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Sexualities and Class in Transnational Family Practices of LGB Migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands

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Biographical note.

Tanja VUCKOVIC JUROS received her PhD in Sociology from Indiana University Bloomington. Her research, mostly at the intersections of cultural and political sociology, has been funded by the Croatian and the US National Science Foundations and the European Commission's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. She currently serves as the editor-in-chief of the *Croatian Sociological Review* and is preparing a new MSCA-IF research project on citizens' responses to anti-gender messages in Croatia and Belgium.

Sexualities and Class in Transnational Family Practices of LGB Migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands

The present paper focuses on transnational families of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) migrants and addresses their peculiar absence in sociological and geographical perspectives across migrations, families and sexualities research. It draws from a study of middle-class LGB migrants who are married or raising children with a same-sex partner in Belgium and the Netherlands and their parents still residing in select Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries with constitutional protection of heterosexual marriage. The goal of the study is to examine how intersections of class and sexualities shape CEE LGB migrants' trajectories and transnational family practices. The analysis is based on one life story, situated in a comparative framework. The present study approaches the middle-class experiences and non-normative sexualities of CEE migrants as continuously reappearing and disappearing privileges and disadvantages. From this viewpoint, the study highlights class advantages as consistently alleviating the disadvantages of non-normative sexualities, but also simultaneously bringing both further restrictions and additional benefits to the married CEE LGB migrants, particularly those with children. These restrictions are best reflected in the limits to further mobilities that stem from the risk of losing extensive legal protection of same-sex partnership and parenting. The benefits further extending class advantages are identifiable in the intensification of transnational family practices following planned same-sex parenthood. These not only transform and strengthen the intimacies of CEE LGB migrants with their families-of-origin, but they also contribute to shifting assumptions of 'normal' familyhood, particularly in relation to technology-assisted reproduction, social parenthood and the nurturer roles.

Keywords: sexuality; social class; migrants; LGB; CEE; transnational families

Introduction

Transnational families of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) migrants occupy a peculiarly neglected position across migration, families and sexualities research. Sexualities perspectives, for example, challenge the heteronormativity of migration studies (Manalansan 2006; Mole 2018b) but then focus mostly on individually mobile LGB individuals, rather than families. Even in the rare studies of same-sex migrant couples, analyses typically do not include ties of care and support beyond the same-sex unit (McDevitt-Pugh 2011; Badgett

2011; Chauvin et al. 2019). However, many LGB individuals, even when leaving their families-of-origin in pursuit of freer lives, sustain emotional and financial ties to them (Wimark 2016; Luo 2020). Still, LGB family studies rarely examine kinship and family practices (Morgan 2011, 2020) beyond a nuclear household (Vaccaro 2010) or across larger geographical distances. On the other hand, transnational family research, that specifically looks at such practices (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Baldassar et al. 2014), typically does not analyze non-heterosexual migrants.

Intersections of sexualities and class are, likewise, often neglected in empirical studies. Despite the growing number of the migration and transnational families studies that incorporate class analysis, they mostly focus on heterosexual families (Kofman 2018a; Fresnoza-Flot and Shinozaki 2017; for an exception, see Chauvin et al. 2019). In sexualities research, such heteronormativities are challenged, but class remains neglected (Binnie 2011; Taylor 2011). Too frequently, the experiences of middle-class non-heterosexual individuals are presented as universal gay experiences (Binnie 2004; McDermott 2011), instead of examined, as one axis of privilege, at their intersections with other social experiences (cf. Jackson 2011). As Crenshaw (1991) highlights in discussing intersectionality, such experiences should be analyzed in interaction, instead of being added up. In practice, this means approaching intersections as privileges and disadvantages continuously reappearing and disappearing through negotiations of familial and institutional spaces (Taylor 2010).

Following this approach, I use a case study of middle-class Central Eastern European (CEE) LGB migrants and their parents to spotlight intersections of class and sexualities in the LGB migrants' trajectories and transnational family practices. I focus on CEE migrants, married or raising children with a same-sex partner in Belgium and the Netherlands, who sustain emotional and caregiving ties with their families-of-origin in their home countries. Drawing from sociological and geographical perspectives across migrations, families and

sexualities research, I discuss the peculiar absence of transnational families of LGB migrants in these studies, and I extend this discussion to social class. Building on insights provided by one particular life story compared to other narratives collected in this research, in the analysis I situate the CEE LGB migrants' trajectories in a family framework that highlights how intersections of class and sexualities function differently for individual LGB migrants and mobile same-sex families. I also examine how intersections of class and sexualities underlie the transnational family practices of LGB migrants and their parents, and I highlight gender and sexuality assumptions challenged through these practices.

