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THE FALL OF THE PINK CURTAIN: ALLIANCES BETWEEN NATIONALISTS AND
QUEERS IN POST-YUGOSLAVIAN CINEMA

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde
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TO RENATA

FOR ALL HER LOVE, ENCOURAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT

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INTRODUCTION

In the film *Go West* (2005), an interracial gay couple from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bosniak Kenan and Bosnian-Serb Milan are caught in the midst of the Balkan war during the 1990s; they are attempting to flee the country in fear of their safety.¹ On their way to the West – the promised land of sexual liberation – they become trapped in Milan’s village, a territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina that was then occupied by Serbians. Both xenophobic and homophobic tensions lead Kenan to dress as a woman and they pretend to live as a straight Serbian couple. However, this protective drag-cover act is soon brought to a conclusion by a local female sex worker named Ranka who discovers Kenan’s ruse, she then rapes and castrates him. Shortly thereafter Milan dies. His father together with Milan’s male friend, help Kenan continue his journey westward. He ends up in France, seeking (official or unofficial) asylum. There, he is interviewed by a local TV station. During the interview he tells his story and tries to explain the political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina where Croatians, Serbians, and Bosniaks all hate each other for various reasons and yet share a unified hatred for homosexuals as dramatized by the scene “Everybody hates gays” [“Svi mrziju homoseksualce²”] (*Go West*). Kenan then offers to play music, but since he no longer possesses his cello, he can only imitate playing. During this scene the spectator hears melodious music, while the journalist cannot, and she remarks that he should have played it louder.

By relating these simple facts of the story, complex issues such as mixed ethnicity and the mosaic of often oppositional religions come to light. They reveal a machoistic and anti-homosexual post-Yugoslavian political history. There is a strong nationalist presence in Bosnia-Herzegovina and male homosexuality is considered a threat to societal norms, which has led to accelerating homophobic violence. Astonishingly, these issues seem unknown to Westerners. This is illustrated in the film wherein viewers hear music, but the French journalist does not. This short account of Kenan’s story, which is the central focus of Chapter 2, encapsulates the two primary issues I

¹ I use the terms Bosniaks and Bosnian-Serbs to name the different nationalities from Bosnia-Herzegovina (Dimitrova 2001: 96-97).

² All translations from Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Slovenian are mine unless otherwise indicated.

explore in this study: (1) the need to situate the issues concerning homophobia, heteronormativity and queer activism in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region;³ and (2) the need to de-centralize Western perspectives on queer sexuality. One may think that we know why queer communities are invisible in the East, but the issue in the post-Yugoslavian region is very specific. While the post-Yugoslavian countries are geographically located between the West and East – part of the Western Balkan region – the Western construction of this region places them closer to the East. As Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova (2009) claims, this region exists within the West but is still imagined as “other.” Along the same lines, Balkan cinema specialist Dina Iordanova (2001) argues that with the fall of Yugoslavia, the discursive power of Western moral and cultural superiority associated the Balkans with violence, ethnic and religious tensions, and “the depths of Barbarism” (263), all of which produce social intolerances. She points out that this region has been labeled and treated by the European West “as an invisible semantic space characterized by common traits” (264). It is for this reason that I particularly focus on this region. I investigate local queer activism by analyzing post-Yugoslavian queer cinema. I explore possible solidarities and alliances between nationalists and queers. For example, the relationship between Milan’s father and Kenan in *Go West*, and the queer tactics used in the first queer mainstream films from the region.

Messing with Queer Theory by Traveling between West and East

While the relationship between nationality, religion, and sexuality has been studied thoroughly through cultural analysis, especially in terms of history and politics (Mosse 1985; Parker et al. 1992; Pryke 1998; Mostov 2000; Tolz and Booth 2005), many of these inquiries have adopted a Western lens. Basing their work on the concepts of “heteronormativity” (Sedgwick 1990; Warner 1993) and “homonormativity” (Duggan 2002), a number of scholars have focused on the relationship of homosexual bonding within various nationalisms and homophobia both in Western

