Research Article

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Romanian Diasporic Facebook Groups as Public Spheres

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Abstract: The pilot Survey discussed in this paper was designed to understand to what extent Romanian Diasporic Facebook groups (RDFGs) build up public spheres, i.e. spaces in which people can form public opinions that can shape political subjectivity (Habermas 178) and to understand the impact of the RDFGs administrators as community organisers. The Survey incorporated questions on the administrators' features, group structures, levels of activism and explicit interest in public affairs expressed within these groups. Invitations to participate in the Survey were issued via Facebook Messenger exclusively to RDFGs administrators. The participants reported that their groups were mainly top-down informal structures. They stressed the apolitical profiles of the groups they administer although some reported that the critique of homeland politicians constituted significant discussion threads and said that members often organise offline events that could be described as political. Some respondents reported instances of "political revolts" within groups, in which the ordinary members (OMs) initiated critical dialogues on the group's walls which questioned the positions of the admins. Interestingly, an illusory sense of superiority was revealed in the administrators' responses as compared to their evaluation of the interests of the OMs, as well as a state of ambivalence in relation to the censorship practices and workload linked to their administrative roles.

Keywords: immigration, diaspora, social networks, censorship, e-democracy

Introduction

In September 2016, an administrator [henceforth: admin] of the Facebook group *Romani in Polonia* [Romanians in Poland], which I have been following closely for the last seven years, posted the following on the group's wall: "Shall we keep posts with a political flavour on the group's wall? Things like: collecting signatures, or other forms of mobilisation on behalf of some political party. Messages related to the diasporic vote (or messages from the Embassy) would not be included in this category." The post was accompanied originally by a two-option poll—Yes/ No—to which the users could add other options.

The proposal was immediately questioned. The OMs pointed out that "political flavour" was not defined. They asked who would decide what messages had a "political flavour" and why messages from the Embassy, and, therefore, from the Government, were considered not to have such a "flavour"? They argued that politics is as much a part of what unites them in exile, with all its debates and controversies, as the Romanian language. Users participating in the debate suggested that the admin had acted in an overzealous way and they expressed feelings of powerlessness at having no impact on the decision-making process. Nevertheless, some members seemed to agree with this preventative initiative. Although participation in the poll was modest (5% of the group's members), those voting opted for eliminating "politically flavoured"

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content from the group's wall—by 80% to 20%. Indeed, Mary Joyce or Angel Parham document the urge for avoiding political talk in online diasporic communities. In addition to this, as Malkki (495) has argued in her review of the array of different discursive and institutionalised domains within which "being in exile" have been constituted, the mere fact of immigrant displacement seems to be insufficient to create commonalities between people or a common identity.

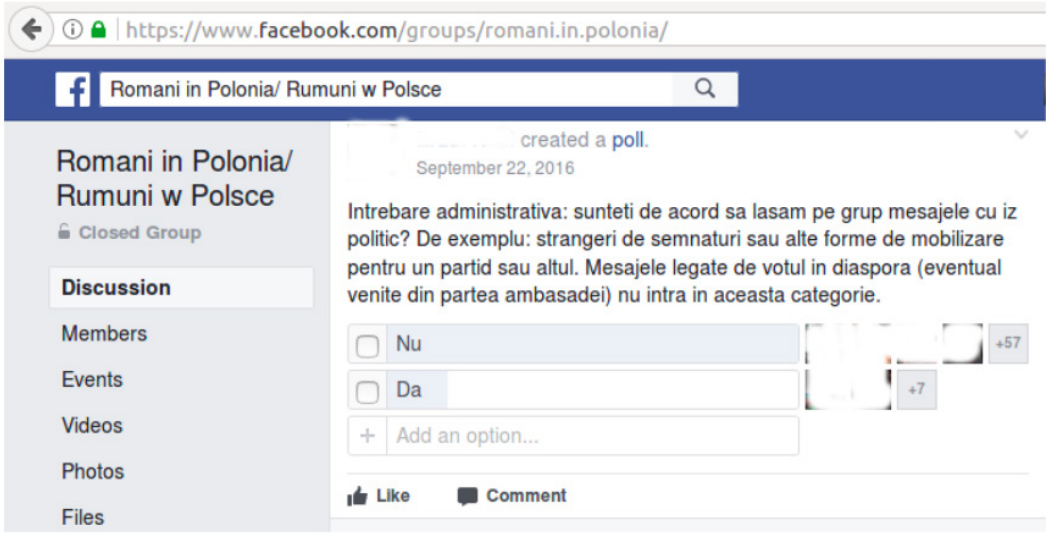

Figure 1. Screenshot of the political talk ban proposal discussion on the Romani in Polonia RDFG.