Theoretical framework

Positioning LGB individuals into the family framework

'Families-of-choice' describe the networks of care and support that LGB individuals develop in response to alienation or exclusion from their families-of-origin (Weston 1991; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001). This concept highlights the intimacies alternative to those based on kin and blood and, simultaneously, widens the conceptualization of 'family' beyond a (married/monogamous and reproducing) heterosexual couple. For this reason, the families-of-choice framework also contributes to the ongoing effort to decentre the heteronormative family in both sociology of families and family geographies (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004; Morgan 2011; Valentine 2008; Wilkinson and Bell 2012; Hall 2016). This framework is not only inclusive of non-heterosexual individuals, but it also brings attention to heterosexual individuals' voluntary commitments not necessarily based on kin or co-residence, including intimacies sustained by the single and childfree (Valentine 2008; Wilkinson 2020).

The families-of-choice framework captures well the experiences of many LGB individuals, particularly in homonegative communities (e.g. Švab 2007). At the same time, the growing number of LGB individuals who access recognized same-sex partnerships and legal parenthood in many Western countries (Waldijk et al. 2017) has helped establish the

LGB families field. In this field, however, the focus remains on nuclear co-resident family structures (for exceptions, see Vaccaro [2010] on queer multi-parent families; or Malmquist and Höjerström [2020] on gay fathers incorporating surrogate mothers as close family members).

By focusing either on voluntary intimacies or nuclear family units, 'families-of-choice' and 'LGB families' frameworks both demonstrate reliance on individualistic and Western-based conceptualizations of family ties. This leaves little room for complex negotiations of individual choices and intergenerational family obligations across households, such as those that may emerge in societies with family or family-like configurations at the centre (Mizielńska and Stasińska 2018). One vivid example of such negotiations is provided by Mishra's recent portrayal (2020) of closeted Indian gay men cohabiting with their same-sex partners, but staying married and sharing childcare with their different-sex partners. Other examples – mostly highlighting strong intergenerational links of economic and emotional interdependence between LGB individuals and their families-of-origin – also come from more familiaristic societies, in Southern and Eastern Europe (Bertone 2013; Maričić et al. 2016; Mizielńska and Stasińska 2018) or countries such as Turkey (Wimark 2016), Taiwan (Jhang 2018) or China (Luo 2020).

Connections between LGB individuals and their families-of-origin are also sustained across larger geographical distances, in a transnational field of care and support.

Nevertheless, as I show in the next section, transnational family practices of LGB individuals often remain invisible across sexualities, migrations and families studies.

Bringing transnational families of LGB migrants into focus

Geographies of sexualities heightened attention to urban and rural mobilities of LGB individuals, and the hetero/homonormativities associated with regulations of sexual citizenship, family and movement across borders (Browne, Lim, and Brown 2007; Johnston

and Longhurst 2010; Podmore 2013; Oswin 2013). What remained out of focus, nonetheless, were personal relationships – sexual, platonic or familial (Valentine 2008). Likewise, the emerging queer migration studies dominantly examine individual LGB migrants who are rarely situated into their (transnational) family frameworks (cf. Chauvin et al. 2019). Families-of-origin are mostly brought up solely in the context of negotiated, hesitant or missing disclosures of non-heteronormative sexual identities of the (seemingly single) first-generation (Vasquez del Aguila 2012; Barglowski, Amelina, and Bilecen 2018) or the later-generation immigrants (Peumans 2015). But, this issue only emerges because some LGB migrants invest considerable effort in sustaining ties with their families-of-origin, even after migrating (Wimark 2016; Luo 2020). While this development may be classed to a certain extent – as some socioeconomically vulnerable migrants are more dependent on their family support (e.g. Vasquez del Aguila 2012) – it is also related to social understandings of familial roles and obligations (Wimark 2016; Luo 2020) and persisting emotional bonds with the family members, sustained across distance (Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir 2018).

Transnational family relationships of LGB migrants are also neglected in family geographies, despite Holdsworth's (2013) argument that distance does not necessarily erode intimacies but may lead to diverse reconfigurations of family practices, and her and other family geographers' effort to be inclusive of non-normative families and intimacies (e.g. Wilkinson 2020). Neither are these relationships visible in the transnational families research. In this field, despite a strong emphasis on gender (Fan and Parreñas 2018; Ducu 2018), sexualities remain curiously neglected, with little progress compared to more than a decade ago when Manalansan (2006) first criticized the heteronormativity of the transnational chains of care studies. While the field of transnational family research has considerably expanded in the meantime, within new conceptual frameworks of circulation of care (Baldassar and Merla 2014) and cross-border family practices (Baldassar et al. 2016), the persisting

heteronormative focus misses the opportunity to more deeply unravel the 'assumptions about kinship, marriage, desires, and social roles' (Manalansan 2006, 225) that are revealed through (transnational) family practices that create 'not just a sense of everyday, but also a sense of the normal' (Morgan 2020, 10). How such negotiations of 'normal' familyhood play out between LGB migrants and their families-of-origin is, therefore, one of the key interests of the present study – which also examines how these transnational family practices are underlined by class.

