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The West through a Moldovan lens

– Reflections on a liminal identity –

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Abstract: The main aim of this paper is to focus the discussion on the way in which the East represents the West or the outside represents the inside of the EU on a specific country, Moldova. Moldova is a rather singular case in post-communist Eastern Europe, being the only country that is a kin state to a member of the EU, Romania. Stemming from this, the paper examines the Moldovan portrayals and "othering" of Romania and of the EU, as the two main actors representing the West both in national identity and foreign policy discourses in Chisinau. The data for this project is comprehensive and encompasses interviews conducted by the author in 2012, official political declarations speeches and newspaper articles and editorials (2009-2013). The main argument here is that the sense of periphery in Moldovan thinking is determined by a wide series of factors. Analysing Moldova's representations of the West through its portrayals of Romania and the EU allows the study to incorporate a whole range of articulations from individual frustrations to national backwardness. Thus, on a whole range of issues, from political culture to the their fashion sensethe Moldovans construct themselves a liminal: part Romanian/European, part outsider and thus inferior. The national identity issue is, thus, augmenting the sense of marginalisation and inferiority in Moldova's normative representation of the EU, offering an original take on the way in which the East-West cleavage divides nations. But, at the same time, the existence of the Romanian kin-state also enables the existence of two counter discourses, based on the national identity issue and the constant contact between the two countries.

Key words: Moldova, Romania, kin-state, liminality, Europe

East and West have shifted a lot in terms of definitions since the fall of the Iron Curtain, and especially with the EU accession of the, so-called, Central European states. This has not only encompassed the discursive equation between the West, Europe and the European Union, but also an eastwards border shift, both on a discursive and on a tangible level. In this context, this paper focuses on the way in which Europe/the EU/theWest, is represented from outside its borders, in Moldova. Moldova's representation of the West, legitimising its EU aspirations, is hardly unique, being a reiteration of constructions present all across central and Eastern Europe (Kuus, 2007). Yet, Moldova has been chosen as it is a singular case in post-communist Eastern Europe, being the only country that is a kin-state to a member of the EU, Romania. Stemming from this, the paper examines the Moldovan portrayals and "othering" of Romania and the EU, as the two main actors representing the West both in national identity and foreign policy discourses in Chisinau.

Analysing Moldova's representations of the West through its portrayals of Romania and the EU allows the study to incorporate articulations ranging from the individual sense of inferiority against the Romanians to the lack of democracycompared to the EU. On issues such as the correctness of the language they speak, their economic development or their importance in international affairs, the Moldovans construct themselves a liminal: part Romanian/European, part outsider and thus inferior. The national identity issue is, thus, augmenting the sense of marginalisation and inferiority in Moldova's normative representation of the EU, offering an original take on the way in which the East-West cleavage divides nations. In this context, the first section of the paper presents the background and theoretical approach employed throughout, focused on the concept of identity as defined through difference and liminality as the main framework for understanding Moldovan representations. These underpinnings are followed by an analysis of representations of Europe, and the West, as a normative power, but also as a civilizational space. Intertwined with this is an overview of how national and individual representations construct the "big brother", Romania. This differs from the construction of the West/Europe because it draws from multiple sources: the communist age propaganda, the imagery put across by the Romanian elites in mirrored representations and, more importantly for this paper - the direct contact Moldovans have with their neighbours across the border. The Romanian government's scholarships and agreements for trade across the border ensure that the Moldovans have ample contact with Romanians and the Romania and this informs their representations of the country, especially those hinting at a sense of inferiority.

