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Religion, Homosexuality and Nationalism in the Western Balkans:

The Role of Religious Institutions in Defining the Nation

Introduction

While the relative closed-mindedness of South East European societies towards LGBT issues (Takacs and Szalma 2011; Uitz 2012) has been a topic of much interest among researchers, the question of the interaction between national and ethnic identities on the one hand, and homosexuality on the other, has received less attention. Yet, it is precisely during highly public debates on LGBT rights where the most vocal opponents of LGBT rights receive a platform to voice their opposition. The discourse used in justifying anti-LGBT attitudes is frequently *explicitly national or ethnic in character*: homosexuality is, in this discourse, directly tied to what it means to be a 'true' member of a nation, or of espousing values compatible with the nation's ethnic and cultural identity. Arguments against LGBT rights – most heavily employed in recent discourse regarding the pride parades in Serbia and Montenegro and the referendum on marriage in Croatia – frequently utilize nationalist rhetoric and calls for preserving the "true" Serbian/Croatian nation against Western "ailments" such as homosexuality. When this kind of nationalist rhetoric is embraced by religious institutions as 'defenders' (or representatives) of the nation, this interplay becomes even more relevant. Thus, in addition to the anti-gay arguments found in such debates in other geographical contexts, in the Balkans the national and ethnic dimension becomes particularly salient. As such, examining the relationship between religious institutions and homosexuality, in particular in their reliance on nationalism and ethnic identity arguments, is of high relevance. In this chapter, we survey the relationship

between religious institutions, nationalism, and homosexuality, by examining how the major religious institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia are playing a role in defining the nation through their statements about homosexuality. Considering the increasing prominence of religious institutions in everyday life in post-Yugoslav countries, and the rising rates of religiosity in general, the examination of how these prominent institutions play a role in defining discourse about the nation (and accordingly, who does and does not belong in this idea of the nation) is of central relevance to nationalism research.

The importance of the connection between sexuality and nationalism is, by now, well-established by researchers: "sex and nation combine to produce notions, both real and imagined, of other nationalities' sexual character and threat, and ideals of virility, fecundity and respectability" (Pryke 1998: 529).[1] The interconnections between sexuality and nationalism include national sexual stereotypes; the issue of sexuality in times of conflict; and sex during nation building; which, in turn, raise other intricate questions, such as the definition of nations through gendered sexuality and similar (Pryke 1998: 531, see also Žarkov 1995). They also include discussions of who belongs to the nation and who does not, and particularly whether the advancement of LGBT rights is compatible with this imagined nation (van den Berge et al. 2014). Nationalist rhetoric frequently draws upon notions of sexuality in identity-making ways: "nationalist rhetoric centered around homosexuality promises to deliver to the nation what is most elusive: identity" (Dudink 2011: 263). This is particularly stark in the Balkans, where discourse about the LGBT community is directly connected with core national questions: patriotism and religion, economic problems, poverty, the Kosovo crisis, and EU integration (van den Berg et al. 2014).

Indeed, public claims about national and sexual identities can influence the degree to which those identities are compatible or not. Sexual diversity can be presented as a complement to national identity, if the national identity is centered upon virtues of tolerance or diversity

[1] For a discussion of the challenges of studying nationalism and sexuality, as well as a review of previous works on this topic, see Pryke (1998).

(such as in the case of Sweden or the Netherlands; see Puar's [2007] work on *homonationalism*). It can also be seen as incompatible with a particular national identity, when identity claims are based on masculinity and purity (such as in the Balkans) (van den Berge et al. 2014). In either case, "debates about religion and homosexuality serve to define the nation's cultural identity, including some groups and excluding others," where religious groups make the struggle over homosexuality issues a salient identity marker (van den Berge et al. 2014: 116; see also Bates 2004; Cobb 2006). As such, the discourse utilized by religious officials becomes particularly important. The following paper examines religious institutions in the Balkans (specifically the Catholic Church in Croatia, the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia and Montenegro, and the Islamic Community in Bosnia) and how they are playing a role in *defining the nation* through their statements about homosexuality. The contribution of this chapter is that, unlike previous studies examining the relationship between sexual and religious identities via implicit "othering," we focus on instances where who 'belongs' to the nation – and what belonging to the nation means – is explicitly discussed, and whether and how these discursive strategies vary across the region.

In the following sections, we first provide a theoretical overview of the literature on nationalism and sexuality, focusing on their interplay with religion in the Western Balkans context, followed by a brief discussion on the current state of religion and religiosity in the region. We then turn to the four countries -- Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia -- focusing on the most prominent recent events in which religious institutions played an important role in shaping public discourse on LGBT issues: debates over marriage and family laws in Croatia, pride parades in Serbia and Montenegro, and the queer film festival in Bosnia.

Theoretical background

In his seminal work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Anderson (1983: 7) defines the nation as imagined as a community, "always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this *fraternity* that makes it possible […] for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such

limited imaginings" (italics added). Although Anderson's reference to *'fraternity'* alludes to the gendered structure of nationalism,[2] it is with the feminist critique on this literature that the gender dimension of nationalism moves to the center of the debates. The feminist critique seeks to unravel the consequences of nationalism for women, highlighting, for example, the specific roles of women within the nationalist project (Yuval-Davis 1997). Yuval-Davis argues that women are not only the biological reproducers of the nation, but are also in charge of cultural reproduction; and moreover, women often perform the role of the "symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively" (Yuval-Davis 1997: 45). The 'burden of representation' that rests on the women of the nation makes it the interest of the national project to control not only women's behavior, but also their body and sexuality; a role ascribed to the male bodies of the nation. Within the patriarchal family, the gendered division of labor follows a pattern in which women are perceived the passive bearers of the family/national honor, and men are the active defenders of their women's and nation's honor (Nagel 1998). Within this feminist literature, although not ignored, the role of men, and the impact of nationalism on men and masculinity, has been explored to a much lesser extent. As Bracewell (2000:566) argues, "[a]ttempts to theorise nations and nationalism from a gendered perspective […] have to often treated men and masculinity as stable, undifferentiated categories, and have posited a straightforward equation between male interests, masculinity and nationalism." However, as (hegemonic) masculinity is idealized as the foundation of the nation and society (Mosse 1985), this power struggle between masculinities becomes imperative to the study of nationalism.

