have to pay a lot of attention to this stuff. Because we focus more on the social, the grassroots community building and so on, but we need to pay attention to the larger settings in terms of political representation, visibility, elections and so on.

I think parties and leisure moments are the most interesting moment when people connect. And loads of projects have started from there. ...It's orgiastic idea factories! Creation! So that's why people need spaces. Unfortunately, as far as I know, there is no official place for lesbian women, women-only spaces. And we need them! Cause the scene is dominated by male presence.

There was a huge problem last year, when actually we realized there is only one woman in the board, of MozaiQ. So lots of colleagues, lots of feminist queer colleagues complained about this! We were very aware, I am not trying to pay any excuse, I raised this issue a lot of times. It's true that some of the guys of the board started to be more sensitive, pay more attention, but... I don't know what to tell you. In terms of membership I think it's more or less, more balanced, but the board team is not balanced at all.

It was important for Hecate to have a feminist and queer agenda, since you still have sexism and problems with women presence in LGBT communities. For example: LGBT issues were represented by ACCEPT. With the Pride or with legal issues. MozaiQ appeared last year. However, women's movement, let's say, movements, were presented under the umbrella of gender equality. And got monopolized and cannibalized by the equal-opportunity and gender-equality-via-EU type of discourse. So basically the feminist agenda completely crashed, because of this European Union accession mostly. So for me it was important to reset the agenda in feminist terms, mostly. Because, the new generations, we know that we cannot talk of queer and feminism apart. But sometimes you need to focus on some specific themes or problems, on feminism! It's not only about gay and lesbians and bisexuals, you know what I mean? So you need to be strategic on some terms. So that's why I focused on a feminist editorial agenda: Hecate is a feminist publishing house. In terms of theory, in terms of experiences... and so on. So for me it's very important because most and foremost I am a feminist. It's important, for me. The positioning it's important because it's still the most minoritarian one within the leftists movements, I think. We need, we need the debate on this. Not necessarily theoretically informed debates but at least some powerful, strong, sustained discussions about what we mean by feminist.

## ANDRADA BEŞLIU

DJ and performer

For 6 years Andrada organized queer parties in Timisoara. Currently she deejays under the name of Admina and works on and off in Bucharest, where she founded a female deejaying collective – Corp. – and where she joined the big Queer Night family.

### How long are you in Bucharest for?

I am not permanently here, but I always come here with projects. I am a performer so I have a lot of projects. I am in a performative play and I am playing some music, deejaying, and that's everything I do.

### How did you start?

I started 6 years ago. I started to make queer parties and I didn't have a deejay, and I didn't have money to pay one... so... Well, I was listening to music at the time, since 11 years I was listening to music and I loved it. So I started. At the beginning it wasn't deejaying-deejaying, it was totally trash, more like putting music from Youtube and all that stuff! That until I got to think "ok I can do this more technically, let's do it more technically!". But actually now that I am talking about this, I don't find it "oh that's so good because this girl is so technical", or "that mix is so good because it's so technical". No, that's some bullshit. And that's an academic bullshit. How can we talk about academics and deejaying when deejaying started from the people? It's not some institutional things. And it's not important to find a moment when you can say "oh that's ok", or "oh that's not ok", and I am actually bored of how this works. So I started to do it technically in the sense that it was a curiosity and in time you can do more with that, playing with songs, and you can give something new to this thing, to mixing. And I was putting music only at the queer parties. And after that I worked for 3 years at a gay club in Timisoara.

### Did you change style to fit the gay bar?

Of course! I listen to every kind of music! It's not a problem. It was actually totally great because I enjoyed a lot playing with everything. That's part of gay bar culture, or queer culture. It's part of everything because we're talking about people from everywhere, people with different tastes, people from...I don't know, many they don't have time to research "oh this is techno" or "oh this is an interesting mix". So they know the commercial things. They feel it, it's a feeling, they enjoy other sides of music and that's music too, so it's ok. If people could be happy, it's ok.

And now that I am booked more in general, I don't put music where I am the only female. And at the big festivals when they call me I say "ok, but I want to call two other girls!".

