

Religion, Homosexuality, and Contested Social Orders in the Netherlands, the Western Balkans, and Sweden

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Introduction

To understand the relation between religion and social order in times of crisis, we can look at the critical junctures where religion serves to connect and divide people within contemporary European societies. One of the most telling examples is the oppositional pairing of religion and homosexuality, figuring prominently in contemporary public debates. Traditional religious constructions of homosexuality repeatedly clash with the public visibility of individual sexual preferences and the increasing acceptance of sexual diversity in the Western world (Ganzevoort et al. 2011, Korte et al. 1999). These clashes between 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991) reflect changing public perceptions of sexualities, while simultaneously indicating shifting boundaries between 'the secular' and 'the religious' as well as between public and private spheres in modern western societies (Vattimo 1999, Woodhead 2008, Bracke 2008, Habermas 2008). Conservative religious groups have made the struggle against equal acceptance of homosexuality an important identity marker (Bates 2004, Jacobsen and Pellegrini 2004, Cobb 2006, Viefhues-Bailey 2010). Conversely, LGBT rights movements have traditionally critiqued monotheistic religions for their assumed patriarchal, colonial and homophobic tendencies, and often positioned themselves as secular (Braidotti 2008, Göle 2010). For instance, as we will show in more detail in this chapter, right wing nationalists in the Netherlands call for a 'defence of homosexuals' against 'religious fundamentalist attacks' and claim the acceptance of sexual diversity to be essential for citizenship ('homonationalism'; Puar 2007, 2011), while their 'allies' in other countries claim that acceptance of sexual diversity is not compatible to their nation's identity. Apparently, the oppositional pairing of religion and homosexuality is an important discursive strategy in conflicts over collective identity.

Shifts and tensions in the public constructions of religion and sexuality denote a fierce renegotiation of power positions, as the vigour of debates about the rights of LGBT and religious minorities may indicate (Kuntsman 2008, 2009, Jordan 2011, El-Tayeb 2012). In this struggle, both discourses tend to gravitate around strategically useful essentialist notions, eclipsing a subtext of more nuanced and fluid conceptions of both religion and sexuality and their multiple and layered interconnections as 'critical conjuncture'.

The emergence and circulation of polarised stances on religion and homosexuality in public discourse have recently become subject of research in various disciplines, such as theology, sociology of religion, cultural anthropology, law and human rights studies, and gender and queer studies. Large scale migration, globalisation, fast changing gender positions and kinship formations, and modern individual and social identity-formation each have been identified as factors contributing to the establishing and solidifying of these tensions (Rodriguez and Ouellette 2000, Gudorf 2001, Schachter 2004, Peek 2005, Schnoor 2006). The impact of certain ingrained theological and moral framings of sexuality and the specific functioning of religious authority and religious belonging in modern and secularising societies have been designated as important factors as well (Yip 2002, Starks and Robinson 2009, Henrickson 2009, Pitt 2010, Rohy 2012).

This chapter focuses on the strategic and ideological assumptions, interests, and effects of present-day constructions of (homo)sexuality and religion in public arenas. Our approach will be an explorative appraisal and critical analysis of the discursive formations of oppositional pairings of religion and homosexuality in contemporary public expressions in different parts of Europe. We will explore public debates on religion and homosexuality in three different parts of Europe: the Netherlands, the Western Balkans (Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, and Montenegro), and Sweden. Our focus will be on those instances in which debates come to an 'eruption'. The first two sections provide a more general discussion of public discourse in the Netherlands and the Western Balkans respectively. The third section provides a more in-depth discussion of a debate in Sweden.

The aim of our comparative exploration is to come to a better understanding of the specific configurations of religion and homosexuality. Which narrative constructs and figures of speech are invoked? How does the shape various public debates take reveal the way in which the construction of both religion and homosexuality are embedded in particular national, social, cultural, religious and historical contexts? We feel this comparative exploration will, first, lead to a more nuanced account of the way in which constructions of homosexuality and religion are intertwined and, second, to a more in-depth understanding of the complexity of these constructions.