Masculinity, as a configuration of practice, is a relational concept. As Connell (2005) argues, it has become common to recognize multiple forms of masculinity, which all relate to

[2] The reference to the gendered aspects of nationalism can be found in other seminal works on nationalism. For example, in his work *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Horowitz (1985) asks why groups move from the family to ethnicity as their basis for group loyalty. He argues that ethnic ties, as kinship ties, are an extension of family ties. Nationalism, according to Horowitz (1985), is the process by which kin loyalty is extended to the ethnicity and the nation, i.e., the nation is seen as an extension of the family.

each other in a specific way. One relationship of particular relevance is that of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is the "masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations" (Connell 2005: 76), and is defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" (Connell 2005: 77).[3] Whilst hegemonic masculinity is at the top of the masculine gender hierarchy, the subordinate masculinities are at the bottom. The dominance of the former is gained by the marginalization of the latter. Something that becomes very clear in the semiotic approaches of defining masculinity (see Connell 2005: 70) is defining masculinity in negative terms, by defining what men are not. Masculinity, then, is defined as not-feminine, and is sharply contrasted by masculine countertypes, whether they are *racial or sexual* (Nagel 1998, our emphasis). This process of subordinating racial and sexual masculine countertypes also characterizes nationalism in the Western Balkans.

As mentioned previously, the interplay between nationalism, masculinity, and sexual identities is particularly stark in this region. Analyzing the break-up of Yugoslavia, Žarkov (2007) argues that ethnicity in the Western Balkans has been created via male and female bodies. She shows that "without notions of masculinity and femininity, and norms of (hetero)sexuality, ethnicity could have never been produced" (Žarkov 2007: 8). Within the wars of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the different nations used (heterosexual) (hyper)masculine norms to illustrate national superiority and pride, whilst simultaneously ascribing characteristics of the subordinate (homosexual) masculinities to the other nations. In her analysis of media representations in the Croatian and Serbian press of sexual violence against men, Žarkov (2001; 2007) argues that the different representation of the male body in stories about sexual violence against men contributed to the construction of the ethnic *self* and the ethnic *other*. Although stories about male victims of sexual violence were rare, she argues that the selected presence of some male bodies is significant. She finds, for example, that within the

[3] See Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) for a critical reformulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

Croatian press, male victims were (made) invisible. This invisibility, Žarkov (2001: 80) argues, "points to the significance of positioning a heterosexual power at the core of the definition of the ethnic Self in the Croatian media. The raped or the castrated Croat man […] would undermine the construction of the Croat nation as virile and powerful." Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), on the other hand, were always depicted as the victims, and both their masculinity and heterosexuality were systematically questioned (for a detailed analysis see Žarkov 2001: 77-79). Serbs, in the Croatian reports on sexual violence against men, were always depicted as the perpetrators. Although their masculinity was not brought into question (as perpetrators, their acts are interpreted in terms of power), it was defined as significantly different from Croat masculinity. Serbs were depicted as perverts and primitives. Images of masculinity were thus used to signify the boundaries between the different nations. The de-masculinization and homosexualization of Bosniaks in the media representation excludes them from the Croatian nation, whilst Serbs were excluded because their masculinity was perverted and primitive, and thus lesser than the powerful, heterosexual masculinity of the Croat men/nation.

Another poignant example of the strong link between nationalism and sexuality can be found in the internal 'othering' following the rise of (hyper)masculine nationalism in Serbia. The first signs of ethnicization and masculinization in Serbia are found in the rise of nationalist rhetoric concerning Kosovo in the late 1980s (Bracewell 2000; Milićević 2006). Wendy Bracewell (2000), highlights the sexualization of the 'Kosovo problem' — including debates on sexual violence in Kosovo as national rape — as a catalyst for political mobilization based on nationalism that draws from, and reinforces, traditional gender role patterns, which were inspired by the traditional and hetero-normative, patriarchal pre-socialist past (Bracewell 2000; Milićević 2006). Or, using Bracewell's (2000: 584) words, it linked the "ideology of the nation to ideas of motherhood and female submissiveness, of male dominance and power, and of uncompromising heterosexuality, [and by doing so] reversed the official socialist ideology of gender equality, reinforcing male privilege, […] and marginalising men and women who did not conform to the imperatives of nation and gender." When the wars broke out, this nationalist

rhetoric not only mobilized male Serbs to volunteer to fight (see Milićević 2006), it also labeled the (male) opponents of the war as "traitors of their nation [and] traitors to their gender: cowardly, weak, effeminate and *probably homosexual*" (Bracewell 2000: 580, our emphasis). The (hyper)masculine traits of Serbian nationalism appealed to those experiencing a crisis of masculinity (caused by, for example, the growing insecurity of employment) and provided the grounds to re-assert their alignment with the hegemonic masculinity via 'othering' based on, amongst others, homophobia (Bracewell 2000; see also Greenberg 2006). Even after the fall of Milošević, Serbian nationalism remains masculinized and related to homophobia. Jessica Greenberg (2006: 321-322), for example, argues that masculine nationalism has been a "resource that the people in Serbia, and in other post-socialist context, have drawn on in times of social and political crisis."