³ Also referred to as the “post-Yugoslavian region” or simply the “region.” It consists of: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, the Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

and non-Western contexts. For example, in his study of the Maghreb, Jarrod Hayes (2000) argues that the rise of post-colonial national movements in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia severely restricted and devalued homosexual practices. Similar patterns can be found in the United States (Allen 1999), France (Dean 2000), Germany (Heineman 2002), Indonesia (Boellstroff 2005, 2007), Ireland (Inglis 2005), and Poland and Germany (Fischer 2007). These studies, which depict the West as the “hegemonic universal structure” and the East as the “Other” (Puar 2007; Jivraj and De Jong 2011), neglect the special context of the so called in-between post-Yugoslavian geographic region. However, there has recently been an emergence of studies on this region (Bilić 2016; Bilić and Dioli 2016; Bilić and Kajinić 2016; Dioli 2011; Ejodus and Božović 2016; Ganzevoort and Sremac 2017; Igrutinović et al. 2015; Jovanović 2013; Kahlina 2015; Kajinić 2010, 2016; Kuhar 2013; Kuhar and Takács 2007; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Kuhar and Švab 2013, 2014; Mikuš 2011; Moss 2005, 2007, 2011; Moss and Simić 2011; Simić 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2010, 2012; Sremac and Ganzevoort 2015; Swimelar 2017; Švab and Kuhar 2005; Trakilović 2016; Vravnik 2009; Vravnik and Sremac 2016; Vuletić 2013).

During the last few years, a growing interest in “de-centralizing the global/Western” position of queer theory has arisen (Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011). There is, of course, an inherent danger in importing LGBTIQ strategies and tactics into different territorial contexts, because 1989 saw the Pink Curtain fall alongside the Iron Curtain (Kuhar and Takács 2007: 11-12), Eastern countries were faced with not only a rise of nationalist and religious discourses, but also an “explosion of Western gay and queer discourses” (Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011), points I further develop in Chapter 1. Sremac and Ganzevoort contend that the danger lies in the perspective differences on homosexuality in the West and the East. They write, “[w]hereas several Western societies consider acceptance of sexual diversity the litmus test of tolerance and essential to human rights, hence a criterion of good citizenship, other societies see homosexuality as a threat to the national, cultural, and religious identity” (2005: 1). By traveling through different geographic locations, queer tactics act as imported products that become a metaphor for a threatening

superiority. I therefore focus on the consequences of importing queer tactics in this light. By tracing how these imports travel across cultures in different countries and also through time, I align my work with Mieke Bal's assertions in her *Travelling Concepts* (2002). More precisely, I am interested in how they become transformed and enriched; and how their "changeability becomes part of their usefulness for a new methodology" (25). I also heed Edward Said's (1983) warning from his essay on traveling theory that, on the one hand, mobility is "a usefully enabling condition of intellectual ability," while on the other hand, it can also result in "the limitlessness of all interpretation" (226, 230). As I see it, in the context of developing queer theory in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region (Chapter 1), the travel and importation of Western queer strategies has had rather devastating consequences, despite activists' good intentions.

Queer activism in Yugoslavia and the countries formerly comprising Yugoslavia, has been opening the so-called Pink Curtain in cinema for over thirty years at the oldest gay and lesbian film festival in Europe. The films that started to circulate in the region depicted so-called Western stories – not Eastern ones since at that time there were no local queer films produced. When cinema curtains opened, queer-thought leaked in, allowing so-called Western queer knowledge to enter the predominantly heteronormative local environment with its thick walls protecting traditional values of the male-dominated societies. However, problems only truly began to arise when Western queer theory and concepts (as presented in the films) were assimilated into local contexts. For example, during the 2000s, local queer activists copied "Out and Proud" concepts from the West to organize the first gay parades in the region: Belgrade and Ljubljana in 2001, Zagreb in 2002, and Sarajevo in 2008 ("Tradicija visokog rizika" 2013). These parades triggered a strong backlash from groups of organized homophobes.⁴ Once transferred to an Eastern context, Western queer theory and practice led to violence; no longer were these Western concepts only visual spectacles but they had the ability to inspire violence. Decades of writing, theory and practice were said to have been corrupted when transferred to the East, and queer communities continue to suffer from political and social

⁴ Except for the Pride Parade in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

invisibility as well as endure ground-level acts of homophobia. Concurrently, the first mainstream queer films from the region emerged and the queer community did not face such attacks from homophobes.⁵ While local activism had begun as early as the early-1980s, this was a watershed moment signaling a change in local perceptions about queers. It began on a cultural level with the organization of the 1984 film festival, known as the first queer film festival in Europe. Soon after there was a public gathering, also known as the first public coming out, not just in the local region but also in the broader Eastern Europe. Additionally, a regular social gathering place opened in Ljubljana: the first gay disco in Yugoslavia, and none of these events suffered any organized attack.⁶ Because of these developments, I position my dissertation to suggest concrete ways in which to approach ground-level realities of sexuality by localizing and rethinking queer theory and concepts in political art beyond the Western hegemonic vision.