Religion, secularism, and sexual diversity in the Netherlands

The 'culture wars' or oppositional identity politics of religion and homosexuality in Western Europe not only reveal a changing public perspective towards sexual diversity but also towards religion, social identities, and citizenship (Puar 2007, Butler 2008, Haritaworn 2008, Mepschen et al. 2010, Dudink 2011). This is well illustrated by the Dutch case. Well into the twentieth century, the social identities of Dutch citizens were primarily marked by their religious or ideological affiliations (segmented pluralism alias 'pillarisation'), whereas sexual orientation was privatised to the degree of invisibility. In present-day Dutch society, however, acceptance of sexual diversity serves as a litmus test of 'tolerance', and hence a criterion of good citizenship, whereas expressions of religious identity are relegated to the private sphere.

Religious positions regarding homosexuality in the Netherlands have changed dramatically since the end of the 1950s and are at present highly divergent (Bos 2010). While some Christian denominations (mainly liberal Protestants) take pride in being

listed as gay-friendly churches in *Coming Out Churches* (Elhorst and Mikkers 2011), others (notably Pentecostal churches) seem reluctant or unable to publicly discuss sexual diversity. In May 2001 – months before 9/11 – a televised interview with a Moroccan-Dutch imam, who described homosexuality as an infectious disease and a threat to society, sparked a heated debate on Muslims' alleged lack of integration (Hekma 2002). More recently, in 2010, a public outcry arose against a Roman Catholic parish priest who refused communion to a local Prince Carnival, because of the latter's homosexuality. With the feast of Carnival traditionally blurring the religious/secular distinction, the priest's decision made national headlines, and prompted liberal Catholics, secular LGBT activists and even politicians to protest during mass. Time and again, statements of Pope Benedict XVI on heterosexual marriage and the family made the headlines. After he had announced his retirement, Dutch journalists focused on the question whether the future Pope would be more acceptant of homosexuality. These heated responses, not only from LGBT-activists but also from mainstream politicians and opinion leaders, are remarkable in a country where churches are often deemed of marginal importance.

Public debate on the social acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands has tended to highlight religion as stumbling block. To some extent, this is understandable, since surveys show a strong correlation between citizens' level of religiosity and 'homonegativity' (Kuyper et al. 2013). However, the issues around which contemporary public debates tend to gravitate seem to have more symbolic than practical relevance. One such issue is the question whether all marriage registrars should be willing to conduct same-sex marriages or should be allowed to let a local colleague stand in if they themselves have objections of conscience. A second issue has been a stride to have sexual diversity education included in the main national learning objectives for secondary schools. Although this affects all schools, the media primarily focused on Christian secondary schools. The then Minister of Education, Marja van Bijsterveldt, did not want to include this in the learning objectives, because she was critical of expanding these learning objectives in general. However, as she is a member of the Christian Democrats, many thought it was all about protecting Christian schools.

Conservative Protestants (and even conservative Catholics) are increasingly and more explicitly considered minority groups. While the number of Christians has declined, the remaining faithful seem unwilling to accept the 'secularist truce' – "the secularist contract that guarantees religious freedom, yet bans religion from the public sphere by relegating it to the private realm" (Achterberg et al. 2009: 696-697). In response to the secularist equation of any disapproval of homosexuality to homophobia, conservative religious groups accuse secular politicians and 'the LGBT movement' of Islamophobia or Christianophobia, and of abandoning their acclaimed tolerance. The latter, in their turn, accuse religious conservatives of abandoning Jesus' call to loving one's neighbour.