Analyzing the alignment of nationalism and homophobic violence during the 2001 Belgrade pride, Greenberg (2006: 336) argues that the homophobic violence occurred at the "intersection of different modes of belonging, entitlement, action and politics." Marek Mikuš (2011) makes a similar observation for the 2010 Belgrade Pride. He asserts that the homophobic violence, and the riots following the Pride, occurred at the clash of 'two Serbias;' where the 'first Serbia' represents those adhering to the old system of belonging, based on conservative and nationalist views, and the 'other Serbia' stands for a system of belonging based on liberal democracy, cosmopolitanism and anti-nationalism (see also Rossi 2009; Stakić 2011; Pavasović Trošt and Kovačević 2013). Homosexuality, thus, has become a symbol for the 'other Serbia,' which clashes with the system of belonging rooted in the nationalist legacies of 1990s.

Religious institutions & LGBT issues in the Western Balkans

In the countries explored in this article, the official religious institutions are *de facto* unified in their opposition to LGBT rights; a situation most clear in the multiple joint statements by leaders of the otherwise opposing major religious communities (Catholic, Orthodox, and

Muslim) about positions towards pride parades and laws preserving the 'sanctity' of marriage. In terms of the connection between religion and homosexuality, it has long been established, both within the Balkans and out, that religiosity is one of the stronger predictors of individual homophobia (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Marsh and Brown 2009; Slootmaeckers and Lievens 2014).[4] This does not only apply to the religious individual; a country's religious tradition also affects those who "share the same cultural space in which the religious traditions are embedded" (Kuhar 2013: 6). Štulhofer and Rimac (2009) found that religious tradition is one of the key determinants of countries' levels of homophobia, and further argued that Eastern Orthodox countries, such as Serbia, are amongst the most homophobic countries in Europe. Štulhofer and Rimac (2009) link this to the more troublesome, destructive political and socio-economic transitions of Eastern orthodox countries (see also Kuhar 2013), a context in which the Church became a "tool for re-building personal and collective identity in a rapidly changing social environment" (Štulhofer and Rimac 2009: 7). The process of re-traditionalization, which Kuhar (2013: 8) defines as the "'coming home' to the true (patriarchal) values of the nation, previously erased by the communist regime," is not separate nor distinct from nationalism and religion. It intensified the role of both processes, thereby contributing to a (hyper)masculine and heteronormative culture, in which the homosexual body is seen as a national threat (Kuhar 2013; see also van den Berg et al. 2014).[5]

The process of re-traditionalization, which came hand in hand with a revival in religiosity, has occurred both at the state level and in terms of actual on-the-ground religiosity (Perica 2002). During the wars of the 1990s and the nation-building that followed, religion became the new dominant ideology that filled the void left from Marxism to nationalism (Kleman 2001: 25), and religious communities became the stabilizing factor of the nation

[4] It is not our intent to argue that homophobia is part of religion, as we follow Wilcox' (2012: 81) argument that, given the historical evidence, it "has become more difficult […] to claim that homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are intrinsic and "natural" to any given religious tradition."
[5] The idea that homosexuality is a threat to the nation has already been used by the Christian Rights in the 1990s in the United States of America (see Herman 1997).

(Cvitković 2013: 19). In the post-Yugoslav states, the region has witnessed an increase in the intertwining of religious and official affairs, as evidenced by the introduction of religious education in schools, the heavy presence of religious leaders at state and official events and in political campaigns, and the introduction of new religious holidays into previous secular national calendars. This deems the utilized discursive strategies ever so important, as they are not occurring at the fringes of society, but in mainstream media and very much at the forefront of public attention. The involvement of religious figures in issues related to LGBT rights – namely referendums on marriage and the right to hold pride parades – is particularly visible, and is, thus, the main focus of the empirical work in this article.

Some important differences in the religious landscape across the Balkans exist, however, which are important prior to considering the case studies. First, the development of religious institutions during the Communist regime somewhat differs across the region. During this period, religious institutions, in all of the countries, took a backseat, and religiosity rates among the population fell continuously during the 1950s, -60s, and -70s. Very low rates of religiosity – measured as religious identification, participation in religious rites, and respect and perceived importance of the institution – persisted, particularly, in the Orthodox areas of Serbia and Montenegro (see Pantić 1993; Perica 2002; Đorđević 2007; Blagojević 2008). In Croatia, the Catholic Church took over as the preserver of the Croat nation, following the mass Communist crackdown during the Croatian Spring (see Pavasović Trošt 2012), so the relationship between the Catholic Church and Croatian national identity already became particularly intimate in the 1980s; whereas Bosnia's multi-ethnic composition and continued insistence on shared brotherhood and unity narratives, persisted through the breakup (Mihajlović Trbovc and Pavasović Trošt 2013). Second, the connection with the EU is also of high relevance, as Slovenia and Croatia are both EU member states. The remaining countries are on a slow, and seemingly never-ending, journey to EU membership; a perception of ceaseless demands, of which human rights and the rights of sexual minorities are perceived, by many average people, as the most prominent (Pavasović Trošt and Kovačević 2012). The

perception of the EU and the compatibility of national/ethnic identities with EU values differs across the region, and what is perceived as EU values (including importantly rights of sexual minorities) are compatible with the Slovenian national identity, and, to a larger extent rather than in other Balkan countries, with Croatian national identity (Subotić 2011). This in addition to the fact that events such as the NATO bombing of 1999 and the West's support of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008 cemented the perception of the West as Serbia's enemy, making it extremely easy – and in fact strategically useful – for the Church to get support for anti-LGBT issues. Hence, the connections between national belonging and sexual diversity - as something the 'malevolent EU' is trying to impose - are expected to be higher in countries further from, and/or more opposed to, membership in the EU, and vary depending on the country's historical relationship with the 'West.' Finally, eastern Orthodox Churches are national churches – that is, they are explicitly national/ethnic in character, as opposed to the Catholic Church in Croatia, which falls under the jurisprudence of Rome. Finally, the legal framework of the states, which certainly affects the parameters within which the religious institutions operate, also differs across the countries; both in regards to when (if at all) homosexuality ceased to be listed as a mental disorder, or in the classification of homosexual relations as a criminal offense in the criminal code. For instance, the Croatian Medical Chamber took homosexuality off of its list of mental diseases as early as 1973, while Serbia's medical society only did so in 2008; such examples of disparate legal frameworks (particularly in terms of adoption of anti-discrimination laws) across the Balkans abound.