Moldova is a very complex case in terms of nationalism, essentially a "site of failed nation-building projects" (Cash, 2008, p.75), divided in between different views of its own identity (King, 2000). More importantly, the fact that one of these promotes to unity of identity with Romania, an EU country, can problematize the representations of the "self" and of the European "other".Identities are conceptualised, in this paper, as created in the context of a relation between two statesor, as Wendt (1992) describes them, in a "looking-glass". States create "others" as "enemies, rivals or partners" (Kubalkova, 2001, p.34). Hence, creating an identity basically means

identifying the "other" and differentiating yourself from him (Waxman, 2006, p.7; Barnett, 2002, p.62). Moreover, the dichotomy of "self"-"other" is imbued with a sense of morality and natural hierarchy. Orientalism is a classic case of how dichotomies are constructed in international relations. It is a"style of thought based [...] on a distinction made between the Orient and Occident", the former being defined by lack of progress and modernisation and as having despotic systems of governance(Said, 1978, pp.2-3). The paper argues that this type of thinking is reiterated in the Moldovan case, only through the eyes of the East as having internalised this discourse. Drawing from this, Moldova's definitions of the West are essentially a reflection of its own identity through the process of "othering". Yet, whilst "othering" is usually used to imply opposition, the relationship between being Moldovan and the West is more complex. In order to conceptualisethis, the paper employs the theoretical concept of liminality, as adopted by Victor Turner (1969) to define the experience of being betwixt and between social categories for the "self". In Moldova's case, it is an identity containing elements from both the East and the Western space, with the possibility of a permanent state of liminality (Neumann 2012;Malksoo, 2012).

The methodological underpinnings of the paper are focused on the Discourse Theory of Laclau and Mouffe and Discourse Analysis as a method (Howarth, 2000). As part of Discourse Theory, deconstruction shows how all meaning is constituted through difference (Campbell, 1992, p. 71). These dichotomies, Derrida argues, always hide a hierarchy as one term is privileged over the other (Devetak, 2005), thus making discourse analysis a perfect fit to our conceptualisation or identity as defined through differentiation. Based on Malksoo's (2012) conclusions vis-à-vis data for studying liminality, the paper uses both elite speeches and declarations, as well as grass roots interviews done by the author in Moldova (April and June-August 2012) and newspaper articles and editorials (2009-2013), thus offering a comprehensive and up to date view of Moldovan society.

Two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, the West has become synonymous with Europe and the EU in Moldovan discourses, as highlighted by former president Vladimir Voronin, as "Moldova can move towards the East or West, towards the Trade Union or the EU" (quoted in Timpul, 17.10.2013). Moldovans use three main characteristics to represent the Western/European space: values, development and a cultural/civilizational element.Moreover, Europe is defined through two techniques, as the final point of Moldova's EU integration and as opposed to the Eastern space. Through both these representations and the use of atransition narrative, the "return to Europe", Moldova is represented as inferior, a liminal, part European, part Eastern. The most common representation of Europe is as a **normative** space.On the official level, references are made to "the European value space" as the aim for Moldova's European integration and former prim-minister VladFilat identifies this space as one of "pace, democracy and prosperity […] pluralism, a developed economy and free citizens" (Filat, 2.11.2012). For him, the quest for European integration is one of modernising the country (Filat, 2.11.2012) and this narrative of modernisation highlights the backwardness of Moldova in its transition towards Europe. Thus, European values stand at the centre of the Moldovan reiteration of an Orientalist discourse and are defined in relation to the Moldovan government's European ambitions.

Simultaneously,grass-roots focus on the negative definition of European values. For example, columnistVitalieCiobanustresses Russia's lack of democratic and European values whilst also equating Moldova with it. He argues that Russia belongs to

> "the Euro-Asian world […] Russia embraces us as we are – corrupt, underdeveloped, with a problematic democracy – because we're like her, with the same problems as the Russian state and society, where the disregard for the law and governments abuses have becometrademarks" (Ciobanu, 4.07.2012).

Thus, European values and European democracy are represented as opposing the characteristics of the Eastern space, as anti-democratic. This idea of the West as defined through its dichotomy with the Eastern space is further iterated through a historical approach:

> "R: To say Russia is European is forced. They tried to be European in the tsarist era and this was the whole idea with Saint Petersburg and European, German names. They tried because up until then they were just a nation, like many others in Asia.
> I: Did they succeed?
> R: No. Mentally, conceptually, in terms of civilisation…no.History confirms this: the greatest genocide ever committed was in the Soviet Union" (Interview with the author, July 2012i).

