

FOR THE SAKE OF THE NATIONS: MEDIA, HOMOSEXUALITY AND RELIGIOUS NATIONALISMS IN THE POST-YUGOSLAV SPACE

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During the last decade, the public perception of religion and (homo)sexuality has undergone fundamental change in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The rights and liberties of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transexual (LGBT) people are still marginalized in the societies of the post-Yugoslav space.¹ The ethnic construct, specifically ethno-nationalism, as the attendant ideology of the states newly established after the breakup of Yugoslavia, is inherently based on principles of exclusion.² The vacancies in its cultural and social semantic are performatively filled with rhetorical claims and constructs in order to establish “universality” (Butler 2000: 35). LGBT issues are included in this, and radical separation is sought for them. For this to be achieved, however, they must be recognized as a troublesome factor in relation to the ideal of all that is ideal in the false universality and substantiality of ethno-nationalism. Thus the practice resorted to is one of translating opposing concepts into one’s own terms using Žižek’s (2000: 103) syntagm of “false disidentification” for the purposes of hegemonistic policy. In doing so, the supposedly radically ‘Other’ and different is integrated into one’s own symbolic network and order of things with the use of oppressor-imposed designations, which have ontological force since they give rise to subordination. This performativity, as Butler notes (2006: xv), is never an individual act; rather it is a ritual repetition which achieves its impact by way of naturalization in the context of the body, which has a temporal aspect and cultural support.

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¹ In this chapter we focus on Serbia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina and Croatia.

² As Bjelić (2011: 1) notes that ethno-nationalism in the post-Yugoslav space “became the master narrative, presenting itself both as a consciousness of national liberation and a psychic cure for the social pathology of Communist totalitarianism.”

In such a context, the nations of the former Yugoslavia need religion in order to transcend the post-transitional reality symbolically and ritually. Religion is the prime mover that sets all that is national in motion, yet at the same time it sets its ultimata, as traditional religious values are presented as the height of morality (Juergensmeyer 2006, 2008, Brubaker 2012, Grigoriadis 2013). Such religion and religiosity is of necessity ideologized, though declaring and presuming itself to be universal, transcendent and uncontaminated. It is presented as universal despite seeking to define key aspects of the ethno-political narrative (Mujkić 2010: 102). Or as Bourdieu (1977: 167) has noted, every established order has a tendency to portray its arbitrariness as something natural.

In the context of Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, both religion and diversity relating to sexual orientation and/or gender identities have taken on public significance. Public statements by religious officials and political leaders have displayed a high degree of homonegative attitudes, including hate speech and strong discriminatory positions. Of course there are also positive and affirmative examples that do not get much media coverage, especially not at times when Pride Parades or other occasions involving LGBT issues come under the media spotlight. For example, the political and religious discourse in Serbia rejects the explicit acceptance of the LGBT community. As a result of the patriarchal tradition and homonegative attitudes, 67% of those surveyed in Serbia, male and female, have said that homosexuality is an illness, while 53% believe that the government needs to act to suppress homosexuality (Prejudices exposed 2010). Similar results have become evident from research recently conducted by the Centre for Civic Education, according to which two thirds of Montenegrins believe that homosexuality is an illness, while 80% believe that it should remain a private matter. Other data from Central and Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe show that homophobia is far more pervasive than in other parts of Europe (Andreescu 2011, Takács and Szalma 2011).

As we will see later in this chapter, the background to these attitudes lies in the interpretation of homosexuality as a threat from the West against the traditional values of national and religious identity. The tone, intensity and ideological oversaturation of these accusations is situated within today's traditionalist discourse in the post-Yugoslav space, which is opposed to processes of modernization, postulating conservatism as the answer to social crisis, insecurity and the devastating consequences of transition (Jovanović 2013, van der Berg et al. 2014).

This study is based on a constructivist approach that tackles issues of the representation of symbolic systems capable of expressing meaning and power systems

connected with specific relational forces. Using a combination of theoretical insights, this approach proposes an analysis of representation (Hall 1997) as a source of the production of social constructs regarding the LGBT community (including hate speech), taking into consideration who constructs these representations and how, through a variety of discursive practices. In this way, public discourse or what Ahmed (2004) calls the “effective economies” (hate speech, disgust, fear, shame) has power and is able to dictate modes of behavior. Therefore, in the context of this study, the social power of discourse is exhibited through the hate speech of religious actors and politicians, in order to exclude and marginalize the LGBT community, to the extent that it can even create national identities through the debate. Our aim is to understand how hate speech functions in public discourse, as well as how the relationships and effects of these discourses of marginalization, social exclusion and violence are named against sexual minorities. Thus, the research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the power of the discourse and its effect on social exclusion, which has important ramifications for nation-state building and national preservation and/or defense.