However, this dismissal of political talk in an immigrant Facebook group seems to contradict the bulk of online diasporic research, which shows that the internet and social network sites (SNSs) foster community growth and liberal values; and that these can become forums for the exchange of ideas, debate and the mobilization of opinion, potentially culminating in strong social bonds and relationships (see among others: Rheingold, Wittig and Schmitz, Ayres). SNSs are often used as a source of political information. By looking at online vote advice apps, Hirzalla, van Zoonen, and de Ridder (2) found that a quarter of the voting population in a democracy use SNSs to access information on political parties posted on these platforms. There is reason to believe that these proportions are even higher today. Although Andersen and Medaglia (101) found that Facebook users had often already made up their mind on a candidate and were more interested in finding information about the candidate than initiating dialogues, the suitability of Facebook for a dialogical, politically open medium for migrants is an issue that deserves attention. Indeed, is Facebook a tool of emancipation, as some have claimed, or is it mainly a company that has created a platform to generate profits out of advertising? The recent numerous and worrying press reports on Cambridge Analytica having allegedly misused the personal Facebook data of more than 71 million people seems to favour the latter option. Yet, the debate in *Romani in Polonia* brought up many specific and more general questions about RDFGs functions. How often do Romanian migrants engage in political talk on the walls of their RDFGs and how do the administrators moderate these talks? To what extent were the restrictions suggested by the admin of the *Romani in Polonia* group a norm among RDFGs? Was this halt to debate a natural part of an ongoing process of diasporic community building and an evolving collective self-consciousness? Are the RDFGs safe spaces in which individuals can express their inner political selves? How does the group stimulate political emancipation in a landscape that is poor in emancipatory platforms for immigrants, who often find themselves in the position of a discriminated minority (Neculau & Ferréol, 10)? In order to understand how far RDFGs constitute spaces for the formation of public opinion that can shape political subjectivity (Habermas 54) and to think further about the role of the admins in these spaces, I developed a Survey addressed to the admins of RDFGs, assuming they are individuals eager to invest their time in exercising the role of community organisers, at least on Facebook.

Method & Participants

The Survey (to access it online see Ajder) was distributed among admins and contained 40 questions. The questions tackled the admins' profile, the size of the group they administer, their political and civic awareness, their and their group's OMs' attitudes towards home and host country's politics, economics, and culture. To account for the organisation within the RDFGs, the participants were asked to choose one out of six types of group "regimes," selecting the one which best represented their group's organisation. These group types were inspired by the five power regimes sketched by Plato in *The Republic* and each was given a simple one- or two-sentence descriptor specific to the Facebook environment. This is not to suggest that state governments and RDFGs are identical entities. This solution was not ideal, but the situation described in my Introduction triggered from OMs' lengthy comments on the legitimacy of their admins' position and even accusations of an abuse of power, as well as the need to change the decision-making procedures within the group, were similar, in my opinion, to the idea of fluid periodicity of Plato's regimes. In addition to this, the Facebook algorithm actually offers the possibility of setting up fully egalitarian groups, whose members could be all admins; this is why I included the last of the RDFGs regimes in the Survey (Figure 3).

The Survey template was finalised following consultation with the admins of five smaller RDFGs. Later on, I did a Facebook search using the following keywords—"diaspora," "romaneasca," "moldoveneasca," "romani in," "moldoveni in" + names of the world's countries, capitals and other major cities. When a group was discovered, a friend request was sent to its admins, and an invitation to participate in the Survey was sent via Facebook Messenger in Romanian, with a short introduction. If the administrator profile was not public, I have sent it to the group or community via the "contact us" messaging option. Additionally, I sent friend requests to the administrators of the RDFGs suggested by Facebook that fitted the desired profile. These were usually RDFGs profiles set up in smaller, provincial cities in countries with substantial Romanian immigrant populations. Interestingly, several RDFGs were moderated by the same admins. The groups that were set up by Romanian political parties targeting immigrant communities were not invited, due to the fact that I was interested in genuine grass-roots online communities. Altogether, invitations were sent to 127 admins running 83 groups.

