Language Matters: Analysing the LGBT Rights Dialogue Between Russia and the West

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The analysis of language and discourse used to be a neglected area of study within IR, but thankfully there is now a sizable amount of scholarship on the subject (Craith 2007, 5). An integral part of the critical constructivist perspective is the idea that language is both a social construction *and* a social constructor, which means it has the capacity to actively shape the world around us (Holzscheiter 2014, 143). One way in which language does this is through the construction of identities, both at a macro (state) level and a micro (individual) level (Epstein 2010, 328). This essay will specifically focus on the role that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities (henceforth referred to as LGBT) play in shaping Transatlantic relations, as a means of illustrating the importance of language, discourse and dialogue. Firstly, I will explain how language is powerful, before moving on to discuss how words get tied to identities. Having laid that foundation, I will then launch into an in-depth analysis of Russia's "anti-gay" propaganda law that was passed by the state Duma on 30th June 2013, and the subsequent back-and-forth dialogue that ensued between Russia and the West. I will argue that this dialogue constructed clashing identities: a pro-LGBT West versus an anti-LGBT East. When analysing the case study, I will initially examine the vague language used in the propaganda legislation itself and explain how the essentially vacuous legalese has enabled the Russian state to turn a blind eye to homophobic hate crimes. I will then describe some of the immediate impacts of this legislation on the Russian LGBT+ community with close reference to reports from the Human Rights Watch. Following on from that, I will analyse the responses of the two main international audiences that criticised the Russian "anti-gay" legislation: the EU and the USA. In doing this I will highlight both what was said and, crucially, what was *not* said. I will then discuss the manner in which Russia responded to Western criticism, before examining the language that Barack Obama used in his address to European leaders in March 2014 to describe the rift between Russia and the West.

Language, Discourse and Dialogue

It is important to clarify from the outset that language is not neutral; words should be thought of as a form of power (Craith 2007, 5). Realist scholars have traditionally overlooked the power of language in international relations in the mistaken belief that it is of minimal significance vis-à-vis a state's material actions (Ibid, 4). In stark contrast, critical constructivists believe that language matters. Language can be utilised by social actors in both a written and a verbal sense, and constructivists are united in the belief that to speak is also to act (Epstein 2010, 343). Thus, it is vital to take these types of acts into account when analysing state behaviour. Another core aspect of critical constructivism is the idea that language and discourse are co-constituted, which means that they are mutually integral to each other's existence (Holzscheiter 2014, 143). It is very difficult to provide a concrete definition that explains precisely what 'discourse' is, as it is an essentially contested concept; academics have resigned themselves to the fact that there will always be multiple competing interpretations of what 'discourse' is and how it operates (Ibid, 143). Put simply, discourse can be thought of as an assemblage of overlapping conversations involving multiple speakers, and hence, the main question posed by a discursive approach to studying IR is: *who speaks?* (Epstein 2010, 341). Epstein argues that, just like individuals, states can and do talk, and that this talking is a fundamental part of who they are and how they act (Ibid, 341). Critical constructivists recognise that it is through ongoing modes of communication between states that Transatlantic relations are constantly being constructed, de-constructed and re-constructed (Diez 2001, 6). Discourses are rarely a level playing field; certain states occupy privileged positions within discourses and have their voices amplified at the expense of states that occupy less privileged positions and therefore have their

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voices silenced (Milliken 1999, 229). An actor's behaviour is also "regulated by pre-existing discourses that structure the field of possible actions" (Epstein 2010, 343). Thus, states orient themselves in relation to other states by embracing certain discourses and either ignoring or challenging others (Ibid, 343).