Activism and Film

The corpus of my analysis are four mainstream queer films produced in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region. These films belong to an area where the relevance of Western queer theory cannot simply be assumed. There is still gross homophobia and a near-invisibility of local queer discourses in the region, which works to enact an erasure of queer bodies altogether. While a few queer films have been produced in the region, they all emerged during the 2000s: *Varuh meje* (*The Guardian of the Frontier* 2002), *Fine mrtve djevojke* (*Fine Dead Girls* 2002), *Diši duboko* (*Take a Deep Breath* 2004), *Go West* (2005), and *Parada* (*The Parade* 2011). Most of these are thrillers that involve stories about danger, fear, and hatred. Accordingly, queer desire in these films is represented as weird fantasies, which are limited in their portrayal of salacious depictions, due to

⁵ However, two of the mainstream queer films that addressed relationships between gay men such as *Go West* and *The Parade*, received many homophobic media reactions. Referring to the organization of cultural events, there has clearly been organized attacks, for example at Queer Sarajevo Festival in 2008 (Kajinić 2010) and Merlinka Film Festival in Sarajevo in 2014 (“Ni tri godine” 2017). Also, a group of neo-Nazis attacked a literature event in Ljubljana that was part of Pride Week in 2009 (Crnović 2009).

⁶ Except for not allowing gay and lesbian social gatherings in local bars and a rise in nighttime attacks on gay men in 1989 (Velikonja 2004: 22, 37).

the fact that they are embedded within heteronormative, nationalist, and religious frameworks.

Rather than beginning and perpetuating queer discourses, these negative representations contribute to creating false views of queer communities. As a result, the question of whether it is preferable to have stereotypical images of gays and over-sexualized lesbians, or not see queer desire represented at all on screen, becomes crucial.

In addition to the problematic negative images, the misappropriation of queer issues for other purposes surfaces, argues cultural researcher Kevin Moss who focuses on post-Yugoslavian-era queer cinema. He suggests that all films from Eastern Europe which included queer characters were made by straight directors who “use[d] homosexuality as a metaphor to explore anxieties about ethnicity” (2012: 353). Spurred by the Balkan wars during the 1990s, these films reintroduced the traditional values of a male-dominated society and reestablished a heterosexual matrix. A similar pattern of scapegoating homosexuals was studied in Poland by Agnieszka Graff, who argues that the “anxieties about joining the EU were expressed via attitudes about lesbians and gay men: homophobia became a mark of Polish difference and national pride” (qtd. in Moss 2012: 353). Indeed, as Moss contends, “queer characters appear in most of the film not as themselves, but as a metaphor for political dissidence, or for capitalist exploitation and corruption” (2007: 261); homosexuality is thus presented as an isolated phenomenon and/or as an import from the West, a metaphor for threat from the outside. The films depict no actual queer characters or even evidence of a queer community in the Eastern European region. Mima Simić adds that in using homosexuality to signify contrast, not only prohibits spaces for queer resistance but also redistributes and propagates post-Yugoslavian patriarchal values (2006).

In this dissertation, however, I address the not-yet researched activist potential of displaying national and religious discourses in cinema from a local queer perspective and analyzing queer activist tactics contained in the region’s earliest mainstream queer films. Rudolf Baranik, a Lithuanian activist (artist and activist), argues that art is speaking its own language, “incidentally, sneaking subversively into interstices where didacticism and rhetoric can’t pass” (Lippard 1984:

343). I argue that artistic mediations, or “visual activism” (Muholi 2014), can be considered tactics by the subjugated (de Certeau 1984) that uniquely frame emerging identities. Bal argues that “doing politics – activism, party politics, or what have you – is not best served in the humanities. But a respect for the objects that are given over to cultural interaction by the people who made them seems to me to be able to serve politics in a profound sense better” (2003: 37-38). Discourses on the politics of art has underscored its potential to express inarticulate feelings (Langer 1953) and to counter invisibility (Jones 2006). Highlighting one of the founding principles of British cultural studies, John Fiske defines culture as “neither aesthetic nor humanist in emphasis, but political” (1996: 115). In other words, culture should be viewed as a major site of ideological struggle, a site of “consent” and “resistance” (Hall 1981).