This highlights the way in which Russia's lack of Europeanness throughout its history impacts on today's developments, through the equivalence with the Soviet regime. The idea that Russia has never been historically European and, if it has, it was limited to the Russian leadership (e.g Peter the Great's Europeanising reforms), and thus doesnot share the cultural and value system of Europe is a recurrent themes in all my interviews (June-July 2012). Moreover, there is an equivalence between economic development and a good standard of living and good governance, i.e. values, as an essential element in the dichotomy in between East and West. The poverty of Russia, alcoholism and laziness are also brought forward in order to argue for Russia's lack of Europeaness, as

> "Russia is barbarian, it is not European .Their leaders' behaviour, their standard of living outside of Moscow and the great cities. It's a mess, alcohol, lacking money, under-fed, over-authoritarian, because they lack authority and this is not Europe. They don't really like working, like any empire" (June 2012).

Thus, the second criterion, **development** is inextricably linked with that of democracy and European values. Concluding, European values are not only implicitly seen as superior to those of the East but also directly recognised as such, as "the European culture and civilisation is net superior through its value system…to all other continents" (Interview, July 2012). Furthermore, the equivalence of Moldova with the East in terms of values stresses the recognition of the superiority of the "other", here as Europe/European Union.

This sense of inferiority both regarding values and economic development is further strengthened through representation of the Romanian "other", whose belonging to the EU makes it a part of Europe/West. This is even more poignant in Moldova, as a Moldovan with Romanian citizenship highlighted "I consider myself European because I am a Romanian citizen and Romania is part of the EU" (Interview with leader of the Cluj Initiative Group, July 2012), a discourse also reflected on the Romanian side (Interview with Romanian MP, July 2012). From the beauty of the Carpathian Mountains to good roads and political debates, a whole range of criteria are used to illustrate the inferiority of Moldovans versus their Romanian "brothers". The economic criterion is especially poignant, as an interviewee noted that in Romania, there are "higher prices, better salaries and better roads [...] it a border you have to cross to get further" (Interview, July 2012). Another one discussed with great amount of detail pension levels in Moldova in order to explain their poverty compared to Romania (Interview in Chisinau, August 2012). This is then augmented by the perception of Romania as a rich country with lots of natural resources (Interview, June 2012), while the Romanians are seen as having more opportunities, less limitations in terms of their jobs and their entertainment (Interview, August 2012). Hence, Romania is portrayed as economically developed; moreover, this contrasted with a period in which Romania was going through deep cuts and street protests regarding these budgetary measures, highlighting the constructed nature of some of these representations.

There is also a general acknowledgement of the fact that Romania is more **democratic** that Moldova, i.e. lacking the Eastern mentality of nepotism and corruption, present throughout Moldovan society, irrespective of their national identity views (interviews with PNL and PS members, July 2012). Romanian interviews have also acknowledged European values as "democracy and human rights are Romanian values as well" (Interview with Romanian MP, August 2012). An interview with a Chisinau based layman easily illustrates this, yet again by associating democracy with development: "[in Romania] there's democracy, living is better, there are a lot more resources for each individual" (July, 2012). Moreover, a former Moldovan student in Romania argued that "Romania is more democratic, hence more European. They discuss politics a lot more" (August, 2012). This argument is also focused around the high electoral results for the Moldovan Communist Party and represented as clashing with the European democratic ideas (Interview, July 2012). Yet, whilst this representation reproduces the Orientalist discourse, there are also counter-discourses to it. Resentment at the failure of the Romanian leadership of the early 1990s to promote the reunification of the two countries stands at the centre of one of these. Former Romanian president Ion Iliescu[ii] is commonly seen as a communist and agent of Russia, an imaged transferred all the way to the social-democrat and national liberal coalition in power in Romania in 2012 (Interviews, June-July 2012); moreover, this is also equated with left-wing options in Moldova as "the social-democrats in Romania and out social democrats want in the Euro-Asian Union and speak Russian" (Interview with PNL member, July 2012). Through an association of the Romanian elites with the communist regime (neo-communists is a term used to portray the Romania social-democrats), together with the opposition between Russia and the West, parties such as the social-democrats are represented as not European. Additionally, the main underpinning of this argument is the nationalist idea of reunification, thus illustrating the way in which "kin-stateness" problematizes the Orientalist construction of the West in Moldova.