### Wow, very good!

Yes, and "if you won't accept this I won't come". Yes! Because they will start to understand how it is, and you could do this for another girl who nobody else would book her. And I'm not booked because I am a girl... I am booked because a friend, somebody who knows somebody else said "look at her, she's entertaining", and all these other stuff, you know it's kind of an exotification. I'm kind of an exotic character for them and they're like "ok, let's do it". And I notice this and I understand it and that's why I ask, "ok you are doing this because you're politically correct or you just find it entertaining?".

### Do you mind this exotification or you play with it?

I know that and I am playing with it of course. I like to dance without t-shirt and I like to do this because it's totally empowering. And I know how people look at me and, I am really playing with that. Because I don't

fucking care! I know, it was very hard to reach this point actually. But when I really understood that if... you don't need the validation, we never need the validation from them. Never-ever! So, what's to validate, you know? I am doing everything I want, they...I don't care if they understand or they don't, they just have to see it. Because they will ask them some questions: where this girl comes from? Why she's doing this? And from where does she have the power to do this? And that's enough. They don't have to understand more than that. And that's the empowering thing, I'm trying to reach. Because I don't need their validation, I just need things to change. Cause I am really tired.

**Yes, I really understand... What about queer spaces then..? Like, the queer party in Timisoara that you started, how did you start it and why?**

I started in a place called Atelier, that was the name. I started there and after that I was in a bar, and I went to all the bars in Timisoara of which I know the owners, and I asked "hey, can I have a queer party here?" "yes". Because that's the thing about Timisoara, people know about this, a lot more then here. Because we are talking about not about so many people, and the algorithm is on a smaller scale...

In meanwhile there were for 11 years gay bar in the center of Timisoara, like a nice place. But it was owned by two hetero cis homophobes.

**What? And it was a gay bar?**

Yes! It was a gay bar. Because when they bought the business it was already a gay bar... and when they wanted to change it, they couldn't because that was a homophobic reaction at a business level. Nobody wanted to rent it just because they knew that it used to be a gay bar and that it would continue. So they continued for the business but they hated everyone in there. And they didn't do anything at all for 11 years for the gay scene. Nothing, nothing at all! Just parties with deejays that didn't know queer culture, and the people went there anyways cause they didn't have any other place. And that thing is something very bad that happened to the LGBT community from Timisoara because they didn't learn how to stick together, because there was no place, no one guiding them or telling them "it's ok"...if they didn't search for themselves they didn't know anything about themselves.

And now it's the same problem with gay bars in Timisoara. We don't have one, we only rent places. One is the most rented, it's an ex strip tease club which is very nice and looks really really nice. It has a very balkanic aesthetic, and the best thing for me is that they allowed everyone in. And we have a lot of queer, LGBT people from... they are homeless, they don't have anywhere to stay. And in the previous gay bar that was open for 11 years...

**They were not allowed?**

Exactly. I don't know. And about discrimination, when I am listening here to manele and I see all that people, and I see only one person who really knows and really understands his culture –it's not our culture you know– I am not feeling myself actually, cause I am thinking "ok we need again white people to confirm to other white people that that culture that is not yours is ok!". It sucks. And when I am listening there [at the club in Timisoara], it's different, it's like totally different. You just feel it. I mean, we were hugging like that...Everytime I go to a gay bar in Timisoara it's the only moment in which there could be a community. They didn't know how to do it, they just hold hands with each other and do dances, you know, that's how they do it. You are full of emotions there, you are full of love, it's just like that. Or maybe I am exaggerating because I was raised there...but it's the same.

## LUCA ISTODOR

Blogger, Writer And Activist

Luca is on the move. I almost catch him in Romania, then I miss him. I hear he's in the States but I manage to track him down in Amsterdam. Feels warm and slightly surreal to talk about familiar names and places of Bucharest in a crowded Dutch café. He is very young and yet extremely active, I ask him about some of his projects, and particularly I am curious about a viral online article he wrote, featuring him kissing his boyfriend in visible urban locations in Bucharest. But first things first:

I don't know where I live now, I guess in Bucharest and Boston, that's kind of how I consider it. I go to Bucharest often and I am in touch because I still do projects there and I want to do projects there and obviously every time I see something that it's happening there, or that annoys me or that excites me, then I wanna contribute to it, or fight it... or you know, go back and do something.