Art is a powerful weapon against oppressive political systems and has been used as such in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region. For example, the cellist Vedran Smajlović at the Sarajevo Opera Company and Philharmonic Orchestra, who played his instrument in public spaces in Sarajevo during the siege at the time of the Balkan war, used his music as a counter weapon against the snipers who surrounded the city in the nearby hills. As he says, “I never stopped playing music throughout the siege. My weapon was my cello” (Galloway 2008). He began playing the cello in public spaces at the same time snipers were targeting civilians from the surrounding hilltops. His courageous act in the name of peace lifted the inhabitants’ dignity and hope during the city massacres. When a CNN reporter asked him if he was not acting irresponsibly by exposing himself to harm in the middle of the war zone, he refuted by remarking: “You ask me if I am crazy to play the cello, why not ask if they are not crazy to bombard Sarajevo?” (Green 2005: 119). This is a queer response: it does not answer the question directly nor does it accept the question, but it does dismiss the norm as madness. Another account of art being an influential weapon was marked by the debut of the most prominent film festival in the region, which began during the siege of Sarajevo in 1993. As Shapiro notes, “In the case of Sarajevo, the arts (words, images, imaginative technology, and so on) are a weapon of history; they are radically changing the ways in which the

siege of Sarajevo will have been remembered” (2012: 419), a statement which, I argue, is the case for the entire region.

I analyze queer cinema as a political critique of homophobia in the post-Yugoslavian region. Dino Murtić argues that “film is important to understand politics, [and is] especially a platform from which we can address nationalism in the context of Yugoslavian politics; and as a fabric without which we cannot embrace the wounds of the past” (2005: 3). I also explore his assertion that films from the post-Yugoslavian region were the first artistic practice to cross borders in the Western Balkans and thereby challenge nationalism, while considering what is missing in his analysis, namely, the mention of queer cinema. While he focuses on partisan films of the Balkan war and tries to be balanced in analyzing an equal number of directors from different ethnic backgrounds, what this dissertation seeks to address is the oversight of the political importance and potential of post-Yugoslavian queer cinema. Along the same lines, Moss argues that since “the question of how states treat minorities, including sexual minorities, is a central role in the development of civil societies and democracy” the portrayal of homosexuality in film “can almost serve as a litmus test for the general openness of the society” (2007-2008: 2, 4). Because homosexuality continues to represent a threat to national and religious identity in Eastern Europe, Moss claims that it is impossible to make a film centered around homosexuality without including nationalist and religious elements. Moreover, he maintains that the first mainstream queer films from the region only use homosexual topics to critique society and its politically corrupt system of (post-)war ultra-nationalist patriarchy, which is upheld by the religious political reality (2007, 2012). The objects of my analysis are: *Go West*, which is set during the Balkan conflict in the Bosnia-Herzegovinian war zone; *Fine Dead Girls*, which reflects on post-war society; *Take a Deep Breath*, which offers a perspective that lesbians come from the West; and *The Parade*, which focuses on alliances between post-Yugoslavian war heroes and the queer community.

In post-Yugoslavian cinema there seems to be a continuous connection between the portrayal of queers and the political system. Two films that portray lesbian desire, *Mädchen in*

Uniform (*Girls in uniform* 1931) from the West, and *Egymásra nézve* (*Another way* 1982) from the East. Both depict the entanglement of societal critique with homosexuality; the first critiques the cruel Prussian education system, while the second examines political and sexual repression in Hungary after the 1956 revolution. During my analysis, I focus on whether this connection between the portrayal of queer people and politics is meant to be activist in nature and always a critique of current political systems that do not accept gays, lesbians, and other non-heterosexuals. My hypothesis is that all queer films are political in nature as long as the political situation in the country of origin is not fully accepting of the queer community. While Moss contends that the “queer in the film is used to make a political statement” (2007: 253), I argue the opposite: namely that queers use the critique of political issues to represent the repression of queer desire. Thus, instead of questioning whether or not homosexuality is represented as a metaphor for “political dissident,” I ask: what if “political dissident” or “capitalist exploitation” or “corruption” are actually metaphors for queer identity? Following Jasbir Puar, I investigate how “playing on this difference between the subject being queered versus queerness already existing within the subject (and thus dissipating the subject as such) allows for both the temporality of being and the temporality of always becoming” (127). Mireille Rosello and Sudeep Dasgputa argue in their edited volume entitled *What’s Queer about Europe?* (2014) that:

Queering is a permanent process that undermines normativity at the same time that it wards off the paradoxical threat of reinstating non-normativity as a desired and stable program. To that extent, queering possesses the perpetual uncertainty of a negative dialectical habit of mind without hypostasizing and reifying litanies into both normative and non-normative programs that are on their way to becoming normative. (9)

The films I focus on in this dissertation portray the corrupted and queered political situations of gays and lesbians in the heteronormative and homophobic environments of the post-Yugoslavian

region, which opens up both “the temporality of being (ontological essence of the subject) and the temporality of always-becoming (continual ontological emergence, a Deleuzian *becoming* without *being*)” (Puar 2007: xxiv). Thus, being gay or lesbian and engaging in identity politics in this region is actually the queerest thing one can do.