Class, migrants and homonormativity

Bourdieu (1984), influentially, conceptualized social class across the interrelated material and symbolic dimensions. Material dimension refers to the degree of access to economic capital, whereas symbolic dimension typically highlights how life chances are also stratified by the 'right' (profitable) knowledge, activities or dispositions (cultural capital), but also by the 'right' social connections (social capital) (Bourdieu 1984; Swartz 1998; Outhwaite 2008; Edgerton and Roberts 2014). In research on family and sexuality migrations and on transnational family, social class is most visibly related to material (economic) dimension. It is often also connected with some elements of cultural capital (e.g. educational qualifications) and social capital (such as access to supportive networks of kin and co-nationals). For example, social class is most apparent when discussing the migrants' financial resources and their ability to secure such resources through their educational credentials or professional skills. Thus, both heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals with better economic or professional prospects can more easily meet, for example, the income requirements of immigration or family reunification schemes (Simmons 2004; Kofman 2018a; Chauvin et al. 2019). Such migrants can also more easily use their available resources to sustain transnational interactions and family practices (Fresnoza-Flot and Shinozaki 2017).

Nevertheless, the symbolic dimension of class can be equally prominent. For

example, those with high cultural capital may be exempt from income requirements in some immigration systems (Kofman 2019), or they may use the high levels of cultural or social capital (obtained, for example, through immigrant social networks) to more proficiently navigate the immigration, labour and social benefits systems of their host countries (Ryan et al. 2008; Kofman 2018a; Wray, Kofman, and Simic 2019; Chauvin et al. 2019). In addition, symbolic class-based stratifications can be identified across a wide array of policies regulating LGB individuals, migrants and families in general. For instance, middle-class standards of femininity and parenthood can be related to the exclusionary, morality-based framing of working-class and lone-parent families in the UK (Skeggs 2004; Hall 2016). Middle-class morality (Mosse 1988) can likewise be related to the immigration policies that privilege the model of married/monogamous couple with children, as also seen in more recent expansions of family and immigration rights to same-sex couples conforming to this model (Simmons 2008; Wilkinson 2013, 2020).

In this context, the desire to pursue 'marriage with children' model of the family may be linked to the middle-class dispositions and aspirations, as suggested by Cherlin (2020) in his recent evaluation of (heterosexual) marriage as a middle-class cultural capital. This issue is, indeed, at the heart of the homonormativity debates, where some perceive same-sex marriage and queer reproductivity as assimilationist and heteronormative (Duggan 2002; Richardson 2004), while others argue that such appropriations also transform traditional models of marriage and family (Weeks 2007; Vuckovic Juros 2020). Classed elements are further suggested by the middle-class profiles that dominate in the studies of married same-sex couples (e.g. Badgett 2009; Richman 2013; Lannutti 2014). Likewise, the financial resources often needed for intentional LGB-parenthood (e.g. surrogacy) result in the higher socioeconomic status of families where same-sex parents raised their children from birth (Mazrekaj, De Witte, and Cabus 2020). In light of such patterns, the present study addresses

the need for a deeper reflection on the role of social class, in both its material and symbolic dimension, in transnational lives of LGB migrants who are married or co-parenting with a same-sex partner.

Situating LGB CEE migrants

CEE LGB migrants in this study must be situated within the new wave of CEE intra-European migrations following the Freedom of Movement Directive (2004/38/EC) and the EU enlargement to the CEE countries in the 2000s. CEE migrants to Western Europe (WE) today form a diverse group in terms of national and class composition, but one prominent profile among new CEE migrants are young and well-educated individuals, who frequently experience downward social mobility due to deskilling in WE (Ruspini 2011; White 2016). The downward mobility in the host country may also result in a divergence between economic and symbolic indicators of their social class (cf. Wray, Kofman, and Simic 2019, on other groups of young, well-educated migrants with lower financial resources). Among a handful of studies on non-heterosexual migrants from CEE to WE, most research participants fit this general profile of new CEE migrants (Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018; Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir 2018). These LGB individuals also report migrating primarily for economic reasons (for an exception, see Mole 2018a, on Russian-speaking migrants who are not part of the free-movement category), though the pursuit of sexual freedoms and more extensive legal protections are pull factors as well, or at least, a welcome corollary (Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018; Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir 2018).

Furthermore, in defiance of the stereotypical image of an individualized queer migrant avoiding prejudiced co-nationals or escaping family-of-origin, the lived experiences of CEE non-heterosexual migrants conform to those of CEE migrants more generally and reveal a continued engagement with kinship and family networks, and complex intersections with ethnic/national and cultural identifications and social class (cf. Ryan et al. 2008, 2009). For

example, while some LGB migrants disengage from their co-nationals, fearing presumed homonegative attitudes (e.g. Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018; Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir 2018), others rely on immigrant and kinship networks for support and information (Stella, Gawlewicz, and Flynn 2016). Others still reach out to co-nationals because of the significance attached to national identifications or cultural commonalities (Mole et al. 2014; Mole 2018a) or they may find in such networks a way to manage discrimination from the locals (Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir 2018). The present study builds and expands on these explorations by delving further into the intersections of non-normative sexualities with class, and in using this perspective to examine the CEE LGB individuals' migration trajectories and transnational family practices.