Only about 40 admins accepted my friendship requests. In the process, Facebook blocked my ability to use messenger three times for a 24-hour period. Altogether, twenty-one admins answered my call and participated in the Survey, which gives a participation ratio of 1 in 6. It is possible that many of the admins did not receive my call due to Facebook security settings. The Survey was available online from 15 January to 31 March 2017.

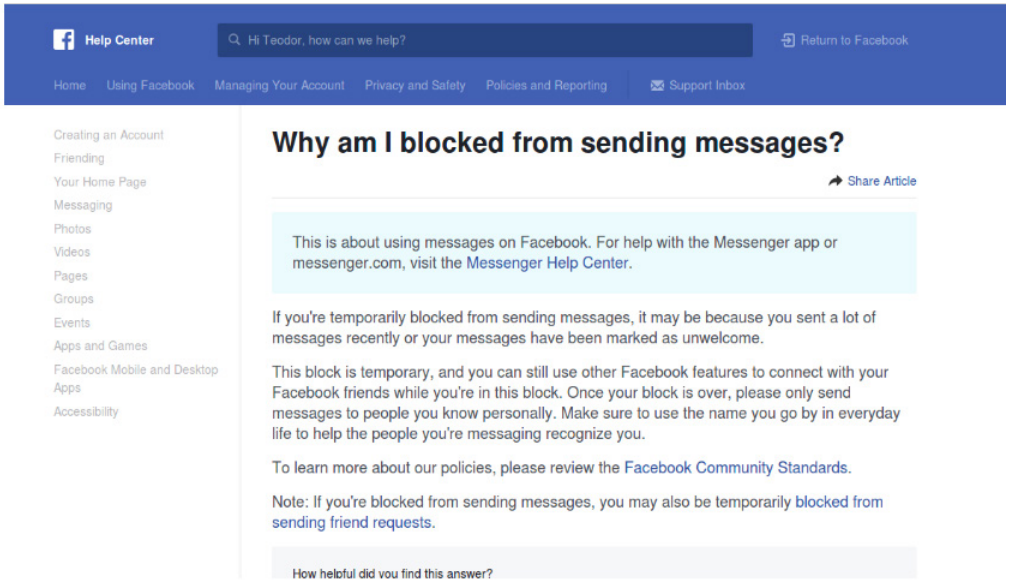

Figure 2. Facebook blocked three times the account used during this project from sending messages.

Results

Twenty-one admins participated in the Survey, 14 men and 7 women. It is not a representative group, and the Survey results should be regarded as a pilot study. The participants administer 12 public and 9 closed groups. Eleven participants administer more than one group. Four groups have only one admin, while 17 have more than one. Five admins reported that there are over 50,000 members in their groups. Four said that they administer groups of 1,000–2,000 members. Two administer groups of 10,000-15,000. Six administer small groups of up to 1,000 members. Sixteen of the participants declared that their groups consist mainly of members living in Europe, and five said that the members of their groups live mainly in Canada or the United States.

Participants' Age

Surprisingly, almost two-thirds of the participants were over 33 years old. Almost half of them were between 33 and 39 years. Close to a quarter of the participants were over 40 years old. Two-thirds of the participants have administered their groups for more than 3 years. These data support studies indicating a progressive interest in civic and political affairs that comes with age, as shown by Gerber, Green & Shachar (542). The willingness to participate in the study may have also been influenced by this variable. Plausibly, younger admins were less interested to spend time on filling out the Survey.

The Interests' Curbs. When asked to give their reasons for creating the group, without prioritising, only one respondent answered that the group he administers was formed primarily to meet a political need, although the names of at least two other groups suggest that they may have been formed with a political motive. According to six admins, their groups were founded to answer a need for mutual support; three listed the need for community building; another three to promote the existence of a Romanian ethnic group in a particular place; two cited unjustified allegations against Romanians abroad voiced by those at home, and one the increasing Romanian population in the UK. Two admins cited political dissent, although when asked more directly, in a different question, about political reasons behind their group's formation, they did not consider their dissent political. Lastly, two admins said that their groups were created due to an interest in fostering cross-cultural and linguistic exchange.

The group membership criteria vary across the sample. In eleven groups members can be added at will by any existing member. In the other ten, they have to fulfil strict criteria: a potential member must live in the city or country the group is active in; they must be a Romanian, speak Romanian or another "second language" of the group; they must have had a Facebook profile for at least one year; and finally, trolls with fake accounts, spammers, xenophobes, users who lack tolerance for others or use hate-speech are not accepted and are excluded from the group.