In this chapter the key research issues that will be addressed are as follows:

- 1) Investigation of the connection between ethno-nationalism, religion and homosexuality in current public discourse in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia;
- 2) Investigation of the relationship between these discourses and the religious-political configuration in different national and media contexts;
- 3) Analysis of the consequences of these discourses on marginalization, social exclusion and violence.

The Example of Serbia: “Clenched Fists of the Humiliated and Offended”

Until recently the Serbian Orthodox Church was completely indifferent and mute on the issue of homosexuality. With the increased visibility of the LGBT population that began with the fall of the Milošević regime in 2000 and the (unsuccessful) attempt to organize the first Pride Parade in 2001 (now remembered as the “massacre pride”), the Church has felt provoked, and open hostility has followed, permeated by moralist and nationalist discourse (Jovanović, 2011). Generally speaking, the emergence of homosexuality as a topic of debate has been interpreted in Church circles as an imposition of the “decadent West” (Tucić 2011: 45) and

as foreign to “our history, tradition and culture” (Irinej, 2011).³ The syntagm “non-traditional sexual orientation,” used to indicate this variant of human sexuality, is somewhat indicative. We also encounter publicists who, inflamed with the ardor of self-victimization, speak of “LGBT dictatorship” (Informativna služba Srpskog sabora Dveri 2010), the “gay Inquisition” (Dimitrijević 2011), and “terror of the minority.” Or we might quote Živković (2007: 22): “Who gave them the right to ‘tolerate’ and respect the right of so-called ‘marginal groups’ while at the same time meting out totalitarian and fascistoid treatment of the rights of the ‘majority’ (including the faithful of the SPC [Serbian Orthodox Church])?”

The Pride Parade is seen as an offense – “a humiliation and a fulfillment of foreign desires: These marches insult the morals of the absolute majority, not just those of Christians but those of members of the other great religions, and they should not be allowed. I respect individual liberty, but not liberty that leads to anarchy” (Spaić and Popović 2012: 18). Patriarch Irinej demonstrated a similar attitude when he sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Ivica Dačić demanding a ban on an exhibition of photographs called *Ecce Homo* by Swedish artist Elisabeth Ohlson Wahllin that opened in Belgrade on 3 October 2012, which he described as “shameful,” “horrific” and “scandalous.” At one point Patriarch Irinej (2012) declared the following:

This deeply insulting exhibition has been promoted by homosexuals, the organizers of the Pride Parade, planned for 3 October this year [2012]. We likewise request and demand that the planned tragicomedy known as the Pride Parade – which really ought to be called the “Shame Parade,” and which casts a dark moral shadow over our city, our centuries of Christian culture and the dignity of the family as the basic cell of the human race – be prevented from taking place.

The negative attitude toward the LGBT issue reached its pinnacle in a statement by the Patriarch in which he claimed that the rains that had caused catastrophic flooding in Serbia in 2014 were a warning from God and a call to repentance regarding preparations for a gathering which “represents great lawlessness and a despicable vice, in which they declare pride and assert their dignity and democracy, yet which entirely opposes god and the law of life” (Tanjug 2014a). This was an allusion to the Pride Parade to be held in Belgrade, which in a second statement published on the same day (15 May) he called “the tip of an iceberg of immorality, a gathering of all flaw and vice” (Tanjug 2014b). In the same spirit, four days later Metropolitan Amfilohije joined the blaming game, declaring that the flooding which had

³ All translations from foreign language sources are the authors’ own unless otherwise stated.

befallen the nation was “a sign that the Lord loves us,” that he was testing us so that we might “return to the true path,” and that it was no coincidence that the disaster had come in the wake of the victory by Austrian drag artiste Conchita Wurst at the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest, explaining that the extreme weather was a sign that people must reject this “Jesus-like figure” (Internet portal 021: 2014).