Croatia

The biggest involvement of the Catholic Church in Croatia with LGBT issues occurred during the Croatian constitution referendum in 2013; when, in reaction to the left-wing coalition government's attempt to legalize same-sex partnerships, an initiative named "In the name of family" was organized by the Catholic Church and several conservative groups. Other recent events in which the Catholic Church has been vocal include the yearly organization of pride

parades in Zagreb and Split, and the proposed new Curriculum for health education, in 2014; whose fourth module included sexual education. The Church's public stances towards these issues are described below.

The "In the name of family" referendum was held in late 2013, upon gathering over 700,000 signatures in May 2013, with the aim of exclusively defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman. 38% of the population voted, of whom almost 66% voted yes. Leaders of virtually all of Croatia's religious groups joined the Catholic Church in a common statement of support for the referendum. It was signed by officials from the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Reformed Christian (Calvinist) Church, the Baptist Union of Croatia, the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, the Bet Israel Jewish Community and the Mesihat of Croatia (see *Glas Koncila* 2013). The Evangelical Lutheran Church opposed the referendum, stating that real democracies do not exclude any minority, and that Christians, in general, and Lutherans, in particular, were also discriminated against and persecuted in the past; making Lutheran Protestants particularly sensitive towards questions of human rights, freedom and equality (*Tportal* 2013a). The joint statement and symposium "The preventative and curative aspects of preserving marriage and family in Croatia – experiences of religious communities," appealed to "all believers: Catholics, Orthodox, Protestant, Jew, Muslim and others" to "with their vote ensure the constitutional protection of marriage, given that marriage as a relationship between a woman and a man is the best place for receiving and upbringing children and the basis of family which is the fundamental unit of any society" (*HKV* 2013). While the Catholic Church was formally not an organizer of the referendum, the links between the church and the independent group "In the name of the family" was led by people connected to the Church or Church-related organizations.

What is immediately clear from this discourse, particularly in comparison to similar statements by religious officials in Serbia and Montenegro, is a higher reliance of themes portraying the LGBT community as a threat *to the family*; and less as a sickness, or a question of national purity, as similarly found by Sremac et al. (2014: 259). The main advocate for the

Church's position towards the referendum, Zagreb Archbishop cardinal Josip Bozanić – who was incidentally named "homophobe of the year" at the most recent (12th) pride parade in Zagreb in 2013 – has maintained a temperate and neutral discourse. His statements about the referendum, and LGBT issues in general, heavily relied on family-centered rhetoric, "marriage is the basis of the family, a cell of society," "we should not neglect the primary right of children, who are the only ones who should be privileged;" and, without exception, were accompanied by explicit non-discrimination statements. For instance, upon insisting that marriage was exclusively a union between a man and a woman, different from a same-sex relationship, he adds, "but being different does not mean limiting anyone's rights, but respecting them" (Župa Soblinec 2014).

Nonetheless, even in the temperate statements by Cardinal Bozanić, several themes connecting the nation to LGBT issues are present. First, the question of same-sex marriage is not only a religious, but *civilizational question* – "we will invite our parishioners to get involved in this democratic and far-reaching civilizational undertaking;" "this is a first-class civilizational question," and similar (*KHV* 2013). Relatedly, *the future of the Croatian nation* is frequently alluded to. For example, Cardinal Bozanić underscored the Church's wish to socially defend the institution of marriage and the family for "the future of the Croatian nation and its good people" (*Index* 2013), and called believers to "not deny the truth and the future of Croatian generations to come" (*Večernji* list 2013).

Third, the omnipresent Homeland (*Domovina*) and *responsibility to the Homeland* even appears in the most non-national of speeches. Cardinal Bozanić, for instance, while speaking in Vukovar about the importance of voting for the referendum, said, "I feel a responsibility to say this here in Vukovar, because from this place it is easier to hear and feel the responsibility to the Homeland" (*HKV* 2013), and frequently mentioned that the referendum was a "serious question for our Homeland" (*Večernji list* 2013). Naturally, where the Homeland is discussed, the allusion to *Croatia's thousand-year statehood* was also mentioned. The Catholic Bishops Conference stated, "the bishops maintain that the [signing of the referendum] is in accordance

with the general human and gospel values and with the thousand-year tradition and culture of the Croatian people" (*Jutarnji* 2013a).

Finally, while certainly far from mainstream, several Catholic officials, mostly from smaller parishes, came out with far-reaching statements on the Croatian nation and LGBT issues. These include priest Andro Ursić, Dr. Adalbert Rebić, bishop Valentin Pozaić, and Franjo Jurčević, who was convicted for spreading hate speech after explicitly condoning the violence following the Belgrade pride parade (see *Tportal* 2011a). In the statements by these pastors, we can find statements very similar to the far-right ones in Serbia and Montenegro. First, Don Ursić has propagated the idea that the EU is purposely "spreading in all directions a pandemic of homosexualism," and that pride parades represent a "disoriented and lunatic Europe," "spreading a contemporary leprosy over the entire continent" (*Tportal* 2011b). Second, that LGBT issues will lead to the *destruction of the nation*: Dr. Adalbert Rebić, for instance, speaks about the "sexual anti-Croat conspiracy," stating that "with these moral politics, small nations are condemned to destruction. Destruction will come to all of us if we allow that this to happen to Croatia, though it seems to me that it will be difficult to resist this faggot [6]conspiracy" (*Jutarnji* 2013b). A related theme appears, which is absent in the other countries analyzed, namely that of *a conspiracy of Communists* against the Catholic Church and Croatia; a theme which is arguably more present in some ultra-religious circles than the threat of the LGBT population. Valentin Pozaić, for instance, compared the left-leaning government with Communism, also noting that Nazism also came to power through democratic elections (*Jutarnji* 2013d). The theme of the threat of Communism is, nonetheless, not drastically different from statements of the editor of *Glas Koncila*, the Catholic weekly newspaper; who stated that all circles of Croatian society should recognize that, instead of removing obstacles to the development of the Croatian economy, energy was being spent on