Sixteen of the admins were also the founders of their groups. Seven admins said that currently they are not accepting new moderators, i.e. users that can moderate content but do not have decision-making power over the group. The rest said that they could recruit moderators if the latter declare their willingness to participate in the administration of the group. To become an admin, one must be active in the group, eager to take on this role, respect the group's rules, and be politically neutral. Sometimes an interview may be required.

According to the respondents, in 14 groups users are rather active (Figure 4). In over half the groups, there are daily (re)posts. In six groups new posts appear at a frequency of 2-3 times per week, in another three there is a post at least once every two weeks. In only three of the groups do the users' posts have to be approved by the admins.

Responding to the question of what stimulates participation, six admins said that the intensity of discussions is triggered firstly by the quality of the topics—controversial, interesting, funky, smart. Even if no political content is allowed, the groups are more active during politically intense periods (national elections, in either the host or the home country). Four admins stated that increased activity occurs especially when the group is discussing a political topic. Four admins mentioned culture and offline events

and diaspora-related issues. The bigger the group, the more active it is. Users might also start posting just because there has been silence on the wall for a relatively long time. One admin mentioned that discussions related to the rules and practices of the group generate intensive debates. Finally, "as time passes, down-to-earth, apolitical posts gain popularity."

Although, according to the admins, one of the main reasons for setting up the groups was often solidarity and mutual aid, more than half the participants described their group as hierarchical, top-down organisations, in which the groups are ruled by one or a few knowledgeable leaders. They believe that they know what is best for the group and seldom ask the group's opinion on the group's policies.

Admins	Score (in %)	Description in the survey.
5	23.8	The administrator decides everything in the group. His/her decisions are reasonable and are group oriented.
5	23.8	There is a small group of administrators that make reasonable decisions, but also consider their own interests.
2	9.5	The decisions in the group are made by people who have the time and the knowledge to do it. The opinion of the majority of the group is not so important.
2	9.5	All the decisions are made after debates/ voting/ opinion polls.
3	14.3	The decisions are made by one or a very small number of individuals. The decisions are more about personal preferences of the administrators.
4	19	The group is absolutely free. Any member can contribute with posts to the group's wall without any monitorisation by admins. Position of admins is not very important.

Figure 3. Most of the participants described their groups as top-down hierarchical structures.

A quarter of the admins allow practices that could be called "democratic" or declare that they encourage freedom of expression in the group. Only two admins said that they indulge in debates and use polls before making a decision on something that concerns the group's future. Four respondents declared that their groups were fully egalitarian. However, none of these groups are truly egalitarian, in which every single member has admin or moderator status. When asked if they consult the members when deciding on policies, six participants said yes, for most decisions. Eight said that only a few decisions are taken after consultation with the OMs; and finally, six declared that they never consult their OMs when making decisions. Fourteen admins said they do not use any kind of polls; four said they use polls and what matters is the result, the number of the voters is not as important; only one said that there should be a majority, and one member declared that at least one third of the group members must vote in order for a poll to be valid. Access to co-management by other members is fairly complicated, but it is not totally closed in most of the groups. The admins described in laborious detail the rules that other members need to fulfil if they wish to become an admin.

A question about popular threads yielded interesting results: thirteen (!) admins listed political events among the most popular topics; nine said that job offers, buying, selling were popular; five mentioned offline events; two listed integration; and two said transport. Translation, group policies (for example on membership), sports and, more precisely, football were also mentioned. One member said that generally there is little real discussion on his group's wall. Usually, there are a lot of reposts and a few likes, which come from the same narrow group of loyal members. Seventeen admins stated that belonging to the group increases the integration skills of the group's members in the host society. Only a third of the participants believed that membership enhances the political emancipation of the members. On the walls, newcomers

can ask and find answers to basic questions about daily life in the host country: visas and administrative paperwork, places to see, restaurants, how to meet other diaspora members, driving schools, living costs, ways of dealing with everyday challenges and unfamiliar customs. They repost home and also often translate mass-media news of the host country. It is a platform for acquiring the host country's language and also for preserving their native tongue.