The Church is mounting an antimodernist defense against the assault from the Western “ideology of homosexuality” (*sic*) whereby the issue is being relocated from the field of human rights to the sphere of moralism. Leading the way in this is Metropolitan Amfilohije, who speaks of “violence against the moral order of things” (2010: 6–7). The list of pejoratives, already lengthy, aimed at homosexuals and homosexuality, is constantly being expanded: “mental illness,” “grave disorder of the human personality,” “abomination before God,” “persons almost entirely lacking in physical and human virtue,” “conscious or unconscious impulse to self-destruction,” and “desecration and misuse of human nature and its God-given drives.”

An indicative example of such discourse is the article by Nebojša Bakarec in the newspaper *Печам*, an egregious example of conspiratorial anti-Western discourse in the context of the public debate on the 2013 Pride Parade. Bakarec, vice-chair of the executive board of the DSS (the Democratic Party of Serbia [Demokratska Stranka Srbije]), a center-right party with a conservative agenda and open support for the Serbian Orthodox Church, wrote the article under the title “I won’t forgive you for the children” (*Decu vam neću oprostiti*) as a response to an exhibition called *Our Queer Childhood*, held in Belgrade as part of the Pride Parade event in 2013. It is worth noting that in 2012 Bakarec was found guilty of discrimination against LGBT people and of hate speech when he claimed in his article titled *Drugi oktobar 2011* that homosexuality was a pathology that should be treated medically. In “I won’t forgive you for the children,” Bakarec (2013: 36) “exposes” the gay lobby with the following claims:

It is obvious that foreign patrons have footed the bill for everything – either that or the self-proclaimed associations of fags,⁴ lesbians and others have got lots of money. Either way the money originated abroad. What I am getting at is that it is clear that the EU and USA have invested significant funds in the Parade itself – the Week of Shame – and

⁴ Serbo and Croatian – *peder*. *Peder* and *pederluk* are terms which once had a “technical” meaning and are frequently used by opponents of LGBT issues, even in print, but can today hardly be construed as anything other than derogatory. They are loosely translated herein as “fag” and “faggery.”

every year this funding clearly increases, as does the political support, pressure and blackmail.

According to Bakarec (2013: 37), Serbia needs to protect juveniles by way of a law similar to that in Russia. Even more interesting is the apocalyptic undertone of the article as a whole, and of the subtitle “The end of the world is nigh” (*Biće skoro propast sveta*), with Bakarec developing a discourse on eschatological technocracy, predicting:

...a brave new world, in which children will be conceived and born by purely artificial means, in surrogate wombs. Children will be brought up by homosexually conditioned robots and artificially generated e-personas. Only same-sex sexuality will be permitted... What remains of the human race will ultimately die out, extinguish itself. Apocalypse. The Day of Judgment.

Through these and similar statements, Bakarec is explicitly agitating for and promoting an anti-Western discourse with the mission of saving Serbia from the morally ruined West.

An even more banal example of sexual and religious nationalism can be found in statements by Borislav Pelević (2013) in the television program *Revolucija* broadcast on TV Happy. Pelević, once better known as the general of Arkan’s Tigers⁵ had the following to say:

I wonder if the parents [of the organizers of Pride] are proud of their children who are homosexuals. Who are abnormal, who are perverted, who are sick and who war against normal life in Serbia. Against our Orthodox faith, against our glorious Serbian tradition. I see no reason; nobody is preventing them from engaging in their perverse and debauched acts in their own homes ... But why do they poison our children? Why do the media devote so much attention to those sick, perverted, abnormal people? Why do they want to poison our children with that?

Pelević’s homonegative statement is a classic example of the perception of homosexuals as sick, sinful and deviant, and his invocation of tradition and Christianity in the struggle against homosexuality is a well-established discursive strategy. As a rule, the debate is waged on the level of religion, ethics and morals, while neglecting the issues of human rights, discrimination and tolerance. General lack of moderation coupled with moralistic zeal in the rhetoric of both Bakarec and Pelević actually attests to their marginal position in the political

⁵ Željko Ražnatović Arkan was a Serbian criminal and commander of a paramilitary force in the Yugoslav wars. He was accused by the UN of crimes against humanity for his role during the war in Croatia.

life of contemporary Serbia, as that rhetoric's main function is in drawing public attention and securing some space under the political sun.

It seems that church officials would prefer to ignore and gloss over same-sex attraction as a subject of no importance: "Given the current spiritual, social and political condition of our nation and state we believe that certain media and certain non-governmental organizations, out of their own base, if not subterranean interests, have imposed this disagreeable topic on our entire society, a topic which is in essence irrelevant to us" (Irinej, 2010: 5). Calls can also be heard from certain secular circles, to "prohibit homosexual propaganda and its promotion among juveniles" (Vukadinović et al. 2012; regarding the debate which this sparked, see Antonić 2012 and Gligorijević 2012), a wording which is very reminiscent of the legislation on "the prohibition of homosexual propaganda," enacted in Russia in June 2013 at the same session of the Duma at which the law prohibiting "offense against believers" was passed.