Moreover, some Moldovans tend to award agency to the Romanian "other". As opposed to Moldova, Romania is portrayed as a state with a historical experience and maturity that should act as an arbiter of Moldova's EU integration, a sort of teacher that would help overcome the problems of the Moldovan political elite (Interview with Socialist and Liberal party members, July 2012). Likewise, the EU itself should recognise Romania's role and use it as a middle man in communicating with Chisinau (Interviews, July 2012); through this, Romania's lobby would help Moldova become a member of the EU before its ENP colleagues, e.g. the Ukraine (Interview with Communist local councillor, August 2012). This comes as a reflection of the Romanian discourses regarding Moldova; an illustrative case is 2006, when Romanian president TraianBasescu asked Chisinau to join Romania in their EU accession (January 2007), a statement that was received remarkably well in pro-European circles in Moldova (Interview with academic, July 2012). This idea of Romania as a "teacher" can easily be described through the metaphor of the "older brother", which also explains the Romanian attitude towards Moldova and the Moldovans and is also present when it comes to cultural liminality, as noted below. Concluding, Moldova is not only constructed as part of the East and hence inferior to Europe, but also in a hierarchical relationship with Romania. Additionally, discourses representing Moldova as Romanian and thus European makes their rejection from Europe even more poignant, whilst some also challenge the dominant Orientalist discourse.

The third definition attached to Europe encompasses **cultural** criteria, such as religious or linguistic elements, and hints at a civilizational divide. One interviewee, upon being asked whether the Moldovans were European remarked: "If we are not European, what are we? Do we belong to the Arabic or Islamic world?" (July 2012). This argument constructs a unified Christian space and opposition it to Islam. Moreover, the religious dichotomy between Christianity and Islam has been taken a step further and equated with the antagonism between Russia and the West. According to this argument, Russia's issues stem from its expanding Muslim minority, from the problems of Chechnya to the increasing power of oil-rich Tatarstan and the number of Tartars in the Russian government (Interview with the author, July 2012). And through this, Russia becomes an epitome of Islam, of what

it not Western. This is modelled after the cleavage lines illustrated by Huntington (1993), but by redefining the Eastern Orthodox space as Islamic, not Christian.

Whilst discussing Moldova's Europeaness, the West is also defined through a linguistic criterion, as prime-minister Filat stated that "Moldova is the only country from the **Latin** areal that is outside of the European space. It has no alternative but European integration" (quoted in Adevarul, 25.04. 2012). This definition of Europe portrays Moldova as outside this space, whilst speaking a Latin language is perceived as a cultural and linguistic characteristic of Europe. This argument is not limited to the political elites, as interviews at grass roots have also noted a series of language related arguments such as the "Indo-European character of the language" (sic!), the fact that they are a Latin nation, but also belonging to the Balkan culture and *la francophonie*(sic!). Moreover, the idea of speaking a Latin language intrinsically reiterates the Romanian and Romanianist discourses of national identity. These hold that the people of Moldova are Romanian - a Latin nation surrounded by Slavs, highlighting the importance of the "Slav" as the Romanian's "other" (Interviews with the author, June-July 2012). Culturally, the discussion on Romania is extremely relevant as most of my interviewees have associated their Europeaness with the fact that they are Romanian or, even more, with their ethnogenesis as being the same as the Romanian one (Interview, July 2012). Thus, the focus of this section is on the way in which Moldovans representations of their identity as a tainted version of being Romanian feeds into their marginal character in relation to Europe. Through this, being European can be linked with, although not subsumed within, the idea of being Romanian. Journalist StelaPopa (2010) argues that "We are European and we speak an official language of the EU!". Yet, scientifically there are a series of differences between Romanian and the language spoken in Moldova in terms of vocabulary (Deletant, 1996; Dyer, 1996). In this context, an interviewee argued that