**But how you started with your writing on LGBT is with ACCEPT's project QueeRO?**

Yeah. but I don't know, the project didn't really stick, as you probably know. I mean, it was published sometimes but yeah, I don't really write there anymore. But we used to be very determined! And we translated news and ... And then I had my little project with them that I started you know, the purple blog. Do you know it?

**No...**

It was my own blog. It was funny because when I first came to ACCEPT it was after a bad period they had, I think they had an incident at Muzeul Taranului with a screening and they were very skeptical and I was 17 or something, yeah I was 16. And I was a minor and they really didn't want to take me as a volunteer... because they thought they would have issues. And they were really freaked out. But then I also created a blog, because I kept waiting for people to give me something to do, but it wasn't happening, so I created a blog, called the Purple Blog. I wrote about my experiences being gay, about films, like queer films and ...that's basically when I started like being involved with my own projects. Because I thought maybe I should do something on my own since not that much is happening from others. And that's when I met a lot of people and I became much more visible, and public, since I gave my name there.

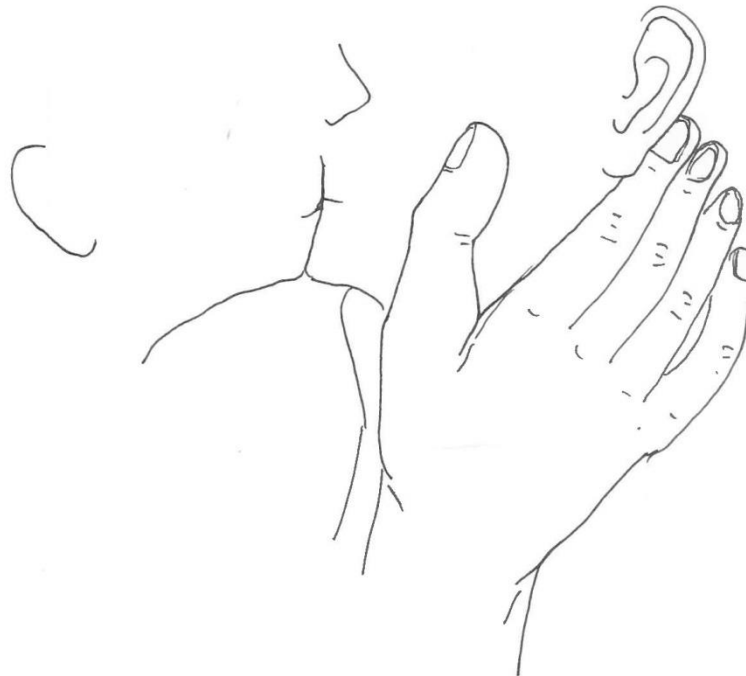
**Wow, very brave!**

Well, I didn't really realize it then, people kept telling me this though... And then I stopped writing after 6 months because I felt I didn't have much more to write about my experiences. And I didn't want it to deviate. Like I only wanted to write about being gay and I wanted to stick to that so it's just there and still gets visitors so... I guess that people still find it.

**About this article you wrote with photographs of you and your boyfriend kissing in public spaces of Bucharest... how do you live that? Is this level of visibility a statement or like, what happens?**

Well it's kind of both. I had a boyfriend for a long time in high school, for 3 years, and I kept wanting to make a statement with him and like kiss in public and he didn't want to. And then I also always had this project in mind which I think people at ACCEPT wanted to do at some point but I don't think it really worked out, like flash mob with people kissing everywhere... Then they started to have participants but most of them just withdrew and they didn't have enough people, so it got cancelled but they wanted to do it for Pride, like two years ago. But it didn't happen, so...Yeah I really wanted this and I thought, you know like, I kept asking what do people say. And I think it's really important for people to see these things because it will never get better if people are never exposed to the subject in real life and if they only see it on TV or in different publications which have who-knows-what portrayals of LGBT people...