The proposed Law Against Discrimination in 2009 "forced" the Church to react and to end its "policy of silence." Two articles of this law were a particular focus of attention. First was Article 18, which in the draft law prohibited the denial of the right to accept, maintain, express and change faith or convictions, to which, at the initiative of the seven "traditional religious communities," headed by the Serbian Orthodox Church, a paragraph was added which absolved priests and religious ministers of responsibility for discriminatory action if their behavior was in accordance with the religious doctrine they advocated. Article 21 of the draft law prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, with specific mention of transsexuality in the third paragraph. In the final, enacted version of the law, the third paragraph was left out, as was all mention of gender identity (Jovanović 2013: 89-91). Condemnation of homosexuality from a position of religiously colored nationalism is done by juxtaposing the Pride Parade with the problem of Kosovo and Metohija, thus situating homosexuality in the position of the "Other," among the opposition according to which "the national" is constituted. The patriarch himself employs this discursive strategy (cf. Irinej 2011).

A thorn in the side of the church remains in the form of homosexuality (including homosexual pedophilia), which is dealt with by way of deafening silence. Examples of this have been accusations against Bishop Pahomije of Vranje, the homosexual scandal concerning the Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla, Vasilije Kačavenda, which ended in his early retirement, as well as the case of the Abbot of Novo Hopovo monastery Ilarion who was

accused of “prohibited sexual acts with juveniles.”⁶ Any mention of the topic that there may be is couched in denial.

The Example of Bosnia and Herzegovina: “It Should be Kept Within Four Walls”
Bosnia and Herzegovina is another striking example of the relationship between religion, nationalism and (homo)sexuality. As in other areas of the post-Yugoslav space, religious institutions have been the main incubators of nationalism (Mujkić 2010: 120). However, nowhere has this been more apparent than in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in view of the fact that this is the only Republic of the former Yugoslavia which did not have a titular nation and to this day no official definition of the Bosniac nationality has been adopted (Mujkić 2010: 129). Religion “sprang to assist” in the “nativization” and “indigenization” of the three “leading,” so-called constitutive nationalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs. Within such a context, LGBT issues are, seemingly of some kind of historical necessity, set within ethno-confessional frameworks and subject to their rule and measure. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, gay pride parades have not been organized to date.

Since in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is a constant manufacturing of the national, which as such remains incomplete, the role of various elites in these discourses is of special significance. As regards the political elite, political parties in the country have no official stance, either positive or negative, toward this subject, except that there is a particular tendency toward the expression of homonegative attitudes on the part of politicians from parties on the political right, who not infrequently invoke God’s laws and traditional values, and in that context directly or indirectly condemn the LGBT community. Thus, for example, Bakir Izetbegović, currently a member of the country’s Presidency and vice-president of the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije – SDA), once said: “I am not in the least pleased with the holding of the Queer Festival. This reminder of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of the 27th night [of Ramadan], a noble night which Muslims look forward to – I am not at all pleased by that” (Nurkić 2012). Izetbegović also said around the time of the Queer Festival that, “They [LGBT people] have a right to their sexual orientation, or rather disorientation, but we will employ all moral means to fight the influence of homosexuality on youth... It’s something that will spread if you let it. It should be kept

⁶ In a response to the 2014 Pride Parade, Patriarch Irinej glossed over the pedophilia scandal among the bishops. Using the well-established anti-Western discourse, the patriarch declared the following: “If the gay sexual orientation is justified and should be propagated, then why the same is not true for pedophilia, widespread in the Western world, as well as incest [...] Why is their right less important than the so-called right of your sexual (dis)orientation.” (B92 2014).