In addition to cross-cultural comparison, historical research is vital, not only for bringing to light contingencies and discontinuities in a principles-ridden field, but also for gaining insight into the ways in which oppositional pairings have been transferred from one arena of contestation (e.g., 'liberal Protestants vs. conservative Protestants') to another (e.g., 'Enlightenment vs. religion'). Instances of public upheaval about religion and/or homosexuality can be clarified by analysing them from a 'dramaturgical' perspective (Gusfield 1984, cf. Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). As Michel Foucault (1976) has argued, nineteenth-century discourse on 'homosexuality' fundamentally differed from earlier discourses on 'sodomy' by virtue of its creation of the homosexual as a distinct character. Since the 1960s, public discourse on homosexuality and religion has given rise to many more characters, such as 'the gay-friendly pastor', 'the homophile neighbour' (and his or her father and/or mother), 'the gay pastor', 'the anti-gay clergyman', 'the anti-religious queer activist', 'the ex-gay, born-again believer', 'the ex-

ex-gay ex-evangelical', or the *weigerambtenaar* (registrar who refuses same-sex couples). Many of these characters, which are frequently 'staged' in public debates on homosexuality and religion, embody narratives of sexual and/or religious 'conversion' (cf. Erzen 2006). A well-known, often invoked example is the Dutch novelist Gerard van het Reve (1923-2006), who grew up in a Communist family, but – after having come out as gay – was baptised, and cultivated a form of camp Catholicism that would become widely popular (cf. Bos 2006). Very different conversions were presented by singer-songwriter Robert Long (from gospel pop to queer, fiercely anti-religious cabaret) and nurse Johan van der Sluis (a born-again ex-gay, the show-case of evangelical conversion therapy).

Some of these characters have been frequently invoked in public debate, and re-created in fiction or other expressions of popular culture, whereas others are conspicuous by their absence, or have just entered the scene (e.g. the South-African gay imam who on his visit to the Netherlands was 'baptised' as 'the pink imam' by COC Netherlands). Moreover, whereas some of these characters (e.g., 'the homophobic pastor') are quickly transferred from one arena of contestation to another, others are not – witness the unfamiliarity of 'the understanding Muslim parent'. Public debates on religion and homosexuality can then be analysed by not only identifying which characters are invoked, but also by assessing how they relate to 'narrators', i.e., the extent to which they can speak for themselves (cf. Mooij 1998). Such analyses can bring to light how discourse on religion and homosexuality privileges some voices, while silencing others.

Religious nationalism and homosexuality in the Western Balkans¹

A rather different configuration we find in the Western Balkans, where the oppositional pairing of religion and homosexuality is related to the religio-political configurations in different national contexts of the Western Balkans. In recent decades the public perception of both religion and sexual diversity has changed fundamentally. LGBT persons, their freedoms and their rights are still on the margins of social processes in the Western Balkans. These societies, fifteen years after the war, are still functioning as societies of 'frozen conflicts'. Numerous challenges they are facing in the economic, political and cultural fields are trying to be 'overcome' by constructions of specific narratives depending on constant threats of 'others'. Within these narratives, religion and nationalism intermingle and strengthen each other in preventing the narrative entropy without which nationalist ideologies cannot survive. In such a context, the prominent roles of religious communities are remarkably different from their almost total absence from the public space in the former Yugoslavia until the 1980s. As was the case in other countries behind the iron curtain, religion was marginalised in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the voice of religious officials on important public topics was not very loud. Sexuality was, like other issues, under the control of the secular state. With the 'national revival', which peaked in the civil war in the 1990s, the Western Balkans witnessed the 'comeback' of Orthodoxy in Serbia, Roman Catholicism in Croatia, and Islam in Bosnia (Perica 2002). Although desecularisation of society remains questionable, religion appears as a dominant identification marker (Blagojević 2008, 2009). It signifies the belonging to a religious community and strengthens the ethnic difference in relation to the other Balkan peoples, which are historically and culturally very close, due to the fact that the communist regime had suppressed their ethnic and religious identity. For the Serbs, Croatians and Bosniaks, religion remains, first and last of all, "the faith of national identity" (D. Bogdanović, quoted in Vrcan 1995:

¹ Here we would like to thank to Dr. Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović from University of East Sarajevo for her insightful comments.