[6] Throughout the article, we use the English word »gay« for the translationtransation of »*gej*«, and »faggot« for the translation of »*peder*«

"turning back the wheel of time and reviving the continuity, political and ideological, of the 1980s" (Miklenić 2012).

Serbia

In Serbia, the event of focus in our analysis is the organization of the Pride parade – most notably the notorious parade in Belgrade in 2010 secured by 5000 police officers and followed by widespread looting and violence – and also those organized (successfully or not) in subsequent years, towards which the Serbian Orthodox Church has always taken a particularly rigid stance. Particularly, in 2010, Church representatives utilized extreme nationalist discourse, and did little to distance themselves from the hooligan and ultra-right groups advocating for violence towards the pride participants (see Nielsen 2013). Indeed, although the Serbian Orthodox Church officially condemned any violence towards parade participants, the rhetoric used by several bishops and priests was strikingly similar to the rhetoric of the ultra-right groups and hooligans. It has been argued that, by aligning itself with the attitudes of several ultra-right organizations, the Church provided legitimacy for extreme homophobia (Pavasović Trošt and Kovačević 2013). As in the other countries of the region, in Serbia all of the major religious communities came together in their position against the pride parade. Earlier this year, the Center of the Archdiocese Belgrade-Karlovac organized a public debate on the topic of "How to speak about homosexuality today." The speakers included representatives of the Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim communities (Holy Assembly of Bishops 2014).

In an official statement by the Holy Synod, the Serbian Orthodox Church stated that it is against public displays of sexual orientation "especially if it insults the right of citizens to privacy and family life, their religious beliefs, and inviolability of human dignity;" adding that violence is condemned, "even towards persons or groups which, by the teachings of the Church, sin against moral norms or threaten public morale" (Holy Assembly of Bishops 2010). Already in this official statement, the bases for the statements of other more extreme religious

figures are present. Interestingly, among the religious officials most vocal in their condemnation of the parade, Montenegrin Bishop Amfilohije Radović especially stands out with his statements and de facto calls for violence. He frequently referred to the parade as the "parade of shame" or "parade of Sodom and Gomorrah," and said, "the tree that doesn't bear fruit [reproduce] should be cut and thrown into the fire" (Bojić 2009), culminating in his statement after the parade: "Yesterday we watched the stench poisoning and polluting the capital of Serbia, scarier than uranium...." Instead of condemning violence, he attributed the blame to the participants of the gay parade (*B92* 2010). The statements of the Orthodox Church – both officially and coming from particularly opinionated priests – are worrisome given the authoritative position the Church plays in everyday life. The Serbian Orthodox Church has played a role in providing credibility to right-wing movements, including its reverence of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, an anti-Semite, xenophobe and zealous nationalist. "By assimilating their extremist political views within the ideology of an esteemed religious figure, organizations such as Obraz are able to present themselves as reasonable and respectable" (Byford 2002: 50). The media played a particularly troublesome role, publishing headlines such as "The Church is only defending morality" (Kazimir 2009); the media's unquestioning representation of these positions is what makes this situation stand out in comparison to Croatia, where the media were much more critical of such extreme headlines.

When examining statements that explicitly link the Serbian nation and homosexuality, several themes appear. First, the Church makes the connection between *homosexuality as something European and Western,* and thusly, inherently opposed to traditional Serbian values. The threat to traditional national values come from the "decadent West" (Tucić 2011:45), and the move towards local LGBT rights is supported by the "international gay lobby", the U.S., and "deviant Europe where gay lobbies rule" (Pavasović Trošt and Kovačević 2013: 1066). The Holy Synod recently discussed the new "post-Christian" world order, where an increasing number of countries have taken benevolent positions towards "unusual" phenomena, such as homosexuality. These countries are led forward by "European and Euro-Atlantic countries"

(and later "a part of the Protestant population, especially in European countries"), who allow same-sex marriages with the open threat and tension to spread (Holy Assembly of Bishops 2014). The Patriarch also pointed to the fact that paedophilia (which is unsurprisingly equated with homosexuality) was "massively spread in the Western world" (*B92* 2014).

Relatedly, the parade was "*imposed*" – sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, by the West, the EU, the U.S., "international gay lobbies," or NGOs – a statement present even in official statements by the Holy Synod. The Synod, for instance, has ascribed the imposition as coming from "certain media and non-governmental organizations" (Assembly of Bishops 2010). In a statement of the SOC, signed by Patriarch Irinej, the SOC maintains that the parade is "forcefully imposed" onto Belgrade and Serbia, and that the organizers of this parade, and "their mentors from Europe," apparently do not wish to learn the lesson from previous parades (*B92* 2014). On a similar note, the Church has also advanced the popular notion that gays are "materially well-situated" and purposely trying to corrupt the innocent, scared and weak persons," "especially uncorrupted children and inexperienced youth" (Holy Assembly of Bishops 2014).