between four walls...” (Čaušević and Gavrić 2012: 317). Statements like these can be perceived by ultra-nationalist organizations as a call to violence against LGBT people, which serves to solidify further the stereotypes and prejudices that homosexuality is an illness and is to be weeded out. As chairman of the BiH Presidency, Izetbegović also stated, in *Gracija* magazine of October 2010, that, “we must fight with all moral means against those who seek to pervert a highly moral society. Everybody has the right to live their life as they please, but not the right to present the perverted as normal to young people and to call them to join in” (Barreiro and Vasić 2012: 24). Member of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliament, Amila Alikadić-Husović deemed it inappropriate that “something like that” was being held in the month of Ramadan, adding, “[h]omosexuality is condemned by every religion. Who are we to approve of something that God forbids?” (cf. Vučetić, Rašević and Popov-Momčinović 2013: 15). From this and similar quotes one can see the intermingling of the ethno-nationalist, religious and homonegative, as well as the way in which such statements circulate practically unhindered in public discourse, the primary mediators of which are the mass-media. With their lack of critical distance from the source of the “information,” they further contribute to the circulation of hate speech against LGBT people and lend support to constructs which reflect certain power relationships, social fracturing and hierarchy.

The most homonegative statements by religious officials could be read in the magazine SAFF, which has a narrow readership oriented towards radical Islam, though it should be noted that this magazine also has an online edition accessible by the broader public. In this magazine, LGBT people are depicted as having fallen into the trap of Shaytan, concealing obvious sin by calling it by another name while invoking human rights and liberties (Durkalić 2012a: 147). The most egregious example of “anti-gay propaganda”, as cited by Durkalić, could be read in the same magazine in the editorial “Fagland” (*Pederland*) (Alispahić 2008: 18), headlined “Struggle for Survival” (*Borba za opstanak*) with the opening sentence of the editorial: “The goal of the festival of fags in the month of Ramadan was not just meant as an affirmation of faggery but as a provocation and intimidation of Muslims, with the ultimate ambition of having the Bosniacs accept faggery as a lesser evil than their own tradition” (Durkalić 2012b: 176). What is especially striking is that ethnic distancing from the “aggressor” (read: the Serbs⁷) has, by use of discursive sophistry in one article in this magazine, been depicted in a positive light as regards the treatment of LGBT

⁷ The Bosniacs tend to regard the 1990s war in BiH as an act of aggression by the Serbs and reject the term “civil war.”

issues, with the goal of mobilizing Bosniacs and Muslims against LGBT people and, more generally, awakening their patriotic sentiment. So we read the words of Milanko Mihaljica, leader of the Serbian Radical Party of the Republic of Srpska, who declared that Sarajevo was just the place for the Queer Festival, since “[the Republic of] Srpska will never allow debauchery and perversion in its streets, nor lend support to unnatural tendencies” (Durkalić 2012a: 99).

However, this well-established discourse does not end here. It also produces and reproduces moral panic and social confusion. Thus the largest daily newspaper in BiH, *Dnevni Avaz*, ran a front page headline on August 28, 2008 which inquired in huge letters: “Who is trying to trick the Bosniacs by holding the gay gathering during Ramadan?” (*Ko Bošnjacima podvaljuje gay okupljanje u Ramazanu?*). This linking of Ramadan with the festival served to depict the festival as an attack on religion, even though the festival program did not touch on religious themes. *Dnevni Avaz* used less inflammatory language than SAFF, “ideologization in ‘so many words’ ... but the ‘job’ was done for them by numerous public figures, their statements serving to indoctrinate the readership in the idea that queer people are sick and that the festival was deliberately timed to coincide with Ramadan and hence they were disrespecting Islam and its fundamental values” (Durkalić 2012b: 181–82).

It should also be noted that the supposedly more politically correct media do not always respect the code of professional reporting ethics where LGBT topics are concerned. For example, they constantly interview the same people, they place no critical distance between themselves and the source of the (dis)information, and so on, thereby contributing to the creation of a homonegative social climate. The fact that the great majority of members of the public, both male and female, consider homosexuality to be an illness and have a high degree of social distance toward the LGBT population, would seem to support this theory (Popov-Momčinović 2013), while the media are just there to show “things as they are” (see Milojević 2012).