Material and methods

This paper draws on material from a larger research study (MSCA-IF project *TransNorm*, 2017-2019) in which I used biographic-narrative-interpretative method (BNIM) of interviewing (Wengraf 2001) to collect the life stories of LGB CEE migrants who were married or raising children with a same-sex partner in Belgium or the Netherlands, two countries with the longest tradition of same-sex marriage in the world, and extensive legal recognition of parenting rights of non-heterosexual individuals (Waldijk et al. 2017). This material was complemented by semi-structured interviews with the migrants' family members, living in five CEE EU-member states with constitutional protection of heterosexual marriage (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), who reflected on the LGB migrants' families and their mutual relationship.

Participating countries were selected by critical case reasoning (Patton 1990), where I used the legal and symbolic status of same-sex marriage to identify, within EU, the most divergent socio-institutional contexts of migrants' CEE countries of origin and their WE host countries (for a more detailed explanation, see Vuckovic Juros 2019). This contrast should

not be construed as a differentiation between the 'progressive' West and the 'backwards' European East, as some homonationalist interpretations might be quick to do, ignoring both the outlier position of Belgium and the Netherlands among WE countries (Waldijk et al. 2017), and the problematic nature of applying a linear (progressive) model to the development of LGB rights in the European East (Kulpa and Mizielńska 2016). Still, as Binnie (2004) is right to warn, adopting a position of caution in regard to East-West differences does not entail ignoring them, and this study proceeds with situating LGB migrants and their families-of-origin into the strategically chosen contrasting socio-institutional contexts of select CEE and WE countries.

Recruitment and participants

CEE migrants were recruited by snowballing originating in my personal networks and by advertisements through Belgian and Dutch LGBTIQ* organisations seeking self-identified LGB migrants of specific national origin and family status. The sample consisted of six ciswomen and five cismen between their early 30s and early 40s, the majority residing in Belgium. Six were parents and one was a prospective parent – all their children were planned in a context of a same-sex relationship. All but two migrants were married to their same-sex partner. All migrant participants were also highly educated (most held a master's degree) belonging, in my judgement, to two middle-class profiles. The first, larger group consisted of highly skilled professionals who migrated to Belgium after obtaining their degrees elsewhere and who were frequently linked with the EU institutions in Belgium or the international corporations. These LGB individuals were also mostly partnered (co-nationally or cross-culturally) with other international migrants. The other, smaller group consisted of migrants who completed at least part of their education in the local Belgian or Dutch community, mostly worked in less international environments, and were often partnered with locals.

Families-of-origin members residing in the selected CEE countries were recruited

directly through the participating LGB migrants. This, by design, led to the self-selection of those family members, primarily parents, who sustained emotional and caregiving ties with the LGB migrants and who mostly adjusted their attitudes to support the migrants' marriages and same-sex families. Six mothers and two fathers participating in the study were all between early 60s and mid-70s and retired now. Most were also well-educated (university degree), thus also fitting the middle-class profile.

Interviews and data analysis

I conducted all interviews with migrants in English or my native Croatian, positioning myself as a heterosexual ciswoman sharing the parenthood and CEE migrant status with the participants. Parents were interviewed in their native languages, by myself or the local interviewers, with greater diversity in the positionality between the interviewer and the interviewee. All the interviews followed the approved ethics protocol, were taped and then transcribed or translated verbatim. To ensure confidentiality, all possibly identifiable information (e.g. country of origin) is removed when presenting the data.

The material was organized through both thematic analysis (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995) and narrative summaries of the interviews. The present analysis is primarily based on 'life stories', which consist of chronologically organized migrants' material complemented by the relevant themes identified in migrants' and parents' interviews. The paper is organized around one particular case – the case of Dominika – that provides rich material obtained through the interviews with the migrant and both her parents. In addition, a mix of both typical and distinctive elements in Dominika's life story provides a strong foundation for comparative analysis with other study participants, which I use to search for general patterns highlighted by the specific (Wengraf 2000), with the goal of achieving theoretical generalizability (Gobo 2008).

Families and mobilities at the intersections of class and sexualities

Unlike many other CEE migrants, and the majority of CEE LGB migrants in other studies – who frequently experienced both increased material security and downward social mobility in their WE host countries (Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018; Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir 2018) – the LGB migrants in this study are notable for their robust middle-class profiles. While this must be in part due to snowball sampling and self-selection bias, the homogeneity of participants recruited in a study on married or parent LGB migrants from CEE still draws attention to intersections of class and sexualities in these migrants' trajectories and transnational family practices. In the following sections, I explore these issues by spotlighting the case of Dominika and drawing comparisons with the other study participants. In the first part, I highlight the sexuality and class dimensions in the CEE LGB migrants' trajectories. In the second part, I turn attention to the transnational family practices of LGB migrants, especially those intensified by the planned LGB parenthood, and I also examine the sexuality and gender assumptions negotiated through such practices. Although the dimensions of sexuality and class can hardly be disentangled, in the sections that follow they are separated for analytic purposes, and then brought together in the Conclusion.