> "There is a linguistic difference. Our language has issues, especially that from central Moldova, from around Chisinau where the Russian influence is stronger – even I finished school in Russian and a big percentage of Moldovans are Russified and that's way the language has its problems" (Interview with New Right leader, July 2012).

This difference is achieved through a contamination of the language they speak with Russian terms and expressions or, to be more specific, with elements belonging to the national "other", the Russian/Slav. Yet, this Russian influence is translated as "incorrectness" by the Moldovans as they "have a different dialect, [they] speak like a Moldovan, not correctly Romanian with all the notions and correct expressions" (Interview with PNL member, July 2012) and "we speak a more Russified dialect, whereas you speak a polished Romanian" (July 2012). This perception of speaking an incorrect language was also framed in my fieldwork through comparisons with the language I speak, a rather accentless Romanian that much to my disappointment most interviewees picked up as not belonging to Moldova; this is very similar to the direct contact Moldovans have with Romanians once crossing the border. Additionally, even those that perceive their language as being Moldovan will make a note of the latter being inferior: "we call ourselves Moldovan because we speak Moldovan, which isnot as cultivated as Romanian language. We think Romanian is something above, more beautiful, more special" (Interview, August 2012).Thus, through the medium of language representations, the Moldovans represent themselves as inferior to Romania and, implicitly, to Europe. Furthermore, reiterating the "teacher" narrative, there are expectations from Romania to provide programmes to teach Moldovans and, especially Moldova teachers to speak "proper" Romanian (Interview with columnist, July 2012).

This is also extended to other cultural endeavours, Romanianists also criticising the Moldovan tendency to consume "entertainment" in Russian and from Russian sources, from music to books, movies and TV series (Interview with the author, June 2012); likewise, some of these are linked to negative behaviour, such as violence as determined by watching Russian TV shows. But the more important element feeding into this liminality is the representation of Russia as not only the Romanianist "other", but as non-European from a cultural point of view. As mentioned above, arguments range from their ethnic origins, Mongolian and nomad influence on their beliefs and temperament and their art and culture as reproducing these origins, such as the architecture of their churches as resembling the Mongol turban (Focus group, Chisinau, July 2012). In this way, the perpetuation of the effects of Russian and Soviet rule over Moldova are represented as the denting Moldova's European/Western character, whilst Russia is equated with its current, Tartar, and historical, Mongolian, influence. Furthermore, Russia's role on Moldova's inferiority complex is also direct, through the elimination of a generation of intellectuals in the 1950s, followed by the impact it has had on the following generations, creating a sense of marginalisation, periphery and inferiority which continues to affect Moldovan cultural creations to this day. A Chisinau-based columnist has stressed this point in a conversation, focusing on the problems they have with speaking Romanian properly, but also the quality of the literature in Moldova and their tendency to limit themselves to their own space in attempting to overcome this perceived inferiority (August 2012). Additionally, the Soviet influence is not limited to the cultural domain, the direct persecutions of the soviet years being blamed for the current lack of a cultural and political elite that can steer the country towards democracy (Interview, June 2012). Hence, due to the Soviet policies, the Moldovan cultural scene portrays itself as inferior to the Romanian one. This cultural inferiority towards Romania, together with Romania's perceived belonging to Europe, is another element that feeds into the Moldovan inferiority complex towards the West.

Beyond the visible linguistic complex, the difference at the individual level in-between Romanians and Moldovans is highlighted by one of the programmatic purposes of Moldovan students' organisations in Romania to

> "ensure a favourable environment for Bessarabia students' adaptation to the specific life in university centres and, through this, contribute to the proximity of Romanians both sides of the Prut and fight the isolation of Bessarabian Romanians and the prejudices against them in Romania" (LSBB, n.).