Opposition to the group's policies occurs quite often. From more than half of the RDFGs, members have left as a declaration of protest against the policies of the group. Ten admins said that this happens rarely; five said that it happens once in a while. Only one said that this happens fairly often, and five admins said it has never happened yet. Some people left because of warnings about hate speech, others because they cannot accept the vulgarity of other group members. More educated members left because the less educated members were also free to express themselves on the group's wall. Three admins said that members had left due to a disagreement over group policies. Other, less common reasons for leaving were: debates on the politics of the host country; spam; unanswered requests for help. Users also left because they were downgraded from the role of moderators; they were uninterested in the community; lack of time; unhappy with posts that had nothing to do with the life of the Romanian diaspora.

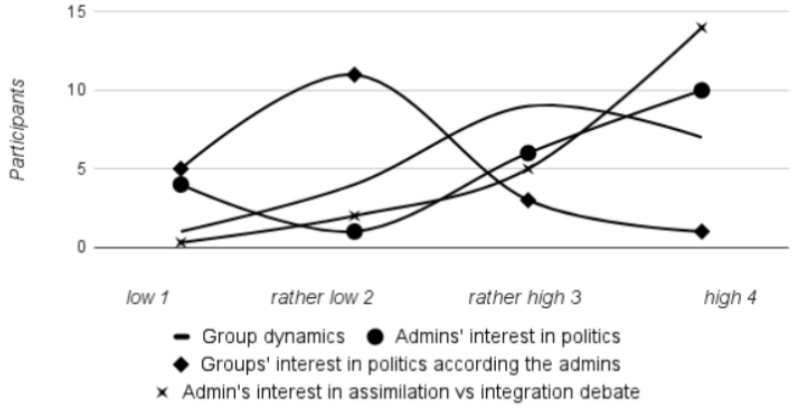

Figure 4. Group dynamics and interest levels in politics and the assimilation vs integration debates.

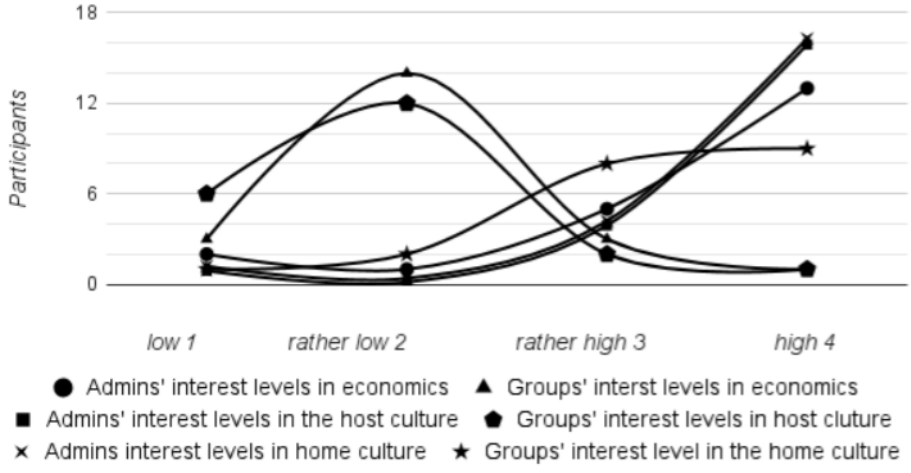

Figure 5. Admins and OMs interest levels in economics, host and home cultures.

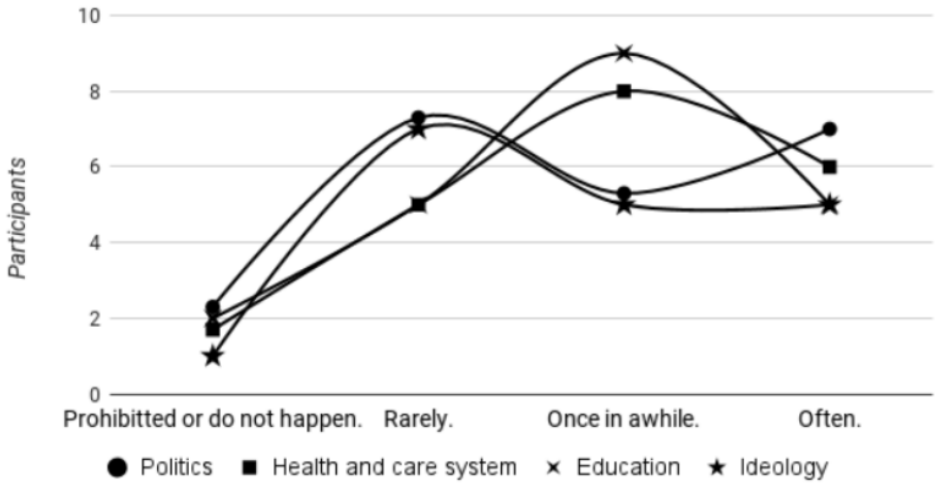

Figure 6. Frequency of posts dealing with politics, health and care system, education and ideology.