As the guardians and proponents of the national interests of the constitutive nationalities, politicians have also not been immune to moral panic. This interests which they mystify in various ways in view of the fact that the Constitution does not specify which issues come under the category of national interests, even though under this guise and through the so-called House of Peoples in which the representatives of the constitutive nationalities sit, they can block laws and decisions taken by the representative parliamentary bodies. From such statements we can clearly see the intermingling of the national and the religious, and this intermingling is not infrequently mediated by LGBT issues. This

discursive negotiation is thus a place of agreement and common ground irrespective of the national and religious affiliations of the politicians and of whether or not this topic is discussed or glossed over. And when it is discussed, using the mechanisms of restrained, mute and hypocritical sexuality (Foucault 1978: 3), it is declared taboo through the attribution of imposed meanings which correspond to local symbolic orders and the ethno-national *status quo*, within which it is perpetuated by way of the narrative of one's own victimhood and the need to ensure survival through biological multiplication. Fear of assimilation or extermination is constantly manufactured through the repetition of stories and ethnic narratives which, although incongruous, have the same internal logic (Vlaisavljević 2009: 78). The war in Bosnia produced a replacement for the vacant position of the enemy in the form of the "domestic enemy" (Vlaisavljević 2009: 81). Although the domestic enemy is usually a member of another ethnic group or indeed the group itself, sometimes, and in certain circumstances and depending on political expediency, it can be the other and the different in the non-ethnic sense too: those of different ideology provenance or of other sexual orientation.

We can say that, although homophobia is very much present in BiH and that the re-patriarchalization and re-traditionalization of society seeks to set everyone in his or her proper place in accordance with a binary understanding of gender roles, it is also somewhat "loose," being intersected by *ad hoc* media, religious and ethno-national constructs. Thus, for example, although religious institutions have a hardline attitude toward this topic, one survey conducted on a representative sample of the population of BiH did not find that religiosity was a major determinant of homonegative attitudes. Specifically, even though religious people showed a slightly greater degree of social distance toward LGBT people and somewhat more homonegative attitudes, statistically significant differences were not found for any of the questions between the attitudes of religious and non-religious interviewees, both male and female (Popov-Momčinović 2013: 10). Religious institutions continue to resort to certain ploys with regard to LGBT rights. They frequently use the syntagm of the so-called separation of the "sin from the man" and the "state from the act." They frequently address the subject *ad hoc* and through mechanisms of decontextualization. Thus, for example, religious institutions in BiH sometimes make public statements regarding Pride Parades to be held in countries of the region or further abroad, or on the referendum recently held in Croatia, without deeper reflection on the BiH context. This points to subtle mechanisms of Foucauldian control and punishment (and pastoral power is one form of power) on the part of local religious institutions in regard to the topic of LGBT. This power,

exercised through discipline as an “ensemble of minute technical inventions” (Foucault 1995: 220), gives rise to a variety of discursive plays which obscure and conceal the limitation of the public arena (Žižek 2000: 100).

The Example of Croatia: “In the Name of the Family”

Croatia presents an interesting example of a country that has strong relations with the dominant religion (Perica 2002), but at the same time also gives the greatest rights to its LGBT population in comparison to the rest of the region. From one point, the Catholic Church as the main religion in the country has great influence over state affairs (e.g. history textbooks and a strong position in enforcing identification based on an interplay between religion and ethnicity [cf. Topić 2012, Topić and Vasiljević 2011a, 2011b]). On the other hand, the LGBT population is able to organize gay prides (albeit not always without problems) and has recently won its long struggle to obtain the right to civil partnership and equalization of status with heterosexual marriages. However, the LGBT population has been the subject in 2013 in which one conservative NGO – as will be discussed below – called for a referendum to insert the definition of marriage as a “biological union between a man and a woman” into the country’s Constitution. At the same time, Croatia is also the only country that has a football fan group fighting against homophobia in football stadia and where the media stand up against every attempt to violate the rights of the LGBT population (Jutarnji list, Novi List, Index.hr, Slobodna Dalmacija), while those media that belong to the conservative side and are traditionally more affiliated with the Catholic Church (Večernji List) still cannot be called hate preachers.

Even though the rights of the LGBT population are greater than in other countries of the region, the group has emphasized a few points that still need to be addressed. Namely, LGBT activists believe they are still discriminated against because the legislative system inadequately addresses issues of the legal protection of LGBT people. Besides the anti-discrimination law, the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia does not address the matter of the protection of the rights of its LGBT citizens. Indeed, LGBT rights organizations called for provisions to be included in the Constitution regarding the protection of the rights of gender minorities (Izvještaj o stanju ljudskih prava seksualnih i rodnih manjina u 2010. godini), however, these demands were not met, and in 2013 a referendum was held seeking the addition of a provision in the Constitution according to which marriage would be defined as a “biological union between a woman and a man.” This was the initiative of the “In the Name of the Family” (*U ime obitelji*) association (2014), which invokes democracy in its

campaigning and criticizes the media and the government for undemocratically prohibiting the expression of opinion, and for the “terrorization” of the silent majority by the so-called aggressive minority. In doing so, this association is effectively distorting the fundamental tenets of democracy, advancing the idea that the majority has the absolute right to decide, something which the President of Croatia himself, Ivo Josipović, pointed out, saying that democracy was not a “vote-ocracy” and that democracy did not mean that the majority could trample on the rights of the minority (Jutarnji 2013). Such insistence on the absolute right of the majority was characterized by more left-leaning media and individuals as fascist and discriminatory.