362). The post-communist societies have put religion in service of the secular 'religion' of nationalism (Bigović 2009: 13). In such conditions, religious communities emerge as a stabilising factor of the nation (Cvitković 2013: 19). Many political actions by national communities have been justified by religion, including war crimes. In the context of ethno-nationalism, Croatian Roman-Catholicism, Serbian Orthodoxy, and Bosnian Islam contributed to the tensions (Perica and Gavrilović 2011: 117). This relationship continued in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, as privileged holders of the old regime survived by converting from Marxism to nationalism (Kleman 2001: 25), and accepted Orthodoxy, Catholicism, or Islam as their new dominant ideology. From a profoundly secularised society, in which religion and religious institutions had been even more marginalised than in other parts of Eastern Europe, over the course of only two decades the countries in the Western Balkans have become societies with high rates of religious identification, while religious communities have gained a prominent place in public life.

In this context, both religion and sexual diversity have gained great public importance. Public debates have shown a high level of homophobia including hate-speech and strong discriminatory attitudes by leading religious leaders and politicians. For example, the Serbian political and religious discourse conspicuously lacks an explicit acceptance of the LGBT community. As a consequence of patriarchal and homophobic traditions, in Serbia 67% of the respondents believe that homosexuality is an illness, while 53% think that the Government should take measures to combat homosexuality (GSA and CeSID 2010). Similarly, in a recent research conducted by the Centre for Civic Education (CGO) two-third of Montenegrins stated that homosexuality is an illness and 80 percent said it should be kept private. Other data from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Southeast-Europe (SEE) also show that the level of homophobia among the general population is much higher than in the rest of Europe (Andreescu 2011, Takács and Szalma 2011).

Civil rights activists in the Western Balkans have been trying to organise Gay Pride parades since 2001. The first parade in Serbia (2001) was interrupted by violent attacks and ended with dozens of marchers injured by ultranationalist groups and football hooligans. The 2010 parade was finally held but 20.000 opponents clashed with police and hundreds of right-wing extremists were injured and arrested. At the same time, the strong opposition of the Serbian Orthodox Church towards homosexuals was expressed on numerous occasions through the media, in some cases indirectly providing legitimisation for the violence against the LGBT minority (Jovanović 2011). In 2011, stone-throwing nationalists disrupted a Gay Pride march in Split, one day after Croatia was given the green light to join the European Union. Thousands of extremists attacked about 200 Pride participants with rocks and bottles, chanting 'kill the faggots'. The first Montenegro Pride (2013) in the seaside resort of Budva invoked a violent counter demonstration with the local news agency reporting that bottles and glasses were flying in the direction of the gay parade participants. One day after the parade a local orthodox priest consecrated the part of the town of Budva where the parade took place in order to prevent "the disease from spreading". The priest was quoted as saying: "We [the church] strongly condemn this parade of shame and disease, and we are praying to God to repeal this disease and the devil's attack on Budva and Montenegro" (*BalkanInsight* 2013). In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH), Gay Prides have not been organised to date. In the year 2008 an attempt was made to organise a *Sarajevo Queer Festival*, featuring exhibitions, films, and lecturers. Although organised as an indoor event, a climate of violent response was created in Sarajevo long before the festival was finalised. The front page of BIH's largest newspaper *Dnevni Avaz*'s issue of 28 August 2008, opened with giant letters: *Ko Bošnjacima podvaljuje gay okupljanje u Ramazanu?* ("Who is framing the Bosnian public in relation to gay gathering during the month of Ramadan?"). This connection to Ramadan served to interpret the festival as an attack on religion, even though the

festival itself had no religious or anti-religious references. In response, radical Islamic Wahhabis tried to enter the exhibition violently, yelling *Allahu Ekber*. Although the police prevented this from happening, radicals attacked people who were present at the festival on their way home, at the tram stations, and even in front of their apartments. To date, the violence has not been addressed properly in court, possibly due to political and other pressure. The Islamic journal SAFF published several pieces that qualify as hate speech, calling for violence against the festival and its participants. Other religious communities were not eager to condemn the violence although they seized the opportunity to criticise radical Islam.