One-third of the admins had been contacted and offered some kind of collaboration by a political party, but none of them had received any financial support from a party or from any external business organization. Eleven admins said they collaborate with similar RDFGs. A third of them organise offline events at least once every 6 months. Another third organise events at least once every 2 months. One group organises one event per year, one group does events on a weekly basis, and one does not organise offline events at all. The admins only get moderately involved in the organisation of these events. Only 8 of them declared that they take part directly in organising such events or participating in them.

When asked what are the benefits of being an admin are, 12 participants answered: "None." Some of these added, "It is a difficult and unrewarding activity. It adds to the frustration of being an immigrant" (see Kóczán). Two admins said that it helps them listen to and thus understand better the problems that expats face. One of the participants used a metaphor about OMs "How they winnow like chaff through the host countries' grains"—(in Romanian: *vântură*). The admins also listed the following benefits: they get personal satisfaction, for example from learning to manage people; promoting ideas and discussing certain topics; and also, they acquire a voice in the host country.

Interestingly, when the participants were comparing themselves to other members of the group, they exhibited what could be described as a sense of superiority. They presented themselves as more interested in politics, economics and the host and home cultures than the OMs. This might indeed be so, due to their involvement in the creation and moderation of these RDFGs and initiation of cross-cultural news nodes. At least the admins who responded seemed to defy the stereotype about immigrants being uninterested in their host country's culture and language. All except one reported above-average levels of host-language mastery. Of course, the chances are low that the respondents actually checked through, say, the last 100 posts, marked them according to the subject of the enquiry, and literally counted them before comparing them to some average; they must have juggled some mental statistics like how frequent the posts on X would need to be for somebody to state that there is an interest in X on the part of the community. One could expect a short-cut, a normalising tendency in all of these evaluations. Nevertheless, instead of opting for average scores, the admins were rather demanding in their judgments.

Contrary to their online activity, the admins may well believe that Facebook does not enable people to be politically active in pursuit of a common cause and that the platform does not provide opportunities for expressing identities, including political ones. On the other hand, individual users seem to be able to reveal themselves in most of the RDFGs, while also concealing as much about themselves as they choose, similarly to other online diaspora groups (see Graham & Khosravi). When asked directly, the admins who filled out the Survey reported that the group's members tend to be uninterested in politics, economics, the host culture etc. (see Figures 4 and 5). The interests of the ordinary members came close to those of the admins only in relation to their home culture (Figure 5). When asked about the frequency of posts linked to

de facto politics but not directly associated with high politics or politicians, such as education, the health system or ideologies, it turned out that these topics are rather commonly found on the groups' walls.

Discussion

Like the special Facebook division of information cleaners (see the interviews in Gottschau or the analysis in Solon), many of the RDFGs' admins mentioned hate speech and xenophobia as key issues which they deal with, by suppressing them. This is, in fact, a common practice among admins of diasporic communities as reported frequently in Brinkerhoff's *Digital Diasporas* or, in the case of Romanian diaspora online forums see Trandafoiu's *Diaspora Online*. These are also the main reasons why users choose to leave RDFGs. This either happens due to the reduction of their freedom of expression, or due to instances of hate speech in the forums that were not dealt with quickly enough. It is becoming commonly accepted that information technologies take emotional reactions to extremes. The emotions of SNSs users' may be flattened out by temporal distance, which removes the contingency and element of surprise from emotional presentation; but it could also radicalise in the direction of being negative and aggressive or positive and ebullient, as Marlin-Bennett puts it (134-135). Moderating often seems to be complicated by what has been called the schizo-identity of nomadic subject (Lai 6)—"broken," "shattered"—common to many migrants due to their state of dwelling "between cultures"; such identities are often expressed through (Bernal 161) swearing, hate speech, nationalisms, extremisms (Tarța (a)), sexually explicit language (as described by Climescu 3-13). These are inevitably part of online diasporic communities (see also Graham & Khosravi 235). Having to manage the gate-keeping of this awkward content may be one reason for the declared dissatisfaction of the majority of the participants in the Survey when they were asked about the benefits of being an administrator.