Case of Dominika: non-normative sexuality and class

Dominika is a woman in her thirties, married with a child to another woman in Belgium. She was born in a CEE country to university-educated parents. She spent a year at a US high school, returned to complete university in her home country, and then obtained a master's degree in another European country. Her master's studies were partially financed by her parents who, at that time, already knew of Dominika's non-heterosexuality. During that period, Dominika started a relationship with Elena, a girl from another CEE country, also doing her masters abroad. Being a cross-cultural couple, they had to decide where to live after graduating; they were looking for a place where they 'could both potentially find a job and settle'. Elena was the first to get a job in Belgium, and Dominika followed her. Dominika

was initially unemployed and already considering moving again in search of employment, but she then found a job in the EU institutions. After a couple of years of living as legal cohabitants, Elena and Dominika got married in Belgium. Their marriage was not recognized in either of their EU-member home countries. After several more years, they decided to have a child, and started an in-vitro-fertilisation (IVF) procedure with Dominika as the biological mother. After their child was born, both mothers were recognized as such in Belgium, although Dominika was legally considered a single mother in her home country.

Highlighting non-normative sexuality in a CEE migrant trajectory

Dominika attributed her international mobility to educational and economic opportunities, rather than her sexuality. This is similar to the accounts of CEE non-heterosexual migrants in other studies who also highlighted economic and educational reasons, rather than discrimination or violence, as motives for intra-European migration (Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018; Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir 2018). This study's other participants likewise did not mention personal homophobic experiences as pushing them to emigrate. Still, most accounts – in contrast to Dominika's – also featured the themes of a stifling homonegative environment of the participant's youth and of difficulties coming to terms with non-heterosexuality. Furthermore, in a couple of accounts, earlier educational and professional choices were presented as shaped by the desire to leave and live more freely elsewhere. This is consistent with the argument that, even when not highlighted directly, sexual freedom cannot easily be disentangled from other motives contributing to non-heterosexual individuals' decision to migrate (Binnie 2004) or to stay in their host country (Stella, Gawlewicz, and Flynn 2016; Mole 2018a).

The absent themes of an early stifling environment and a difficult adaptation to non-heterosexuality make Dominika's narrative a negative case to one of the study's patterns, and a deviation from a well-known coming-out and spatial mobility narratives of non-

heterosexual individuals (Weston 1995; Binnie 2004). Nonetheless, Dominika's narrative still demonstrates sexuality influencing her migration trajectory, though this is more visible when Dominika's story is situated into the framework of a mobile same-sex couple, rather than an individual non-heterosexual migrant. For this highly educated professional couple, the decision where to settle may have been, at face value, shaped by available job opportunities, but other factors quickly came to play. Most notably, settling in a country with LGB-friendly legislature meant that the couple could obtain the status of legal cohabitants, which protected Dominika with partner benefits while looking for a job. In contrast to some other same-sex partnered migrants (Badgett 2011), these legal rights were not what specifically attracted Dominika and Elena to their host country. Nonetheless, this made it easier to stay initially. If such protections had been absent, Dominika and Elena might have been pushed to migrate onwards – as it was the case for corporate lesbians described by McDevitt-Pugh (2011).

In the course of Dominika's mobilities up to this point, sexuality reappears and disappears (Taylor 2010) at different junctures to – in conjunction with other factors – nudge Dominika's individual and couple migration trajectory in specific directions. However, at the next juncture, Dominika's becoming a parent, sexuality reappears in force to limit further mobilities. First, Dominika and Elena decided to have a child in the context of Belgium's recognized and protected same-sex parenthood (for more on how socio-institutional frameworks shape LGB parenthood trajectories, see Vuckovic Juros 2019). Afterwards, however, they became locked into staying in Belgium. As noted by Dominika, having a child made it difficult to leave, regardless of her personal preferences, lest they risk losing the recognition and protection they enjoyed. This is consistent with the accounts of other CEE LGB migrants, both in this study and elsewhere who, once they entered civil partnerships/same-sex marriages or had children with their same-sex partners in their WE host countries, realized that their future mobilities (including a return to home countries) were

restricted (Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018; Mole 2018a). Therefore, while non-normative sexualities may be more or less negotiable in individual trajectories of CEE LGB migrants, they become considerably less so for mobile same-sex families.