As opposed to a discourse, which often involves several actors, a back-and-forth conversation between two social actors can be thought of as a 'dialogue' (Hutchings 2011, 640). Hutchings suggests that there are three "threads of meaning" at work with regards to 'dialogue'. The word can be used to describe: a general conversation between two actors in which there is not much concern for what is at stake in their discussion, a "staged" encounter between two actors that has been "scripted by somebody else," or a negotiation between two actors that are perhaps attempting to reach a consensus (Ibid, 640). Although the two terms are not interchangeable, there are a number of similarities between discourse and dialogue. It goes without saying that an actor's use of language is equally as integral to the development of a discourse, as it is to the development of a dialogue (Holzscheiter 2014, 144). Both discourses and dialogues are shaped by different contexts, yet they also have the capacity to construct contexts themselves (Hutchings 2011, 641). Similarly, dialogues, just like discourses, are not always equal and there are often power dynamics within them (Milliken 1999, 229). As there are two actors involved in a dialogue, binaries can be, and frequently are, constructed within their interactions (Ibid, 229). These binaries create a relation of power such that one side of the binary is privileged, and the other side is relegated to an inferior position (Derrida 1981). These power dynamics can, and do, change over time and are again dependent on context; in other words, just because an actor has a privileged position in one dialogue does not mean that it will necessarily hold a privileged position within a different dialogue in a different context (Milliken 1999, 250). It is extremely important to acknowledge that these power dynamics are by no means fixed, and that to insinuate that they hold true irrespective of context would be an act of intellectual complacency (Ibid, 249). Hutchings argues that we need to avoid automatically using "the West/non-West binary as a way of characterising the participants in dialogic exchange," which is an idea that will be examined again later during the discussion of the case study (Hutchings 2011, 640). Indeed, the West/non-West binary is a prime example of how discourses and dialogues construct identities.

Identity

Just like language, the concept of identity is "central to research agendas that seek to move beyond rationalist and materialist assumptions of state action" (Bucher and Jasper 2017, 392).

Although identity scholarship has played an important role in challenging the narrow rationalist focus on power and interests that was previously dominant within the IR academy, there are those who criticise identity analysis because of the "conceptual fuzziness" of the term (Epstein 2010, 328). Nevertheless, I would still strongly argue that identity is a powerful lens through which we can view Transatlantic relations. It is vital to remember that identities, like discourses, do not exist in a vacuum and need to be examined in relation to context (Legro 2009, 38). Depending on the context, an actor's identity can enableor constrain their ability to behave in certain ways (Ibid, 38). Furthermore, an actor's preferences and interests are also inseparably tied to their identity (Bucher and Jasper 2017, 392). With regards to the international system, discourse can shape both an individual state's national identity and collective identities that are shared by a group of states; I will address each of these in turn. Legro proposes that it is the *plasticity* of identity within the anarchic international system that enables a state's national identity to change and not remain fixed (Legro 2009, 37). The key question (or the 'puzzle') that he identifies is: "when can we expect national identities to be malleable and when will they be relatively resilient to change?" (Ibid, 37). His answer to this question is prefaced with the acknowledgement that national identities are difficult to alter because they are often internalised, they go unquestioned, and thus they are often assumed to be natural, to the extent that any thought of an alternative identity would seem outside of the realm of possibility (Ibid, 44). He subsequently argues that a state's national identity signifies how they perceive themselves in relation to the international order, and that this perception is shaped by "the dominant rules, institutions and norms that characterise the international system" (Ibid, 38). These rules and norms often manifest themselves through language and discourse (Holzscheiter 2014, 146). This line of thinking will reappear later when I analyse how and why Russia's sense of national identity is often figured as being in opposition to the established 'Western' international order, led by Europe and America.

Collective identities are arguably more complex phenomena than national identities as they involve multiple states,