Imposing a manufactured discourse, censorship included, comes with a cost—animosity on the part of the members or, worse, users leaving the group. There is also another heavy cost in personal time. The relationship between the levels of freedom of the group and the benefits the group brings to its members is still to be addressed. The Survey data seem to indicate a correlation between collective administration and perceived benefits. Four out of those 5 participants who see some benefits in being an admin are part of a team of admins who run more democratic groups, managed by boards.

A certain inconsistency as reflected by the survey data can easily be observed among the admins. This is shown by the admins' declared dedication to helping the members of the RDFGs, though at the same time they seem to exhibit a reluctance and even an unwillingness to aid the political emancipation of fellow immigrants, which would help them more than anything to settle in their new home despite the fact that the admins themselves report high levels of interest in politics. In other words, the respondents say that they are interested in the domain of politics, claim that politically related topics are some of the most frequently discussed on their group's walls and boost participation; yet they seem to opt for restricting or, in some groups, explicitly banning politically related content.

There is clearly a network of users in place (Diminescu 577), yet it has been reported that online political talks get people het up (Trandafoiu 190, among others, with the focus on the Romanian diaspora). "Don't ask, don't tell" acts as a social glue. An evolving community might gain both in numbers and cohesion if its members were more discreet about expressing their political opinions. Humans have a paucity of "political talk" (Eliasoph, 108). Although debates induce friction, which is an essential element of democratic life, an initiative to eliminate messages with political content, while providing a frictionless experience, suggests the motive of protecting the group's cohesion and an attempt to keep a scattered community together and at peace. Trandafoiu considers how maladaptive it is for immigrant or diasporic Romanian organisations to take sides in the political debates, although often they do so. In Italy and Spain, for example, the Romanian diaspora has formed political parties or joined local ones and participated in elections, sometimes successfully. In June 2017, a Romanian-born woman, Anca Moldovan, became a deputy in the regional Parliament of Madrid, replacing a colleague from the centre-right wing Popular Party, who had to resign due to allegations of influence peddling. The Romanian immigrants subscribe to a large array of ideological coalitions—from anarchist to socialist or liberal, as well as, to right-wing parties, which were undertaking anti-immigrant campaigns, although the

voting turnout of [Romanian] diasporans is, regrettably, very modest. To have a political identity means having an audience of others by enabling the creation of interest groups or communities which form around a collective experience; the latter can either be an expression of collective affirmation developed in time or a tool for mobilisation. Those who create public Facebook groups or who express their political opinions online are inviting us into their private (political) worlds by allowing fellow users an unfiltered view into their private political thoughts. This is in many ways a courageous act because in this context disclosure of a political opinion occurs in an *anonymous* environment. For individuals to choose to act, they must feel that they are part of something and that this 'something' is worthy of a political effort (García-Bedolla 9). A group focused on immigrant experiences might offer this something. Therefore, Facebook might be still considered a performance space where immigrants can express a political identity.

It is possible that many of the RDFGs members are part of both—groups based on special interest groups (i.e. political issues) alongside constituency groups. If this is the case, the same people might use the two types for different purposes and be more active in the interest-base and less in constituency-base ones, presented here. This was not tackled in the Survey. I tend to agree with Trandafoiu, who argues that in the case of the Romanians abroad immigration is in itself a powerful political statement of certain citizens. The Romanian diaspora, both as individuals and as an institution, is indissoluble from Romanian politics in a lot of different ways. The representation of migrant groups in Romanian politics is an ongoing topic both in Romania and in Immigrant communities. See for example the recent "Diaspora's anti-governmental protests" (Ciobanu).

Another reason for the admins' inconsistency is that they may have implicitly learned that Facebook is hardly a place where democracy can be performed. Facebook is more like a mall and less like a town hall. One could still ask (Marichal 113): if Facebook is changing how do its users think of politics? Does their engagement with Facebook affect what being a citizen actually 'feels like' to them? The emphasis on the personal makes public life convenient, but more predictable and routinised (Coleman and Blumler 12). The platform's standardised interface also limits (political) in-depth debates. The communication in Facebook groups is asynchronous, meaning that the parties are not simultaneous "co-utterers" and the threads are difficult to track. One can only imagine what Facebook would look like if the default option in creating a group or community implied full admin rights for every participant. Would that stimulate participatory practices more?