In Croatia the media are not complicit in discriminating against minority rights as is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the media do not adopt a firm stance with regard to discrimination. Indeed, some media openly position themselves as “guardians of democracy,” exposing themselves to insult and accusations. The difference in verbal discrimination in relation to other former Yugoslav republics is that the LGBT community in Croatia is perceived as representing a threat to the family (which was the focal point of the referendum on marriage in December 2013), and less as an illness. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that Croatia and Slovenia removed homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses as early as 1973, and in 1977 the criminal law of the Socialist Republic of Croatia decriminalized homosexual relations. Slovenia, Montenegro and Vojvodina did the same, while the other republics did not. However, the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church to students of religious catechism is that homosexuality is an illness (Jutarnji 2013a).

As regards Pride events, despite discrimination against the LGBT community, Croatia is the only former Yugoslav republic in which these events are held regularly, albeit amidst heavy security. The first Zagreb Gay Pride was held in 2002, accompanied by verbal abuse from the public and violence against marchers, but also enjoying significant support from the media, which called the event a test of democracy (Jurčić 2012). After the first event a campaign was launched called “Love is Love” (*Ljubav je ljubav*), and further publicity was given to LGBT rights by the film “Fine Dead Girls” (*Fine mrtve djevojke*) by director Dalibor Matanić. However, participants in the 2007 event in Zagreb had a petrol bomb thrown at them, leading to the first ever hate crimes conviction for the perpetrator. The year 2007 was marked by large-scale attacks on people of LGBT orientation in all public places, as well as in their offices and their own homes. Until 2011, these events were held only in Zagreb, often accompanied by a parallel gathering organized by the HČSP (*Izvještaj o stanju ljudskih prava seksualnih i rodnih manjina u 2010*), an ultra-right wing political party which has hitherto

failed to meet the election threshold and enter the Croatian parliament, but which systematically seeks to garner publicity and support for its beliefs, including glorification of the Ustasha regime. Such parallel events have often involved discriminatory aspects, in view of the offensive placards they feature (Topić, 2013).

Although the Gay Pride events in Zagreb have mostly occurred peacefully (with the exception of 2007), a Pride Parade in Split in 2011 led to a wave of violence in which event participants had stones thrown at them and were verbally abused. Nazi salutes were also in evidence. The media reported that 10,000 protesters wanted to “tear apart the 400 participants of the event” (Jutarnji 2011). On that occasion the police halted the event. The following year the event went ahead, and the LGBT population was able to express its views -- but it should also be noted that the event was held amid a heavy police presence, with all approaches blocked to streets through which the parade was to pass. In other words, this outcome does not mean that there would not have been incidents had they not been physically prevented by shutting down the entire center of Split. It was not until the 2013 event that things passed without incident and without a complete shutdown of the city (Bačić, 2013). However, the events that followed, with the referendum initiative regarding the definition of marriage, showed that an end to the discrimination of the LGBT community was not a social reality.

Nevertheless, the greatest discrimination comes in verbal form, where those of LGBT orientation are abused at football stadia and by Catholic associations which are not officially part of the Catholic Church but are affiliated with it. Thus the aforementioned referendum initiative on the definition of marriage from 2013 got the fervent support of the Church, which on the day of the referendum (traditionally held on Sundays) called on citizens to come out and vote “yes” (Laudato 2013). The leader of the referendum initiative, Željka Markić, personally admitted after the referendum was over that the referendum was her way of ensuring that the LGBT community would never gain the right to marriage, which belonged only to “normal people” (Jutarnji 2013b). After the referendum, the government continued drafting the Life Partnership Act which it had earlier begun (this separate law serving as proof that there had been no intention to give the LGBT community the right to marriage, hence that the referendum had been unnecessary), and which would permit LGBT citizens a status equivalent to marriage, albeit under the official term “life partnership” (*životno partnerstvo*) (Index 2013).