The idea of adaptation suggests the existence of differences, while the mention of "prejudices" highlights their constructed nature. As above, Moldova's historical experience, especially the Russian Tsarist and Soviet occupations, are the main source of these differences that can encompass everything from language accent to cultural levels:

> "People [in Moldova] are used to living differently. They have different customs, habits. I can't give you any examples. There's something... even in our humour, we are influenced by the Soviet world. There are great differences: we've been fed their culture, influenced by their movies. So it's all a thing of adopting their culture, because besides for that there is no difference beyond what one would consider a regional difference within Romania. And if it wasn't for 1812 and 1940iiiiwe wouldn't need to adapt" (Interview with student association member, June 2012).

Through this construction, the inferiority of Moldova is blamed on the Eastern influence, strengthening the opposition between Romania and the East. Additionally, it is represented in a mirror, as also drawing from Romanian prejudices regarding Moldovans. Representatives of student organisations have argued that Moldovans are seen as speaking Russian, generally foreign, lacking Romanian patriotism or being heavy drinkers in certain groups in society.For example, an interviewee explained that his high-school colleagues in Romania used to not only call him "Russian", but also ask him "to teach them swear words in Russian […] because Moldovans were closer to Siberia" (Interview, June 2012).

Thus, Moldova's cultural liminality is a lot more complex than the linguistic criterion, encompassing a whole series of elements. A range of positive qualities are being associated with being European and Romanian, from being clean and hardworking, to being kind people, whereas negative ones are associated or, seen as the reason for not being European, such as laziness (Interviews, June-August, 2012). Some other things mentioned throughout my interviews were the fact that the Romanian are more patient, more active, but also, on a more visible level that they dress more comfortably, are more relaxed in their approach to fashion and festivities. But more importantly, an umbrella criterion was used all throughout my discussions in Moldova: being more cultivated and, even, more civilised. Thisapplies not only in relation to Romania, but also to Europe and through the meanings attached to the idea of "cultivation" reproduces the hierarchical construction that sees Moldova as inferior. It is widely used by my interviewees as a sign that Moldova is not European, as this space and Romania are characterised by a very high "culture". Culture here isnot limited to how much Moldovans read or the number of cultural events, but the values they apply in day to day life, colloquial things like parking on the pavement (Interview in Chisinau, July 2012).Likewise, cultural criteria are amalgamated with "values", highlighting the artificial division into the two categories. Within this context, Moldovan identity is represented as in-between the two spaces. In research circles, Moldovan mentality has been associated with the idea of the "post-soviet man [not] totally guided by soviet values, sometimes he even looks at them rationally, whilst also being headed towards European, Western values" (Ciurea, 2013). Moldovan mentality is, thus, liminal due to their transition from the Soviet to the European way of thinking. Some of the criteria included within this concept and that have also appeared in my fieldwork (June-August 2012) are political intolerance, lying, paternalism or a parochial civic culture. Thus, the Moldovan's defects that are due to the Soviet regime, the East, are described as "foreign to our European clothing, to the European coat we should all be wearing" (Ciurea, 2013). This "blame" discourse is also almost omni-present in grass-roots discussions and newspaper articles and editorials (Interviews, June-July 2012), whilst also stressing the East's lack of democratic character.

Moreover, those Moldovans that perceive themselves as Romanian argue that these influences are a form of "baggage that they need to get rid of" (Interview, July 2012), highlighting the very rejection of their liminal identity. In this context, student organisations organise events aimed at promoting Romanian culture. For example, in Galati, they organise music evenings, playing GuraMareluiUrs, Pheonix, Compakt, DucuBertzi or GicaPetrescu. These are all considered to be representative Romanian musicians, but it is worth noting that they are at least a couple of decades out of date, an element that highlights the idea of "catching-up" with Romanians. This is aimed at

> "making[Moldovans] remember, they need to feel Romanian. They have become part Romanian not through their choice, they only had access to Russian music and Russian culture" (Interview, June 2012).