Third, while the Catholic Church in Croatia also frequently refers to same-sex marriage or parades as threats to the "healthy" family, in Serbia, it is emphasized that they *threaten the healthy, Serbian, traditional family*. The Holy Assembly of Bishops (2014) stressed, "in the healthy Serbian family traditional atmosphere, a relationship is deeply engrained towards everything that is verified, weighed and that lasts" ([*provereno, odmereno i što traje*]). Patriarch Irinej similarly pointed out that "a healthy family is the basis for a healthy society, healthy nation, healthy education, and healthy culture," and called for an increased presence of the Church in the "spiritual and moral renewal of the Serbian nation" (*RTS* 2013a). The notion that *Serbian traditional symbols do not belong to the LGBT population* was also evident in the outcry of the SOC against the organizers of Belgrade's pride week; for using the icon of the "White Angel," a fresco in the Serbian Monastery of Mileševa, appealing to the government of Serbia for protection of the church's holy objects. The SOC blamed the organizers for "spitting

on Orthodoxy," which is the "source of the live water that literated, enlightened, and educated us, and took us into the cultural heritage of worldly nations" (*Alo* 2013a). Amfilohije Radović has also spoken about the "abuse" of Christian symbols ("such as the cross and others") in gay parades, which he sees as "permanent violence over the majority," and a "more or less hidden fight against Christianity and the Christian faith, and against all-religious values on which humanity has built its collective historical memory and existence through centuries" (*Pečat* 2010).

Finally, the *survival of the Serbian nation* is called into question. Patriarch Irinej stated that, in this day and age, nothing is more threatened than marriage and the family, which are being deliberately destroyed, "especially by the gay parade," and this scourge [*pošast*] is the only remaining thing the Serbian nation needs to disappear from the face of the earth (*RTS* 2013a). Similarly, discussions about the Church's role in promoting natality, spirituality and the moral renewal of the Serbian nation are frequently mentioned side-by-side with discussions on LGBT issues (*Novi Magazin* 2013). The SOC's statement captures the idea that the Serbian nation is on the edge of survival, only to be pushed over by gays: "You have a right to parade, but only at your own cost and the cost of your customers [*nalogodavaca*], whatever they may be called, for the parade, as well as for the security, but not at the cost of Serbia – bombed, ravaged, morally and economically crippled, impoverished, flooded, nailed to the pillar of shame" (*B92* 2014). Apart from pointing to gays as the potential downfall of the Serbian nation, this statement also underscores an appeal to patriotism, and the implicit statement that, if anyone truly cared about Serbia, they would not parade. The parade, itself, is thus inherently unpatriotic and nationally treacherous. The connection between the parade and the destruction of Serbia reached an almost humorous dimension in May 2014, following the floods that devastated the entire region. They were interpreted, by Patriarch Irinej, as God's warning to "stay away from the path of vice, wickedness, and lawlessness," specifying that he is referring to the parade being organized in Belgrade, which represents "great lawlessness and an abominable vice" (Mihajlović 2014).

Bosnia

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation regarding LGBT rights is even starker. The notion of holding any semblance of a pride parade is all but non-existent (Banović and Vasić 2012). Thus, we analyze here the incident related to the first Sarajevo Queer Festival in 2008, since it represents one of the few organized LGBT events in Bosnia. The Sarajevo Queer Festival in 2008 was organized by the Q organization, and was supposed to be a cultural five-day event including broadcasting of several LGBT-issue films. Protesters, purported to be mainly from the extremist Wahhabist movement, were later joined by football hooligans, attacked journalists and participants of the event. The event was, thus, closed after the opening night, with eight people injured. In addition to the Queer Festival, we also examine media statements of the Islamic Community regarding LGBT rights, whether connected to a particular event or not.

As in Serbia, but to an even greater extent, the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina has amplified the situation and given extremist statements visibility.[7] The titles of the articles themselves are already indicative of the unmistakable position. In 2008, *Dnevni Avaz*, a daily non-religious newspaper, published two articles with particularly problematic titles: "Who is imposing the gay gathering upon Bosniacs during Ramadan?" (*Dnevni Avaz* 2008a) and "Mufti Smajkić: Freedom should not be used as promotion of that garbage from the West" (*Dnevni Avaz* 2008b). The Islamic periodical *Saff*, which describes itself as the "Islamic Youth Review,"", published articles with titles such as "Masters of Faggotism Promoted in Sarajevo: 44 Experts for Debauchery" (*Saff* 2011), and other *Saff* articles, before and after the event, included similarly colorful discourse. While these articles do not represent official statements of the Islamic Community, per se, their inclusion in *Saff* implies their condoning of the viewpoints presented. Analyst of Bosnian media, Maša Durkalić, concludes: "The ideological

[7] For a review of the media situation in regards to LGBT issues in Bosnia, see Huremović (2012) and Zurovac (2012).

messages sent through these publications in a terrifying point of how it is possible to change any idea which is not in accordance to the prevalent opinions rooted in tradition and patriarchate (which are still represented as the greatest moral values), by using careful editor manipulation into open hatred" (2012: 160).

As can be seen from the article titles, several of the themes are similar to the ones discussed in the cases above. First, is the idea that *homosexuality comes from the deviant West*. One of the *Dnevni Avaz* articles cited Mufti Smajkić saying, "I think that freedom and democracy should be not used to promote grotesque ideas and that garbage which is imported from the West" (*Avaz* 2008b); mirroring the language used by protesters at the Queer Festival, "May dear Allah let you live to see your children taken by two faggots from the Netherlands and make porn movies with your children" (Huseinović 2008). Mufti Smajkić frequently referred to the "spirit of Bosnia" and the "vision of Bosnia" in which these kind of Western-imported ideas do not belong (*Dnevni Avaz* 2008b). The Islamic daily, *Saff,* unsurprisingly takes these statements quite a few steps further, blaming the European Union for the "gay evil" threatening Bosnia, and projecting a future Bosnia within the EU; where the "European Muslim" will need to, "apart from consuming pork, also support faggots, if he wants to achieve anything in the Christian hierarchy" (*Saff* 2008a). Other *Saff* articles have similarly called out the countries believed to have supported the festival: the Netherlands, Switzerland, the U.S., as well as certain local media (*Saff* 2008b). The sentiment that the event was forcefully imposed onto Bosniacs, and a "provocation" (*Dnevni Avaz* 2008c), is a recurrent theme in both *Dnevni Avaz* and *Saff* articles.