Highlighting class in an LGB migrant trajectory

The classed dimension of Dominika's trajectory is most visible from her pursuit of international educational opportunities, supported financially by her university-educated parents, and followed by further mobility in the capacity of a highly skilled or professional migrant. Many of these elements are echoed in the stories of the other study participants, from the (highly educated) parents' support and financial assistance with (international) educational mobilities to the robust middle-class migration trajectories in which migrants avoided deskilling experienced by many CEE migrants in WE (Ruspini 2011; White 2016).

Indeed, several migrants gave an impression of an almost free-floating earlier pursuit of opportunities. In Dominika's narrative, this was reflected in her discussion of diverse (international) career options after her master's studies and the initial arrival to Belgium. In the narratives of then-single study participants, this impression was even stronger, as illustrated by a migrant who chose Belgium by pointing a finger on a map. This suggests a privileged classed element to migration trajectories of the study participants; one not easily followed by other, more disadvantageous profiles of CEE LGB individuals, who might have been pushed away from this trajectory at many earlier junctures. From obstacles to pursuing higher education (McDermott 2011) to the inability to leave parental home due to socioeconomic dependence or caregiver responsibilities (Wimark 2016), not all non-heterosexual individuals can pursue migration or can avoid immigration restrictions posed to low-skilled individuals (Mole 2018a; Chauvin et al. 2019). Even within the Freedom-of-Movement framework, which removes external migration restrictions for most CEE migrants in Europe, other non-economic but still classed considerations may emerge, such as

dependencies on supportive social networks of kin and co-nationals (Stella, Gawlewicz, and Flynn 2016).

Still, echoing an earlier point about the sexuality dimension in the family framework, international mobility options stemming from the CEE LGB migrants' educational or labour profiles narrowed down considerably once they became part of a same-sex family unit. While neither Dominika nor other study participants had to accept lower-paying or lower-status jobs in the host country in order to enjoy the higher legal protection of their same-sex partnerships, as some other non-heterosexual migrants reported doing (Badgett 2011), Dominika's future career options are impacted by the necessity to remain in a country that protects her family.

However, even the possibility of such professional sacrifices is a privileged position to a certain extent. As suggested by the rarity of transnational same-sex couples with both poor or low-status partners (Chauvin et al. 2019), not all who wish to start same-sex families in countries with favourable legal-institutional frameworks can do so. Furthermore, even if settled in such countries, non-heterosexual migrants might not be able to afford – financially or socially (see Vasquez del Aguila [2012] for social constraints within diasporic communities) – the option of planned parenthood that Dominika and her partner could pursue in Belgium. Finally, as suggested earlier, the choice of same-sex marriage and planned parenthood could also be examined in relation to middle-class normativity, although my data does not allow me to do that. Still, the class dimension reappears in force in transnational family practices of LGB migrants in a manner that suggests a compounding of class advantages for married same-sex couples, particularly those with children. To this I turn next.

Case of Dominika: planned LBT-parenthood and transnational family practices

Dominika's parents have always been an important presence in her life. Nevertheless, when they first learned of Dominika's non-heterosexuality, their relationship became strained. In

that period, during Dominika's university years in her home country, her parents struggled to come to terms with Dominika's sexual orientation and with her then-ongoing same-sex relationship. However, when Dominika started dating her current wife Elena during her master's studies abroad, the parents were already more supportive and becoming more so as the relationship progressed. Dominika and Elena jointly visited Dominika's parents for holidays in their CEE country and the parents, in turn, visited the couple in Belgium. When Dominika and Elena got married, Dominika's parents attended the ceremony in Belgium. It was also Dominika's father who first started asking whether Dominika and Elena would have a child together. When the couple announced the pregnancy, Dominika's parents expressed happiness and excitement. After the birth of the child, Dominika's mother came for an extended three-month stay to help out with childcare and household tasks. Dominika's parents are now regular visitors to Belgium, about four times a year. Dominika's father talks about the small everyday intimacies they witness during their visits as essential in normalizing this family to him. The distance is not perceived as problematic: 'When there was a need, they called, we got on a plane and went there', says Dominika's mother. Dominika, Elena and their child also visit Dominika's parents, two or three times a year. They keep in regular contact through Skype. As Dominika's mother emphasizes, they share both joy and sadness that way. Dominika's father bemoans that he feels like they spend too little time together but he also remembers how difficult keeping in touch was in times before Skype. 'Skype does not smell, I do not feel the touch', but without it, 'the course of the day, what we do, would be lost'.

Intergenerational transnational family practices of LGB migrants

Dominika and her parents sustained their relationship throughout the difficult period of the parents' adjustment to Dominika's non-heterosexuality. Later, as it is typical for transnational families (Baldassar and Merla 2014), Dominika and her parents preserved the sense of familyhood through mutual care, frequent communication via information and

communication technology (ICT) and by visiting while Dominika was, first, studying abroad, and then living with her partner in Belgium. With the arrival of (grand)children, these visits intensified and keeping in touch across the distance via ICT – preserving 'the course of the day' – gained additional importance. As Tarrant (2010) suggests in her study on grandparenting, technology can thus serve to create an alternative social space of intergenerational belonging. These new ways of communicating may initially require adjustment by those used to direct family contact (Longhurst 2020), as also noted by Dominika's father above, but they are no less important for sustaining strong relationships, even across large distances (Baldassar et al. 2016).