Then, the aim of student organisations is to challenge this liminality, to return Moldovans to being Romanian. Furthermore, the representation of the Moldovan "self" in relation to Romania are focused around the idea of "catching-up", stressing the backwardness and hierarchical construction.

At the same time, the idea of development can be reversed, in ensuring that Moldovans conservatism is portrayed as the superior value, for example in explaining the lack of tabloids in Moldova (Interview with leader of the Conservative Movement, August 2012) or the dying out of traditions such as carol singing throughout Romania (Interview with New Right leader, July 2012). This sentiment is not limited to right-wing organisations, a Moldovan who had lived in Romania for a few years also complained about the multitude of "irrelevant, untalented and under-dressed women on TV" (July 2012). Thus, extensive direct contact with Romania, together with the

perception of similarity, allows Moldovans to gain deeper insight into the differences between their country and the West, both in strengthening the Orientalist construction and in challenging it.

Summarising the ideas above, the Moldovans are not European as "nationally, we're not only poor, but our intellectual level is very low. In one sentence: we're both poor and stupid" (Interview with the author, August 2012). Moreover, translating this into foreign policy ambitions, Moldova's European integration is represented as Moldova being "not ready: we are not ready from the infrastructure, education, culture, from every point of view" (Interview with the author, July 2012).Thus, within a positive representation, Europe and the West are constructed as democratic and economically developed, as is Romania, Moldova's kin-state and neighbour. Three artificially divided types of criteria have been used to illustrate this, whilst also highlighting how cultural, economic and democratic development go hand in hand in representations of the East and West.Beyond, they have been used to illustrate how the West is usually negatively defined, through its opposition with the East, represented largely by Russia. In between them, Moldova is characterised by a liminal, betwixt character:it is European because it speaks a Latin language, because it is somewhat democratic and somewhat developed, but it lacks cultivation, it is poor and it has a flawed political system, which are characteristics of Russia and the East. At the same time, through the representation of the East as inferior to the West, Moldova is in itself not only marginal but also inferior to Europe.

Nevertheless, the most important factor in Moldova's representations of the West is its relationship with Romania, as a part of Europe. Their perception of cultural similarity or belonging to the same nation, entitles them to claim Europeaness. Meanwhile, the extensive direct contact in between the two borders enables comparisons at individual level shift the debate from the national to individual insecurities regarding language and behaviour. With this in mind, the differences with Romania take a whole new meaning: stressing Moldova's lack of Europeaness and augmenting its sense of marginalisation and inferiority. These are focused on a whole range of issues from language differences, the quality of roads and economic development or how people dress. Hence, through the representation of the East's influence on this territory, by occupation, cultural policies and the Gulag, Moldova is less Romanian and hence less European. Lastly, the relationship with Romania also enables the articulation of a series of counter-discourses to the hierarchical construction that represents Moldova as inferior. These focus around the anti-European character of a great part of the Romanian political class and the, visible, impact the EU has had on traditions in Romania. Thus, the existence of the Romanian kin-state both augments and challenges the dominant Orientalist discourse regarding the West, stressing the uniqueness of the Moldovan case from this point of view.

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Roxana Adina Huma is a PhD researcher at the University of Plymouth, specialising on nationalism in Moldova and Romania. She has studied at 'Babes-Bolyai' University, Romania, and at Nottingham Trent University, UK, and is trained in both politics and international relations. Stemming from this experience, in her current research she takes a post-structuralist multi-disciplinary approach looking at how national identity discourses manage the relations between Moldova and Romania, both at official level, i.e. in terms of foreign policy, but also at NGO and grass roots level.

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[i] I – Interviewer; R- respondent.
[ii] Member of the communist nomenclature before 1989, became the first president of post-Soviet Romania.
[iii] The beginning of the Tsarist and, respectively, Soviet rule over the territory of Moldova.