While the *Saff* article mentioned above does not explicitly combine national identity themes, professor of Islamic theology Abdusamed Nasuf Bušatlić, nonetheless appeals to Bosniac patriotism by *clear demarcation between Bosniacs and ethnic 'others.'* He quotes the statement of the president of the Radical Party in Republika Srpska, who claimed that Sarajevo was indeed the proper site for such a festival, because Republika Srpska would "never allow debauchery and perversion on its streets, nor does it support unnatural affinities" (*Saff* 2008d).

In this way, Bušatlić appeals implicitly, but unambiguously, to ethnic sentiments (Durkalić 2012: 171). After the parade, he makes an explicit differentiation between "citizens of Sarajevo, and especially Muslims during the mubarak month of Ramadan,"" on the one hand, and the festival organizers and participants, on the other. The included group is, thus, comprised of "all those who believe in … Allah… and follow the path of Islam which is sheer purity, goodness and virtue," while the excluded group not only members of the LGBT community, but also atheists, communists, and secularists in general (*Saff* 2008e). He proceeds to draws a binary between those who supported the festival – or simply condemned the violence – as "seething Islamophobes with insatiable hatred and antipathy towards Islam and Muslims," comparing them to the "black hand of Communism and aggressive atheism" (*Saff* 2008e). By stressing that secularism has reached "the status of a religion whose perverted principles have become holy and untouchable," including an insistence on understanding and tolerance "towards the worst forms of twistedness and deviation" (*Saff* 2008e), he draws a clear binary between those who practice Islam on the one hand, and members of the LGBT community, their supporters, and atheists on the other (see also Durkalić 2012). Other *Saff* articles make similar comparisons: a letter to the editor refers to the journalists at the event as "demuslimized journalists" and the event itself as "organized anti-Muslim action" (*Saff* 2008f).

In the Saff articles, Bušatlić further *appeals to fears of internal division of Bosniacs* by pointing to the fragmentation of the daily newspaper *Avaz* (in reference to internal disagreement of *Avaz* journalists on journalist standards in relation to the festival reporting), concluding that they are "each on their own" and divided (*Saff* 2008c). With this, *Saff* "actually attempted to point to the disunity in the bastion of the defense of Bosniacness itself – the *Dnevni Avaz*" (Durkalić 2012:175). This is connected to the idea that Bosnia is *at risk of losing its tradition or assimilation*: a published letter to the editor states that Muslim blood is being shed "in barrels" all over the world, while Bosnia "worries about a few broken noses" (of the journalists at the Queer Festival; *Saff* 2008f). On a similar note, radical Islamist Fatmir Alispahić contends that, in addition to homosexuality being purposely driven to Bosnia by the

destructive West, this is being aided by "Serbian and Croatian intelligence services, as well as the international factor,"", who are together driving Bosniacs to accept homosexuality instead of "their own tradition" (*Saff* 2008a). The elements of a conspiracy theory are clearly present, even more so when the author blames these forces for their "fascist plan to blame the most tolerant and open society in the Balkan to closed mindedness, terrorism, Wahhabism, and much else" (*Saff* 2008a). As Durkalić points out, this argument contains the idea that Western forces, along with the penultimate enemies Croats and Serbs, are trying to infiltrate the traditional bastion of Bosniac society through the Queer Festival (2012: 177). Sremac et al. (2014: 257) and Vlaisavljević (2009: 78) similarly point to the constant reproduction of the fear of assimilation or extermination by repeated ethnic narratives with the same internal logic.

Montenegro

In Montenegro, the bulk of the public performance of religious officials, in regards to LGBT rights, occurred in response to the pride parades. While the 2014 parade in Podgorica occurred more or less peacefully, the first two parades, held in Podgorica and Budva in 2013, were marred by violence. Bishop Amfilohije Radović has been the most outspoken in regards to LGBT issues, although his statements only represent variations to the themes of the official positions of the Serbian Orthodox Church[8], as discussed in previous sections.

The first theme that appears in statements regarding the pride parade is that allowing homosexuality indicates a *loss of national honor*. During the mass Bishop Radović held in Podgorica to "cleanse the streets" following their "defilment" by the pride parade, Bishop Radović proclaimed that the parade "dishonored" Montenegro, and that Podgorica needed its

[8] The Montenegrin Orthodox Church is a fairly small, newly established and controversial church, which has not been recognized by other Orthodox churches. It is typically attributed to the political nationalist project in Montenegro; the majority of Orthodox Montenegrins declare themselves as Serbian Orthodox, while those declaring a Montenegrin national identity tend to lean towards the Montenegrin Orthodox Church. In the article we refer to statements of the Serbian Orthodox Church as official positions of the Church, since it is still officially has jurisprudence over Orthodox believers in Montenegro. Bishop Amfilohije Radović is the current bishop of Montenegro and the Littoral.

honor restored (*24sata* 2013a). The Mass itself was presented as a Mass for "Montenegrin honor [referred to by two words: *čast* and *obraz*], the sanctity of marriage and of bearing children" (*RTS* 2013b). Indeed, "dishonored" and "dishonorable" were a common theme in regards to many different concepts by Bishop Radović. The parade dishonored the mustache of Montenegrins, which represented "the symbol of the centuries-long humanity and morality of Montenegro" (pride organizers used mustaches as a symbol of the manifestation; *Novosti* 2013). The police found itself in a "dishonored" position because it had to protect pride participants (*Alo* 2013d). A related theme is that the parade represents an *attack on the Montenegrin identity and dignity*. Bishop Radović sated that the organizers of the parade had to be aware that their way of life and behavior "threaten the identity and dignity" and the "ethical, moral and spirtual being" of the large majority of the Montenegrin people (*Blic* 2013). Appeals to identity also included drawing a contrast between the "ecological state" of Montenegro, which was now in danger of becoming a "sodom" state (*Alo* 2014).