This draft law (Ministarstvo uprave RH 2013) provoked protest from the referendum initiative, which protested against the Act claiming that it was evading the referendum decision regarding the status of marriage in Croatia (Jutarnji 2013c). Nonetheless the law was

passed on 1 September 2014 without triggering major protests, and on 5 September 2014 two men in Zagreb committed to life partnership, which gave them all the same rights as in a heterosexual marriage except in name, and there is no possibility of adopting children (Law on Life Partnership of Same Sex Persons NN 92/14 [Jutarnji 2014a]). The media called this event the “first gay marriage,” which triggered complaints from the For the Family group that filed a complaint to the Council for Electronic Media asking the Council to punish and warn all national media that life partnership cannot be called marriage (Večernji 2014). The request was rejected by the Council which stated that the Council could not violate freedom of speech and order the media how to interpret certain laws and terms (Jutarnji 2014b).

As regards the activities of the Roman Catholic Church and the rights of the LGBT community, the Church has traditionally opposed the recognition of LGBT rights to marriage and the adoption of children, being equally opposed to medically facilitated fertilization and any form of sexual awareness education. After the governing coalition led by the Social Democratic Party introduced a health education curriculum that included a fourth module on sexuality, the Catholic Church took up an opposition stance and called for the government to be brought down by use of arms (Jutarnji 2013d, 2013e). This example shows that the Catholic Church in Croatia does not have quite as much public support as was previously thought, despite its strong relations with politics. When the national media came out in support of the secularization of the state and when public opinion surveys showed that citizens were opposed to the interference of the Church in health education (Jutarnji 2013f), Catholic associations suddenly thrust themselves into the public arena, taking over the task of campaigning against health education.

Considering the public opposition to church interference in matters of state and the arrival of moderate Pope Francis at the helm of the Catholic Church, who after the referendum on marriage even announced that four extreme right-wingers among the Croatian bishops would be sent into retirement (Jutarnji 2014), it is clear that the Church did not dare wage the battle over the marriage referendum personally, and the “In the Name of the Family” association appeared instead, run mostly by people affiliated either with the Church itself or with organizations affiliated to it. Evidence of this includes the writing of *Glas Koncila*, the official mouthpiece of the Catholic Church. This journal openly campaigned for the marriage referendum, using arguments rather similar to those coming from the In the Name of the Family association. For example, the January 9, 2014 issue carried a report on an interview with Cardinal Bozanić conducted by Croatian Catholic Radio (Hrvatski Katolički Radio) in which the media and government were criticized for their bias and

tendentiousness (Glas Koncila 2014), arguments which echoed those of the association which initiated the referendum.

It is clear, therefore, that in Croatia the LGBT community is treated as a threat to the family even though it is not explicitly verbally abused as in other states of the former Yugoslavia, and especially not in the media, which have stood in defense of the rights of people of LGBT orientation.

Conclusion

From the foregoing we can see that in Serbia and Bosnia- Herzegovina the media, with their lack of critical distance, contributed further to the circulation of hate speech, lending support to well-established power structures and hierarchies or giving excessive voice to hate speech even when not advocating problematic attitudes themselves. A well-established relationship between ethno-national, religious and homonegative attitudes can be seen at work, where hate speech and similar forms of expression circulate almost unhindered in public discourse, mediated primarily by the mass media. The connection between ethno-nationalism, religion, and especially (homo)sexuality in post-conflict societies explains the functioning of religious nationalism, conferring privilege on heteronormativity and stirring up and supporting an intolerant culture. Open homonegativity is cunningly concealed using what Švab and Kuhar (2005) call the “transparent closet” and the reduction of homosexuality to a personal preference or lifestyle choice, for which there is in fact no place in the public identity politics of this region. For the only identity which is possible – i.e., that which has an ontologically elevated status – is an ethno-confessional one in these societies in which the principles of justice and right have been ethno-nationalized.

Croatia presents a different case where the media do not openly agitate toward discrimination of LGBT groups and where Gay Pride manifestations are regularly held more-or-less without incident. However, Croatia has the general problem of the enormously influential Roman Catholic Church which interferes in all aspects of state politics. LGBT community in Croatia have managed to secure the right to life partnership, which is what they have been seeking for more than a decade. The overall continuing influence of the Catholic Church should not be underestimated, and the fact that the LGBT community managed to obtain this right does not mean they will not become targets of significant verbal abuse if Church-related groups manage to gain more political power, which is currently happening with a new referendum initiative to change electoral law so as to allow smaller parties to enter Parliament again, led by the For the Family group.

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