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are extremely multifaceted, and are constantly evolving to adapt to the global political environment (Kitchen 2009, 96). Risse advocates the idea that collective identities change through "reasoned consensus" (Risse 2000, 1). He suggests that this tends to occur when actors are faced with new emerging rules or norms that challenge the status quo (Ibid, 1). This mechanism can definitely be applied to the EU's move towards supporting the burgeoning LGBT rights movement. In 1998 it was declared that the EU would block the accession of any nation that had state policies that infringed upon the rights of lesbians and gay men (Ayoub 2016, 26). Then, in 2000, the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights was officially ratified and included "explicit non-discrimination protections covering sexual orientation" (O'Dwyer 2018, 37). This signalled a clear normative shift in which support for sexual minorities had become a core facet of the EU's identity as well as its policy mission (Ibid, 38). A similar argument could be made for the Transatlantic identity. Kitchen explains that Europe and America share a sense of responsibility towards each other that is premised on a mutual feeling of 'we-ness' (Kitchen 2009, 97). An idea of a Transatlantic 'self' is constructed and then positioned in relation to 'others' that are excluded from the collective and framed as being different (Neumann 1996, 142). Often these 'others' are imagined to be dangerous entities that could be potential security threats to the Transatlantic collective 'self' (Ibid, 142). The Transatlantic identity has historical roots that have been reinforced over several decades since the end of WW2, to the extent that it has endured long past the end of the Cold War when many were sceptical about its chances of survival (Kitchen 2009, 97). There is definitely some truth in the idea that shared 'liberal values' underpin the Transatlantic community and are the reason behind its enduring relevance (Moravcsik 2003, 85). States who identify as being a part of the Transatlantic community have to argue that these 'liberal values' matter and that they are a core aspect of the Transatlantic identity, as it is certainly not a given that they will be universally embraced (Kitchen 2009, 111). The fact that words like 'freedom,' 'liberty', and 'democracy' are often cited as being the basis of the Transatlantic community demonstrates how identities and words are interwoven (Moravcsik 2003, 85). As collective identity construction is an ongoing process, language and discourse play a key role as they can articulate what the amorphous 'we-ness' actually consists of (Mattern 2001, 352). Mattern conceptualises the relationship between words and identity through the idea of a narrative 'gun' (Ibid, 352). She argues that, in theory, states are the *authors* of their own identity narratives (Ibid, 352). In practice however, when it comes to collective identities, it tends to be powerful states that choose the narrative and weaker states that either voluntarily tag along behind them or are coerced into doing so. In a similar manner to how physical guns "trap victims with a non-choice between death and compliance," narrative 'guns' can be used by actors to powerfully assert their identity claims and force any potential dissenters into complying with the 'we' (Ibid, 352). The 'Cold War' is an example of a narrative gun that has been utilised by both the USSR/Russia and the West to reinforce their respective collective identities (Rivkin-Fish and Hartblay 2014, 107). Although it can be tempting to categorise all disagreements between Russia, Europe and America as being reminiscent of the 'Cold War,' I will refrain from doing so in the context of this essay because there is not enough evidence of escalated tensions to justify the label.

Case Study: The 2013-14 LGBT Rights Dialogue between Russia and the West

LGBT rights discourses have been consistently overlooked by the academic literature on the Transatlantic security relationship. When assessing significant security threats to Europe and America, scholars have occasionally been guilty of conflating state security with human security and making the implicit assumption that if a state is deemed to be secure then *all* of their citizens are secure as well (Hoogensen and Rottem 2004, 156). Marginalised groups, like the LGBT community, are arguably the most likely to experience insecurity within the societies in which they live (Slootmaeckers, Touquet and Vermeersch 2016, 1). Thus, it is extremely important to bring LGBT identities out of the margins of academic scholarship and place them at the forefront of the analysis, to explain how their experiences fit in with the bigger picture.

Before I examine the recent LGBT rights dialogue between Russia and the West, for the purposes of contextualisation, I will briefly outline how the legislation regarding Russia's LGBT population has changed over time. From 1933, homosexual relations between two men were criminalised in the USSR, as stipulated by article 121 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (Verpoest 2017, 10). Historians generally agree that there was a prevailing belief within the USSR that homosexuality was both a mental disorder and "a product of the bourgeois lifestyle" (Kon 2010, 17). The law criminalising homosexuality was abolished in April 1993 after the collapse of the USSR, although men who were imprisoned under the previous legislation were not released

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(Rivkin-Fish and Hartblay 2014, 99). Further legal protection for the LGBT community was not forthcoming in the new post-Soviet era, and lingering hostile attitudes towards homosexuality still remained pervasive (Ibid, 100). Indeed, Verpoest argues that throughout the 1990s and 2000s homosexuality was still seen as "something perverted and foreign" in Russia due to the "low visibility of homosexuality" in Russian society (Verpoest 2017, 11). It is important to clarify that the 'anti-gay' propaganda law that caused such a high degree of global consternation did not appear out of nowhere; similar legislation had already been passed by regional and city level legislatures in St Petersburg, Archangelsk, Ryazan, and Kostroma from 2003 onwards (De Kerf 2017, 36). Moreover, the Russian state actually passed multiple laws that infringed upon the rights of LGBT people in 2012-13 besides the propaganda law (Verpoest 2017, 9). A one hundred year ban on the organisation of gay pride marches was enacted by Moscow courts in June 2012, after years of them being forcibly cancelled or suppressed by the police (Ibid, 9). Laws were also passed that forbid Russian same-sex couples from adopting children and foreign same-sex couples from adopting Russian children (Mortensen 2016, 350). It is also important to acknowledge that only a small minority of the Russian people appear to have been in opposition to these laws when they were introduced; a June 2013 poll conducted by VTsIOM (the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre) indicated that 88% of Russian citizens supported the new legislation (Verpoest 2017, 9). Nevertheless, the laws sparked an international outcry with American and European media outlets branding them homophobic and giving them the 'anti-gay' label (De Kerf 2017, 36). This label later became inextricably tied to the propaganda law in the ensuing discourse, which further exemplifies the power of language and words (Ibid, 36).