Behind the violent clashes lies an interpretation of homosexuality as a Western threat to the traditional values of national and religious identity. The tone, intensity, and ideological saturation of this condemnation clearly positions it within the frame of traditionalist discourse in the present-day Balkans that strongly opposes the processes of modernisation, while postulating conservatism as a response to the social crisis, uncertainty, and devastating consequences of on-going transitions (Jovanović 2013). Anti-Westernism is propagated and topics like the gay-parade are viewed as “imposed by the decadent West” (Tucić 2011: 45). This is in line with the attitude of some radical nationalist groups towards the European Union and the West for having “dubious and ludicrous moral standards” and being “a true danger to tradition” (Spencer-Dohner 2008). The adoption of sexual minority policies for example, is sometimes framed as a direct attack of the so-called ‘international gay lobby’ on national identity. The Metropolitan of Montenegro Amfilohije states in this vein after the Montenegro Pride that the EU gay lobby has no right to “threaten the ethical being of entire nations” (*InSerbia* 2013). In Croatia, Albert Rebić, a prominent Catholic priest and theologian said in an interview for the newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija* [Free Dalmatia] (2011): “The conspiracy of faggots and lesbians would destroy Croatia.”

Similarly, Metropolitan Amfilohije explicitly links homosexuality with modern civilisation, defining it as “something imposed by modernity and invoking, in that way, the myth about a Western conspiracy against Serbia” (Stakić 2011: 56). He utilises the rhetoric of “brimstone and fire” when condemning the LGBT sexualities, calls it a “thorn in the flesh for the Churches” (Hunt 2009: 1), and labels the Gay Pride in 2010 “a parade of shame and embarrassment”. One year earlier he had marked the event as “a parade of Sodom and Gomorrah” (Milićević et al. 2010: 52). By making use of Old Testament symbolism and adding the metaphor of “the tree that does not bear fruit”, his statement “represents a rather explicit call for violent intervention” (Stakić 2011: 56). When the Gay Pride was announced in 2011, Serbian Patriarch Irinej interpreted this as a diversion aimed at drawing public attention away from the difficult situation of Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija. This response exemplifies how discourse about the LGBT community is directly connected with patriotism and religion, difficult economic situations, poverty, the Kosovo crisis, or EU integration. It constructs homosexuals as “constitutive outside” and/or “external enemies” of the nation, as the nation’s Other. In this view, “a nationalist rhetoric centered around homosexuality promises to deliver to the nation what is most elusive: identity” (Dudink 2011: 263).

The concoction of nationalism, ethnocentrism, religion, and anti-westernism targets homosexuality as an internally unifying enemy. This is facilitated in part by the demands the European Union and its Western member countries place on acceding countries. The discourse of human rights, clearly addressing the marginalised position of sexual minorities, is essential to the Western values that are at the heart of the European Union. The same discourse, however, is seen as alien to the values of the Balkan countries. Their desire to become part of the European Union and their awareness that they have limited negotiating power in this process evokes a sense of inferiority that is compensated by stronger identity politics. The more acceptance of sexual diversity is

defended and promoted by the West, the more resistance may be expected because of these power dynamics.

Religion, secularism, and sexual diversity in Sweden

Like the Netherlands – but unlike the Western Balkans – Sweden can be characterised as a front-runner in the advocacy of LGBT rights. However, Sweden differs considerably from both the Netherlands and the Western Balkans in its religio-political configurations. In this section a description of these configurations will be given, followed by a case study in order to clarify the way in which cultural and religious differences between the two countries affect the shape of public debates. The method of a case study was chosen to explore how, in addition to the more general approach in the previous sections, religio-political configurations can also be understood through an in-depth study of a media debate where the struggle over representation takes place.