On the other hand, Facebook groups might be drying out the energy of activists and preventing its users from leaving the virtual bubble and initiating offline institutions that might benefit from financing schemes earmarked for the 3rd sector, and thus from being more active outside SNS.

The constituency-based migrant and diasporic groups are an increasingly salient feature of Facebook. This enables immigrants to contribute to the accelerating development of online culture and new forms of communication, identity negotiation and community-building, and, arguably, to political debate and participation. They do seem dispersed and fragmented, and the communication between groups with similar profiles like RDFGs might be troublesome due to Facebook architecture, as was described above. Nevertheless, the identity-making process is there, and it is not at all a smooth process. Our data seem to corroborate research that credited Facebook with the ability to provide immigrants with a lucrative linkage between the home and host countries (see Rheingold, Wittig and Schmitz, Ayres, and many others), contributing to activism in the host community but also connecting with issues at home; and suggested that Facebook could share the acclaimed capacity of cyberspace to bypass some spatial and social inequalities, which endows RDFGs with political significance. However, the members might have to strive for that in their RDFGs. Immigrants' attempts to participate in the politics of their homeland from their overseas locations show how citizens are not simply subjects who receive state power but are active consumers and producers of this power. They enjoy "emotional citizenship", in the sense that they are emotionally pushed and pulled towards their home national politics, even though they live somewhere else, "Every assimilation is actually only simulated" (Agamben 88).

To what extent do Facebook groups and communities constitute a public sphere? Are they indeed virtual communities, which do not necessarily exist in any identifiable space, where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political

action (Habermas 212)? For Habermas, public spaces are significant because they flourish in times when individuals rebel against absolutist rulers. For Romanians, emigration is still a sign of protest even twenty years after the fall of communism (Trandafoiu 25). Scholarship on the public sphere has tended to focus on the ideals laid out by Habermas, of open access, equal status of participants and rational analysis of alternatives of political self-organisation, which is still problematic, as it has turned out, in the majority of RDFGs whose admins participated in the Survey.

When talking about the internet, Habermas writes that although it is true that the internet has reactivated the grass-roots of an egalitarian public sphere of writers and readers and that it can also undermine the censorship of authoritarian regimes, the rise of millions of *fragmented* discussions across the world tends rather to lead to fragmentation of audiences into isolated publics. Therefore, "the web itself does not produce any public spheres. Its structure is not suited to focusing the attention of a dispersed public of citizens who form opinions simultaneously on the same topics and contributions which have been scrutinised and filtered by experts." In 2010, Habermas stated that he had no experience of social networks like Facebook and cannot speak to the solidarizing effect of electronic communication if there is any (Jeffries).

However, contrary to the results of the mini-poll in which a minority of users voted for the censorship option of deleting messages with a "political flavour," the members of the *Romani in Polonia* group (currently close to 1,500 members) are still allowed to publish such posts. These are not deleted and tend to generate comments. Its members were able to self-organize, join the February 2017 protests and gathered daily in front of the Romanian Embassy in Warsaw, against ordinance bills that were proposed by the Romanian Ministry of Justice regarding the pardoning of certain committed crimes, and the amendment of the Penal Code of Romania, especially regarding the abuse of power by serving politicians (see Păun, Ciobanu(a) and Tarța(c) for reports and opposing views).

Conclusion

The RDFGs seem to form safe and politically stimulating spaces in which individuals can share their inner political selves. Romanian migrants tend to engage in political talk on the walls of their RDFGs, although some of the OMs and even some of the admins would prefer to avoid such threads. Admins might delete content that they find improper, which seems to be an established norm, especially in the groups where the decision-making is their sole privilege. Those who delete improper content state that they prefer to minimise conflict in the group and that this comes with a cost––complaints from the more partisan OMs. It is plausible to think that in at least some of these groups these negotiation practices are constitutive elements of a public space in formation, in which a diasporic community is being organised, and a collective, between-cultures consciousness is developed. Interacting spontaneously with strangers, strangely in "strange places"—Facebook constituency groups—seems to be important for developing essential elements of civic wisdom. These interactions, eventually, may help to inculcate an attitude of humility, a sense of contingency, a desire to listen, an ability to ask the question "What if I'm wrong?" (Marichal 84). Perhaps it is not totally impossible to think of the RDFGs as being a type of public space in which new engaged communities, including political ones, are formed, in which fragments of the users' stories are shared online; as groups that recruit new members, retain and mobilise them and form specific cultures of resistance.

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