Scrutinising Russia's "anti-gay" propaganda law

At first glance, the language used in the official legal documentation is perplexing because of how vague it is (Mortensen 2016, 368). The law prohibits the distribution of "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" to those under the age of 18, punishable by a fine of up to a million rubles if transgressed *(Verpoest 2017, 11)*. I believe that this phrasing was not accidental; it was a strategic, intentional and deliberate choice of words. What exactly does the word 'propaganda' mean in this context? To quote an English translation of Article 6.2 of the Russian Federation's Code on Administrative Offences:

Propaganda is the act of distributing information among minors that 1) is aimed at the creation of non-traditional sexual attitudes, 2) makes non-traditional sexual relations attractive, 3) equates the social value of traditional and non-traditional sexual relations, or 4) creates an interest in non-traditional sexual relations.

(Verpoest 2017, 11)

I would argue that this definition provides very little clarification over what the law does and does not classify as 'propaganda'. Waving a rainbow pride flag, holding hands with a member of the same sex in public, screening films that cover LGBT themes and talking openly about LGBT issues could all technically be classed as a violation of the law (Mortensen 2016, 365). Furthermore, the usage of the term 'non-traditional sexual relations' instead of 'homosexuality' is interesting because it enhances the notion that "LGBT individuals are defined through negation [...] as something best not to mention out loud or in official documents" (Ibid, 366).

The fact that the terminology is so open to interpretation grants a significant amount of discretion to policemen and judges to enforce the law how they wish, which is obviously an alarming prospect (Ibid, 365). Another factor to consider is that the Russian administration likely opted for vague language to avoid directly undermining the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The Russian state has ratified the ECHR and is expected to uphold its core principles, one of which is to respect the rights of minority groups to express themselves without fear of prejudice or discrimination (De Kerf 2017, 36). The anti-propaganda law does not blatantly violate the ECHR to the same extent that a Russian re-criminalisation of homosexuality would have done, hypothetically speaking (Ibid, 40). It is notably more subtle. This has enabled Russia's president Vladimir Putin to defend the legislation and spread the message that Russia *does* respect the rights of LGBT people, on the condition that they do not promote their lifestyle or publicly transgress societal norms (Wilkinson 2013, 5).

What was the immediate impact of the law on the lives of Russian LGBT individuals? Was there anything for the

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international community to be concerned about? Although there is no direct evidence to suggest that the law itself caused homophobic hostility in Russia to increase, there was a considerable amount of dangerous rhetoric already being espoused by anti-LGBT hate groups (Feyh 2014, 103). Neo-nazi organisations like the 'National Socialist Group 88' and the 'Moskovsky Skin Legion' allegedly claimed that the summer of 2013 would be a homosexual "hunting season" (Ibid, 104). Other vigilante groups kidnapped gay men and teenage boys by targeting them online, luring them on the pretext of a fake date, and then proceeding to abuse and humiliate them (Human Rights Watch 2014). Hundreds of video recordings of these harrowing encounters were posted online, and show victims being physically attacked, forced to drink urine, and stripped naked against their will so homophobic slurs could be spray painted onto their bodies (Ibid). In a 2014 interview, Russian LGBT activist Igor Iasine argued that anti-LGBT hate groups saw the propaganda law as a sign that the government officially supported homophobia, and as such they were encouraged to continue to terrorise LGBT people (Feyh 2014, 104). Police were apparently reluctant to investigate these hate crimes, and the victims themselves were often blamed for the attacks whilst the perpetrators evaded punishment (Human Rights Watch 2014). Furthermore, the authorities were not afraid to put their gay propaganda law into action; just a few weeks after the law was passed, Kirill Kalugin was arrested for waving a rainbow flag in Moscow's Red Square (Verpoest 2017, 12). Not long after, the Deti 404 website, which housed an online support group for LGBT youngsters, was permanently blocked and its founder, Yelena Klimova, was fined 50,000 rubles for "distributing gay propaganda" (Tetrault Farber 2014).