Dominika and her parents also sustained a caregiving relationship across distance, although its nature shifted over the course of Dominika's migration trajectory. Initially, for Dominika, as for many others in this study, the parents were those who provided support and financial assistance. While Dominika's parents already knew of her non-heterosexuality at that point, many other parents in this study only learned of this when the migrants were already living their financially independent lives abroad, and sometimes only when the migrants were in a committed same-sex relationship. Although it took some adjustment, most parents became supportive or, at least, tolerant of the migrants' non-heterosexuality. Furthermore, as another consequence of the study participants' relatively high socioeconomic status in their host countries, the direction of support between them and their parents changed. For example, although Dominika and her parents did not specifically mention this, several participants brought up flying in parents for tourist visits or joint travels, and some also reported providing financial assistance to their parents, either in an emergency or regularly (remittances).

While this pattern holds for LGB migrants with children and those without, the former group additionally experienced an intensification of transnational family practices following

the birth of their child. Not only did such LGB migrants often experience greater support and acceptance by extended families-of-origin (for more details, see Vuckovic Juros 2020), but they also developed a new reliance on their parents, primarily for childcare support. This is vividly illustrated by Dominika's mother: when they are needed, they fly in. Other CEE LGB parents in this study provided similar accounts describing extended stays of (grand)parents (typically grandmothers) coming from CEE to help out with childcare and household tasks, or more routine childcare arrangements, such as taking care of (grand)children in their CEE homes or in migrants' homes while one or both parents were temporarily away. This strikingly resembles a more general pattern of CEE migrants in WE who, taking advantage of short intra-European distances and cheap(er) flights in the era of EU Freedom-of-Movement, are now able to fly in their parents when they need extra childcare help or to bring them for extended visits to provide hands-on support (Ryan et al. 2008; Kofman 2018b).

In transnational family practices described above, both sexuality and class dimensions are identifiable. Sexuality, primarily, appears in relation to managing disclosures of non-heterosexuality over distance, that other studies have also explored (cf. Peumans 2015; Barglowski, Amelina, and Bilecen 2018). Class, on the other hand, appears mostly in relation to the middle-class advantage – from the financial independence featuring in some narratives as important for coming out to parents, to the ability to engage in planned parenthood that then becomes transformative of transnational family practices in several ways. One of these ways is through the strengthening of intergenerational intimacies described above, and the other is by challenging family heteronormativities, as presented below.

Challenging sexuality and gender assumptions through transnational family practices

Through engaging more intensely in transnational family practices and witnessing the everyday family lives of their children, the CEE parents in this study also reexamined many of their sexuality and gender assumptions, especially those related to technology-assisted

reproduction (more meaningful in this context than the more common 'assisted reproductive technologies' term), social parenthood and the nurturer role. While these issues will emerge for non-migrant same-sex families as well, they become more sharply outlined when situated into the transnational field of contrasting socio-institutional frameworks and normative expectations of what is imaginable, possible and probable for same-sex families.

In the case of Dominika – a biological mother raising, with another woman, a child conceived through IVF – the most challenging aspect was non-heterosexual reproductivity, with the more 'conventional' elements being the biological link to the child and the conformity to a female nurturer role. For Dominika's father, once he adjusted to her non-heterosexuality and same-sex relationship, technology-assisted reproduction – as a legal and protected option available to the couple in Belgium – became the next and normal progression of their relationship. In this context, he then became thankful for the technological developments that provided both his daughter and himself an opportunity to fulfil their desire for (grand)children. However, not all parents in the study were equally unperturbed about technology-assisted reproduction. For example, Helena, another migrant's mother, though deeply gratified with her child starting a family, fostered unease about the IVF in general and expressed concern about possibly hundreds of the donor's children running around, some perhaps meeting and starting a relationship.

Furthermore, while Dominika's father only fleetingly addressed the biological vs. social parenthood ('they both are, I don't want to say equal, but, both are mothers from her [the child's] point of view'), this is a much more pressing issue for Helena whose daughter is a social parent, with no biological ties to her children. Helena worried about her daughter's role in the future, and that the children might reject her in the absence of biological ties. It is also telling that Helena referred to herself as 'half-grandmother', even though she immediately clarified that the children called her 'grandma', the same as with the biological grandmother.

In addition, when talking about the grandfather, Helena wonderingly described his fascination and attachment to these 'adopted grandchildren', even though she presented her own strong emotional ties to the grandchildren as matter-of-fact.