The *biological survival of the nation* is similarly called into question. The discursive strategies used to promote this concept are numerous. They include discussing abortion simultaneously with LGBT rights, and warning about the dangers of homosexuality and abortion side-by-side, in the same discussion. In the same sermon about the pride parade, Radovic warned mothers against abortion (which he refers to as "infanticide" [*čedomorstvo*]): "Without children, dead is the temple, dead is the land, dead is the nation" (*24sata* 2013a). Frequent reference to the impossibility of biological reproduction of gays, a theme which was already heavily present in Radović's comments about the Belgrade 2010 pride parade, in which he stated that everything that exists, exists to bear fruit, and that "the tree that doesn't bear fruit [reproduce] should be cut and thrown into the fire" (Bojić 2009; *24sata* 2013b). As such, pride parades are described as "parades of death,"", behind which "suicidal tendencies" are hidden. Another way of emphasizing the connection between the biological survival of the nation and the parade is by repeated reference to the parade as "violence" over the nation. By holding the

parade, "we all lost and are left defeated in front of the spiritual-moral and physical violence that befell the capital city of Montenegro" (*Novosti 2013*).

Finally, the aforementioned theme of *gay lobbies and the deviant EU*, which stand in opposition to the purity of the Montengrin nation, is heavily present here as well. According to Radović, gay parades in the region are a result of propaganda imposed by the West, including the EU (*Alo* 2013c); and the Montenegrin government was forced to hold the parade under pressure from the "European faggot lobbies" (*24sata* 2013b). He pointed to the fact that there were "LGBT members" in the top leadership of the EU, but that nobody, not even officials of the EU, "under influence of gay lobbies," has the right to impose their will about something that is unhealthy and morally unpermissible, to "threaten the ethical being of entire nations" (*Blic* 2013). That accepting the EU's demands to hold pride parades was a form of *national subjugation* was also mentioned. Europe's will to "finally put Montenegro under itself, as a sign of her full fulfilment of integration conditions" (*Alo* 2014).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have analysed how religious institutions and actors in the Western Balkans have taken up the role of the 'defender' of the nation, by looking at their discourse on homosexuality. With the disintegration of Yugoslavia, nationalism (and ethnical identities) became very linked with the question of masculinity, which was often defined against subordinate homosexual masculinities. Within this context of new nation-building, religious institutions became more prominent, becoming the new dominant ideology that filled the void left by the demise of socialism, increasingly intertwined with the politics of the new nations. In our analysis, we explored how the religious institutions, in contemporary events, continuously take on the role to not only defend the nation, but also define the nation through their statements on homosexuality. Several themes can be found in the religious discourse on homosexuality. First, homosexuality (and the LGBT related events we analysed) is depicted as a *threat to the nation*. Whilst this debate in Croatia is centered around the question of the

survival of the family (i.e., the central unit of the nation), which needs to be protected from the vices of the LGBT community, the discourse in the other countries is about the threat to the morality of the nation, as well as its health and honor. In Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia, the stress is also on the *biological survival of the nation*, citing the impotency of homosexual relationship and linking LGBT issues to the declining birth rates.

Another theme we distinguished is the *linkage of homosexuality to the 'deviant' West/EU* and general idea that the parades are methodically imposed by the West. Pride parades (in Serbia and Montenegro) and the Queer festival (in Bosnia) are presented by the religious institutions as a vice forced upon the countries by the EU, opposing the values of their respective countries. This discourse is absent in Croatia, however, which is expected, given Croatia's closer relationship to the EU and perceived compatibility between Croatian and European identities (see discussion above). Finally, religious leaders use homosexuality to *define ethnical boundaries*. Whilst in Serbia, the Church denies the LGBT population the use of traditional Serbian symbols and claim that homosexuals are not truly Serbian — the parade is presented as unpatriotic and nationally treacherous—, the issue of homosexuality is used in Bosnia to mark the distinction between Bosniacs and ethnic others, inherently linking homosexuality with Islamophobia, or secularism, Communists, and atheists. This theme is likely the most troublesome finding of our paper, as it suggests that LGBT rights have slim prospects of advancing, as long as they are perceived as a Western-imposed ailment (or without a meaningful change in the public's perception of the West). It further underscores the ease in which religious institutions can manipulate feelings about LGBT rights when they are bundled up in anti-EU discourse, given the general public's feelings of dissatisfaction with the current political and economic situation and impatience with the EU's never-ending demands for membership.

Finally, some important distinctions surfaced. While nationalist rhetoric and intolerant attitudes can also be found in statements of Catholic officials, in Croatia these are limited to the margins of society —in smaller parishes, on blogs of lesser-known priests, and without support

from higher levels of the Church leadership, whose statements were unmistakably temperate; whereas in Serbia and Montenegro, startlingly extremist (and frequently unconstitutional) discourse can be found in statements of the very highest level of the Serbian Orthodox Church leadership. In these two countries, and in Bosnia, the situation is compounded by the unprofessional conduct of the media, who report on these statements unquestionably, practically condoning and only further inflaming public discourse. Ultimately, while our findings do not allow for an examination of the *effects* of religious institutions on public discourse, and certainly not their effect on the actions of everyday people, we can observe clear patterns between the statements of religious leaders on the one hand, and populist sentiments of everyday people, hooligans and ultra-right groups on the other—groups to which the religious leaders advertently or inadvertently provide legitimacy.

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