In Post State-Church Sweden religious affiliation is characterised by the “Swedish paradox”: while regular church attendance is extremely low, most Swedes do find church rituals such as baptism and church marriage important (Bäckström et al. 2004). Unlike the pillarised church history of the Netherlands, church history in Sweden shows that the former State Church – it ceased to be so in the year 2000 – has managed to make it through the past few centuries relatively unscathed. Unlike the Orthodox churches of the Western Balkans, the Church of Sweden hosts conservatives and liberals alike, guaranteeing its diverse character. More conservative religious voices in Sweden often come from the so-called ‘free churches’, minority denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church and charismatic churches. In terms of addressing gender and sexuality, Sweden can be called exceptional when it comes to bridging the gap between queer theory and social acceptance of LGBT’s. The term ‘queer’ became widely adopted in all layers of society. This translates into the way emancipation issues are taken up, for example in a law against the discrimination of “persons who exceed gender norms”, issued in 2009. It has been suggested that this has just been a ‘light’, institutionalised version of the concept that does not genuinely change the way people think about sexual and gender identities and expressions (Kulick 2005). However, the Swedish Federation for LGBT Rights (RFSL) has recently taken up the concept in its policy program, consciously trying to put queer theory into practice (RFSL 2012). In doing so RFSL can connect to discourses in which concepts such as heteronormativity, gender norms and gender identity are already familiar to a larger audience.

In 2002, sexual orientation was added to the Swedish ‘hate speech’ law which was issued in 1948 in order to criminalise expressions that incite violence against an individual or group. In 2004 Åke Green, pastor in a Pentecostal congregation, decided to put the law to the test. Green was of the opinion that the law should not apply to religious expressions rejecting homosexuality (*Dagen* 2004). He wrote a sermon in which he opposed homosexuality, referring to it as a “cancerous tumour” in Swedish society. After the local newspaper *Ölandsbladet* published the sermon, Green was reported to the police by a local RFSL representative and charged with hate speech. In 2005 he was found guilty by the district court, but was acquitted later that same year by both the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court. Green’s charge gave rise to a heated debate in Swedish media. As for the content of his sermon, Green was supported publicly only by Ulf Ekman, pastor in the charismatic *Livets Ord* (Word of the Life) movement (*Dagen* 2004). However, surprisingly, within secular media a considerable number of journalists sided with Green as well, demanding that he be acquitted immediately (Ekdal 2005, *Expressen* 2005, Brinck 2005, Nycander 2005, *Frihetsfronten* 2005). Their position was the outcome of weighing several constitutional rights: protection from discrimination, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion. Apparently, the latter two outweighed the first. Journalist Cecilia Brinck’s reference to Voltaire’s

well-known principle that “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it” (Brinck 2005) characterises the tendency of many articles concerning Green. The pastor’s freedom of religion was to be respected, just as the freedom of Muslims to observe their religion in their own way was to be protected (Ekdal 2005). The overwhelming support for Green’s release might give the impression that the Green-case indicates a high level of tolerance for religious conservatism in Sweden. Yet a closer look at the newspaper articles concerning Green complicates that conclusion. While defending Green’s freedom of speech and religion, many journalists felt they needed to make it very clear that they *themselves* did not approve of his opinions. Green was thus described as “crazy” (*Expressen* 2005) and a “narrow-minded madcap” (*Frihetsfronten* 2005), who would surely “end up in hell for his statements on homosexuality” (*Svenska Dagbladet* 2005). He was accused of taking the Bible literally to a ridiculous point (Ljung 2005) and of trying to obtain the status of a martyr (Nycander 2005, Ekdal 2005). Green was thus described as a mentally incompetent man, isolated from mainstream Christianity. The construction of Green as a fundamentalist lunatic whose constitutional rights nevertheless deserved to be protected has several notable discursive effects. First, through constructing Green as a religious freak a more sane, composed and broad-minded ‘we’ emerged. In fact, the more Green was denigrated, the more noble the liberal ‘we’ became. Tolerating Green became a burden, ever so heavy, but tolerating him was a sacrifice that needed to be made in order to preserve basic human rights in Sweden. Second, by isolating Green in this manner, he was constructed as a marginalised Christian at best or a non-Christian at the worst. Journalists wondered how he had come to perversely twist Jesus’ message to love one’s neighbour. The effect of placing Green outside of Christianity was that no-one felt the need to discuss his sermon and his views with respect to content. Moreover, an image of ‘true’ Christianity as basically tolerant was thus constructed or maintained. Third, the comparison of Green’s views to Islam adds to the presumed ‘otherness’ of both Green and Swedish Muslims. In stating that “we need to tolerate Green just as we tolerate Islam” both are constructed as basic threats to Swedish society and identity.