Despite these challenges of social parenthood, Helena found it reassuring that the children were raised by two mothers, as this fit her perception of natural nurturers ('It's a bit easier to accept as there are two mothers - mom squared. So such kids receive more attention and affection, not less.'). The idea of two men raising (young) children was more difficult for Helena to reconcile with her assumptions about parenthood. This – as a general issue – is acutely felt by another study participant, Dorian, whose children were conceived through surrogacy. More than his same-sex parenthood, it was often his nurturer role that Dorian found more challenging for the people around him. However, for Dorian's mother, who defines children as an important bond of a family, Dorian's role as a father and nurturer was seemingly seamlessly accepted. She also seems to have taken surrogacy, once she was informed about this option, in her stride, despite the complexity of the technological, legal and social consequences of this same-sex parenthood option.

Therefore, the sexuality dimension underlies the transnational family practices of LGB migrants with children also by forcing their families-of-origin, in the light of the strengthened intergenerational intimacies, to further negotiate the assumptions related to kin, family, gender and sexuality. This dimension, however, is also classed, as the migration trajectory that led CEE LGB migrants in this study to this moment is very much a privileged middle-class migration trajectory.

Conclusion

Drawing from a study of CEE LGB migrants who are married or co-parenting with a same-sex partner in Belgium and the Netherlands and their parents living in five CEE countries with constitutional protection of heterosexual marriage, in this paper I highlight the CEE

migrant trajectories and transnational family practices at the intersections of class and sexualities through a life story of Dominika, situated in a comparative framework. Bringing together class and sexuality as privileges and disadvantages continuously reappearing and disappearing through the negotiations of familial and institutional spaces (Taylor 2010), the study highlights class advantages as consistently alleviating the disadvantages of non-normative sexualities, but also simultaneously further restricting and additionally benefiting married CEE LGB migrants, particularly those with children.

This pattern emerges in the case of Dominika, and the other study participants generally support it. Dominika's individual migration trajectory is most clearly shaped by educational and economic opportunities, similar to the other CEE LGB migrants in Europe (Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018; Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir 2018). Dominika is able to take advantage of her middle-class profile to secure competitive educational credentials and a professional position in her host country, thus remaining robustly middle-class – unlike many other young and educated CEE LGB migrant experiencing greater downward social mobility in their WE host countries and greater dependence on networks of kin and co-nationals (Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018; Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir 2018). Dominika's sexuality does not emerge as a central factor constraining or guiding her mobility choices initially. However, sexuality reappears in greater force when Dominika is situated into a same-sex family framework. At this point, and particularly when Dominika becomes a parent in the context of her host country's extensive protection of same-sex legal parenthood, sexuality dimension diminishes Dominika's class advantage by limiting her further mobilities. This is similar to cases of other CEE LGB migrants whose families are fully recognized in a limited number of countries, even within EU (Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018; Mole 2018a). Nonetheless, class advantage reappears in another dimension of Dominika's life, by extending the socioeconomic privilege that gives her access to planned parenthood also into the area of

everyday life. This was most visible after the birth of her child, which intensified transnational family practices and transformed and strengthened intimacies with her family-of-origin and challenged their heteronormative assumptions of 'normal' familyhood.

The findings of this study must be positioned within its limitations. First, the sample of CEE LGB migrants and their parents is small and specific, likely shaped by self-selection and snowballing recruitment. The pattern described above, therefore, is not generalizable to any population. Nevertheless, the specific character of these experiences marks them as critical experiences that provide insight precisely due to their extraordinariness (Patton 1990). Next, the analysis of this paper relies most heavily on one case, which further limits how far the conclusions can be extended. Still, the pattern's consistency across other CEE LGB migrants, both in my sample and in other available studies, strengthens the argument about the theoretical generalizability (Gobo 2008) of the study's conclusions. This does not mean that this pattern will or should be found elsewhere, but its identification is nonetheless relevant for further reflection on the issues examined in this study.

The study's conclusions, therefore, have several implications for sociological and geographical perspectives across migrations, families and sexualities research. First, this study contributes to the emerging understanding (Wimark 2016; Luo 2020) that situating non-heterosexual migrants more deeply into a family framework, including complex negotiations of individual choices and intergenerational obligations across distance, highlights new aspects of family and sexuality mobilities. Second, focusing such explorations at the intersections of sexualities and class further reveals the middle-class default of many sexuality studies as an axis of privilege to be specifically disentangled in its relation to non-normative sexualities. This is another area of emerging research, particularly in the migration studies (Chauvin et al. 2019). Third, by extending the transnational family research beyond its still heteronormative frameworks, this study also demonstrates how, as anticipated by

Manalansan (2006) and Morgan (2020), the assumptions about kin, social roles, gender and sexuality are shifted and transformed over everyday family practices and intimacies that are sustained across large geographical distances. This, in turn, feeds into the sociologists and geographers' attempts to decentre heteronormative family from studies of intimacies (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004; Valentine 2008; Wilkinson and Bell 2012; Wilkinson 2020), while simultaneously also extending the conceptualization of non-heterosexual families and family practices beyond the limits of physical co-presence or nuclear family units.

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