So then I went to Boston, that's kind of when I broke up with my high school boyfriend... and just kind of, it was pretty normal there, especially at Harvard they try really hard to make it very safe and any small aggression is... people make a very big deal out of it, you know, it's on a whole other level. And I had some partners there and I got used display affection in public there, then I met my current boyfriend in Romania... I don't know, it felt natural to me to kiss in public. And I knew it was a statement, I wanted to do it for such a long time, and we did it. And because he was out I was like "maybe we should do something more", so we made that article with us kissing in front of different institutions. Cause I was like, how can we, it's hard to involve other people, because no one, virtually no one I know would want to be in a magazine, to be photographed or you know, the pictures to be online, so I was like "what can we do with our bodies and with just ourselves?" So that's how we came out with that.



**Is there a tension with the vulnerability that comes with visibility?**

Yeah, but it wasn't that kind of visibility, you know like, we weren't on TV... there was a lot of visibility, there were some negative comments, but at the same time it wasn't that kind of visibility that makes you be recognized in public spaces, or makes people come up to you and be like "yeah you're the gay guy who kissed all over Bucharest!". And also I feel I am pretty privileged at this point: my friends support me, my family supports me, I'm in an environment in which I get pretty few negative reactions. Even if it was harder at first, when I came out and when I told my parents of course it took them a year to fully accept it, when I told some of my friends... but you know, right now everything is perfectly fine.



**Another thing I wanted to ask you, I saw online a call that you made for love stories of the community...did that work out, or how was the project?**

More or less, I am still working on it. I am very excited about it but the problem is I don't have a lot of time to do it because there is always something else going on...but I got like 10 or 15 stories, which is not a lot, ideally you know, my ideal number would be around 30 or 40 or something. So I decided to change the method and started interviewing people instead of asking them to write. I got like 3 or 4 very good stories from people who, like really surprised me! Like one of the stories would be something I'd really read for leisure... That's how I started actually: I wrote two articles for Sub25 last year for Valentine's Day and I was like: why don't I expand this? I talked to friends and then I also asked friends if they knew anyone else and that's kind of how it went. I also did couple session when I talk to both of them and I recorded them and when I transcribed it as like a dialogue. So that's really nice and I hope to do something with it. I'd love to get it published in a way.

**Changing topic, did you go many times to the Pride in Bucharest?**

I only went twice. I keep missing it! The first time I went it was right after I started volunteering with ACCEPT. So I went to Pride and I went with my parents, and I think I was the only one who went with his parents. Although they came not necessarily because they believed in it but because they were afraid something might happen to me...But they were there! Yeah, and then 3 years later I went again and it was much bigger, and they came too but this time out of conviction. And yeah the second time we had this group, like Rainbow Families. And so my parents were part of it and they came there too, and another friend who also has a gay son came. It was nice.

**But also the Rainbow Family project is not going on anymore, right?**

No, that's sad. it's really hard to get people involved and it was just the same people every time... well actually there was a time when a mum came who had found the project online and her son had just come out to her. It was very emotional, she told us about it and she cried and she was afraid something might happen to him, and people were very supportive.

**And on more leisure note...do you go to queer parties and nights out when you're here?**

Yeah yeah. Mm. I went to Queer Night like twice. I wanna go but it does not always fit my schedule. Hmm I go to, where do I go to? I go to Queens a lot, which I know many people don't like, but I kind of like it. It's not perfect, but I like it so... Because I really feel the need of a gay club, like a specifically gay club. I don't know why I feel so comfortable there, but that's also this cultural thing of gay bars and cafes and they kind of feel like a community of people who don't know each other. So that's why I like Queens. It's the only place where I feel like completely comfortable. And I threw parties sometimes and like, 90% of my friends are queer so...

**Yeah, that helps.**

It's funny, a friend from Harvard came to Romania to visit me and I only introduced her to queer people and she was "oh...all the Romanian men I know are queer!".