The Western response

Interestingly, it was celebrities who were initially the most outspoken in their criticism of Russia, as world leaders took a while to formulate the most appropriate diplomatic response (Arana 2013). In August 2013, David Cameron, then the UK Prime Minister, agreed to engage with the well-known comedian and actor Stephen Fry, who was a vocal critic of Russia's 'anti-gay' propaganda law (Mason 2013). Fry called for a British boycott of the upcoming Sochi Winter Olympic Games as a means of protest, however Cameron dismissed this suggestion by asserting that attending the Games would be a "better way of challenging prejudice" (Ibid). He subsequently vowed that he would "challenge" Putin during the G20 summit that was scheduled to take place a few weeks later (Luhn 2013). However, somewhat disappointingly, a more thorough condemnation of the Russian 'anti-gay' propaganda law was not to be forthcoming from Cameron; when questioned on the subject he instead frequently resorted to the usage of vague language that promised action but lacked conviction (Rivkin-Fish and Hartblay 2014, 97). President Barack Obama, on the other hand, was marginally more willing to participate in the LGBT rights discourse and make substantive critical remarks. Although both him and Cameron refused to entertain the prospect of a boycott, Obama made a statement by appointing Billie Jean King, an out and proud lesbian, to the US Winter Olympic delegation (Liptak 2013). More notably, during an interview with American television personality Jay Leno, Obama proclaimed that America should have "no patience for countries that try to treat gays or lesbians or transgender persons in ways that intimidate them or are harmful to them" (Politico 2013). Obama's clever choice of words in this instance enabled him to indirectly denounce Russian homophobic discrimination without explicitly mentioning Russia. I think that this comment epitomises the first phase of the LGBT rights dialogue between the Transatlantic alliance and Russia in the aftermath of the passage of the 'anti-gay' propaganda law. It is just as important to reflect on what *was not* said as well as what *was* said, and with that in mind, it is clear that both the UK and America were reluctant to commit to powerful speech acts that explicitly and forcefully condemned Russia for violating the rights of their LGBT citizens.

The Russian response

Russia's multi-layered response to the first wave of Western criticism can be organised into two main strands: one of defence and one of counterattack. Putin steadfastly denied any insinuation that Russia's LGBT population were experiencing stigma, harassment and violence, claiming that "we have absolutely normal relations [with the LGBT community] and I don't see anything out of the ordinary here" (Luhn 2013). Putin was also consistently adamant in his defence of the legislation and made several attempts to explain the logic behind its introduction to the Western media (Mortensen 2016, 352). In an interview with the German national broadcaster, Putin responded to the calls to boycott the Sochi Winter Olympics by explaining:

We've passed a law according to which propaganda among minors is prohibited. But I will say this again: both in your

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country, in all European countries, and in Russia, there is a big problem with the population. The demographic problem is that the birth rate is low. The Europeans are becoming extinct, do you understand this or not? And same-sex unions don't produce children.

(Ibid, 352)

The language being used in this answer was deliberately trying to rewrite the popular Western narrative that Russia was a 'homophobic' state. Putin is arguing that the law was not borne out of anti-LGBT sentiment, but rather a recognition that falling birth rates in Russia were a matter of critical concern that needed to be addressed (Mole 2018, 1). He frames this argument in a manner that constructs declining birth rates as a mutual dilemma that Russia and Europe shared; probably in an attempt to make the propaganda law seem more palatable to Western audiences. Demographic concerns were certainly a less abhorrent explanation than those offered by other Russian politicians, some of whom suggested that the propaganda law would protect children from paedophilia and reduce the number of incidences of child abuse (Mortensen 2016, 364).

The counterattack strand of this phase of the dialogue is where we see the emergence of the clashing West versus East identities being constructed. In his 2013 end of year Presidential address, Putin alluded to Western criticism of the propaganda law before saying:

We know that in the world, more and more people support our position on upholding traditional values, which for millennia have been the spiritual and moral basis of civilization, and every nation: the traditional family values, true human life, including religious life, a life not only of material but also spiritual values of humanity and diversity of the world.

(Verpoest 2017, 10)

Here Putin is justifying the law on the grounds that it reinforces the importance of "traditional family values." Slootmaeckers, Touquet and Vermeersch cite this as an example of Russia positioning itself apart from the West and "providing an alternative political and cultural model that […] promotes 'authentic' national cultures, whilst simultaneously resisting democratic and 'modern' values imposed from abroad" (Slootmaeckers, Touquet and Vermeersch 2016, 3). It definitely appears that Russia made a conscious decision to construct itself as the international flag-bearer for the preservation of traditional values amid the global rise in acceptance of 'non-traditional' values (Ibid, 3). This decision was made blindingly apparent when the Russian Foreign Ministry published its "Report on the Human Rights Situation in the European Union" in January 2014, which heavily criticised the EU's "aggressive" campaign to forward the rights of sexual minorities across Europe (Mortensen 2016, 357). Perhaps irked by the EU's planned investigation into LGBT rights abuses in Russia, the Russian Foreign Ministry evidently felt compelled to retaliate in kind (EURACTIV 2014). The report states that:

the European Union and its Member States consider, as one of their priorities, the dissemination of their neo-liberal values as a universal lifestyle for all other members of the international community. This is particularly evident in their aggressive promotion of the sexual minorities' rights. Attempts have been made to enforce on other countries an alien view of homosexuality and same-sex marriages as a norm of life and some kind of a natural social phenomenon that deserves support at the state level.

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2014, 7-8)

Ironically, in refuting Western allegations of homophobic discrimination, Russia proved that those allegations were justified, as they asserted that the LGBT community is not deserving of the same rights and state protection afforded to the heterosexual population. Thus, by early 2014 it was obvious that Russia had abandoned any attempt at pro-Western rhetoric and was instead determined to establish its own norms and values system, in opposition to the EU and America (Verpoest 2017, 10).

Obama's response

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America's reply to these verbal counterattacks from Russia reinforced the East/West identity divide. In March 2014, Obama gave a speech at the Palais Des Beaux-Arts in Brussels following talks with EU and NATO leaders on how best to react to the Russian annexation of Crimea (CNN 2014). The importance of the political context cannot be overstated as it is likely that the Crimea crisis forced the West to speak out against Russia's actions with greater conviction than before, which thereby prompted a consolidation of the pro-LGBT 'Western' identity (Verpoest 2017, 4). During his speech, Obama took the opportunity to repeat his previous condemnation of the 'anti-gay' propaganda law, but this time he elaborated on his criticisms in much greater detail, in light of Russia's continuous refusal to accept that they were violating the rights of their LGBT citizens (The Washington Post 2014). He proclaimed that:

Western ideals and values of openness and tolerance will endure long past repression. Instead of targeting our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, we can use our laws to protect their rights. Instead of defining ourselves in opposition to others, we can affirm the aspirations that we hold in common. That's what will make America strong. That's what will make Europe strong. That's what makes us who we are.

(Obama 2014)

This is an extremely powerful speech act for numerous reasons. Firstly, he classifies the values of openness and tolerance as being distinctly 'Western' in character, thereby tying them to the Transatlantic collective identity. Through this he implies that Russia could never define itself as a nation that upholds those values. Secondly, Obama's use of language latches onto the 'West versus East' narrative that Russia had previously constructed, but he inverts the roles being played by the two sides. The Russian Foreign Ministry report portrayed the West as being the "aggressors" in their mission to challenge nations who fail to support LGBT rights, whilst simultaneously portraying Russia as an admirable defender of "traditional family values" (O'Dwyer 2018, 228). Instead, Obama characterises Russia as the aggressor who is "targeting" the LGBT community and frames Europe and America as being the protectors of LGBT rights. Lastly, the phrase "that's what makes us who we are" is designed to emphasise both that the Transatlantic alliance stands united in its support for LGBT rights, and that supporting LGBT rights has become a crucial part of the Transatlantic identity. This links back to Kitchen's analysis of 'we-ness' and the idea that language is an effective tool for constructing issues that can then be reified within discourse as being integral to the Transatlantic community (Kitchen 2009, 111).

Therefore, in conclusion, it is undoubtedly important to consider language when analysing Transatlantic relations between Europe and America. Moreover, placing language at the forefront of the analysis can also reveal fascinating insights into how Europe and America interact with Russia, as I have demonstrated. It appears that the 'West versus East' identities within LGBT rights discourse were constructed and reinforced by both Russia and America during their dialogic exchange. Although this binary arguably paints too simplistic a picture, it is definitely true to say that the Transatlantic alliance has incorporated the protection of LGBT rights into its political identity, and that Russia, in stark contrast, has not (O'Dwyer 2018, 38). These clashing identities came to the fore again when, in June 2017, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the 'anti-gay' propaganda law discriminated against gay people and incentivised homophobia (Reilhac and Osborn 2017). Russia disputed the verdict, and the law has not been repealed or amended, as of July 2021 (The Moscow Times 2021). Thus, it is important to acknowledge that the dialogue between Russia and the West regarding LGBT rights is not limited to the snapshot that I have analysed. It is an exchange that will hopefully continue to evolve over time.

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