In common knowledge Sweden is pictured as a country which is mostly secularised and liberal, with (like the Netherlands, but unlike the Western Balkans) a front-runner position in advocating LGBT rights. Public debates on religion and homosexuality, however, seem to take slightly different forms in the various countries. Firstly, in Sweden, pastor Åke Green could quickly be isolated and rendered harmless because he was a member of a religious minority (the Free Churches). Rejecting Green had no consequences for the religious convictions and practices of the majority of the Swedes who turn to the Church of Sweden for their baptisms and weddings. In the Netherlands, with their history of schism and the resulting smorgasbord of church denominations, it is harder to define mainstream Christianity and to decide whether conservative statements on homosexuality represent conventional faith. This might make these statements felt as more ‘threatening’, because it is harder to define the size of the group that agrees to them. In the Western Balkans, as we have seen, statements such as Greens would probably considered to be fully in line with the church’s view on homosexuality. Secondly, the division between institutional religion and secularism seems to be more defined in the Netherlands than it is in Sweden. In the Netherlands one is either ‘within’ the church, attending services as well as turning to the church for life rituals, or ‘outside’, living life completely apart from institutionalised religion. Unlike secularised Swedes belonging to the Church of Sweden, the latter group has less urgent needs to defend a form of Christianity that everyone is comfortable with. While both differences may account for a more activist protest against conservative statements on homosexuality in the Netherlands, this does not mean that Sweden is necessarily the more ‘tolerant’ country. This analysis of the Åke Green case shows that tolerance may

also be a disguise for eliminating views from the public debate, instead of engaging with them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored some of the complex social, political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of framing religion and homosexuality as polarised constructs, informing us of the dynamics of the relation between religion and social order in times of crisis. In conclusion we may note some elements emerging from these explorations that merit further attention. Central to our analysis is the interpretation that the shifts and tensions observed reflect not only changing public perceptions of sexual diversity, but also new positions toward the place, role, and rights of religion in society. The key difference between these three contexts is whether either religion or sexuality is the more accepted or contested social identity.

Further research, therefore, requires an integrative approach that acknowledges the interrelatedness of the religion-homosexuality conflict with constructs of gender and nationalism. This research should incorporate the power dynamics inherent to these 'culture wars' or struggles over public representation. In this struggle, homosexuality and religion easily function as 'identity markers', articulated at the intersection of identity and alterity, marginality and dominance, privilege and exclusion, connection and alienation (Cobb 2006, Kuntsman 2009, Viefhues-Bailey 2010). In effect, they lead to the rhetorical creation of 'imagined others/intruders' and to the formation of collective national, cultural, and religious identities (Ahmed 2006). In the public discourses discussed in this chapter, important questions emerge regarding visibility, naturalness and authenticity: Are religion and/or homosexuality seen as belonging exclusively to the private sphere or as deserving also public expression and political support? Are religion and homosexuality primarily seen as naturally given or as personal choice? To what extent do expressions of religious convictions and of sexual preference – notably the expression of objections to religion or to homosexuality – make a claim to 'authenticity' (Taylor 1991, Yip 2005)?

This chapter thus suggests that even fierce conflicts on religion and social order, like the ones implying homosexuality, are heavily dependent on the ways in which religion and its 'opponents' are socially constructed in relation to other cultural constructs like nationality and gender. Analyzing these processes and identity strategies may serve to understand the multi-layered complexities of religion and social order in times of crisis.

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