Considering the political situation, religious clashes in each country of the post-Yugoslavian geographic region, and the interplay of nationalistic, religious, and queer discourses in the region, queer activists need to develop different strategies to reduce and surpass homophobia. Because one of the strategies is the use of art in the form of queer cinema, which always has a political incentive, I put emphasis on how post-Yugoslavian queer cinema has activist and pedagogical potential for the community. I demonstrate how some films act as educational tools to de-heteronormalize the societies of the post-Yugoslavian region. I pay attention to how these films, as a form of political intervention, can decrease homophobic tension in the heteronormative environment of the post-Yugoslavian geographic region, where conditions for living a queer lifestyle vary from country to country.

Since non-heterosexuals are considered second-class citizens in the post-Yugoslavian region, I argue that their cinematic portrayals or any attempt to make them visible is already a step in the right direction. Films with queer topics or queer characters are either activist artworks or artistic activism even though the intentions of the production houses and film directors may not be directly connected to queer activism. The connection of art and activism rests in the distinction between the fact that films are projections of ideology, in this case heteronormativity, and at the same time they are active constituents of these contexts, in this case queer activism. By drawing a correlation between politics and art, I can examine more specifically the extent to which post-Yugoslavian queer cinema has a potential for political critique and is a form of activism. Accordingly, I ask, to what extent do homophobic battles – which are negotiated through national and religious discourses in post-Yugoslavian queer cinema – represent a political potential for queer activists to turn these

battles into a conceptual means to challenge homophobia in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region?

Summary of the Chapters

My **first chapter** elucidates the ways in which the concepts of queer, activism, nationalism, religion, and homophobia function. This involves the crafting of a historical narrative that takes into account the recent past of the post-Yugoslavian geographic region. Thus, the first chapter offers a critical framework, which I further develop in the analyses in the following chapters. Here, I map the queer cultural history of the post-Yugoslavian region and analyze various homophobic events from the region, as well as offer examples of artistic responses and direct activist actions. I closely examine the connection between politics, religion and homosexuality. While I begin by examining this connection more broadly, I narrow my focus to the post-Yugoslavian geographic region and films of my corpus. I clarify how queer activism in this region arose and delineate its various stages. I focus on several distinct phases of the discursive change: from before the fall of the Pink Curtain in 1989, to during the war and the nationalist revival of the 1990s, to the neo-Nazi organized attacks on queer communities in the 2000s, and finally, to the Europeanization and homo-normalization of the post-Yugoslavian region in the 2010s.

Chapter one focuses on the following questions: who are the political enemies of homosexuals in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region? How do these opponents express their voice? What is the response from the queer community? What locally-oriented strategies do they develop? Answers to these questions will assist me in analyzing public discourse on homophobia in the region and the actors who have the ability to manipulate religious and nationalist symbols and practices to alter patterns of everyday beliefs and interactions. In my analysis, I combine different homophobic events, examples of artistic responses, and direct activist actions.

In the following chapters I focus on various cases; each chapter analyzes a film from the post-Yugoslavian region released around the turn of the 21st century, a period in which both

homophobic attacks and mainstream films centered on gay and lesbian issues erupted in the region. First, I analyze the underlying heteronormative discourses that saturate the pre-production, production, and post-production phases of these films. Directly thereafter, I proceed to investigate the extent to which these films deploy activist tactics. I examine how various queer tactics and strategies challenge homophobia through peculiar alliances, for example when queers and nationalists become strange or not so strange bedfellows.

The **second chapter** includes the first case where I focus on Imamović's film *Go West*, the first and only mainstream feature film from Bosnia-Herzegovina to place a gay couple at the center of the narration. *Go West* is a love story between a Bosniak and a Bosnian-Serb set in the 1990s during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina that directly addresses discrimination based on racism and homophobia. I analyze the counter-homophobic narrative that the film proposes and its specific embedded activist tactics. I focus on the positive images of solidarity and alliances between male-dominated society and homosexuality, specifically, between a straight father and his gay son. Since the father is depicted as being particularly homophobic and nationalistic, I look specifically at the difficult rupture of his having internalized these beliefs and having a gay child whom he loves. In order to understand the nature of the alliances between male-dominated society and homosexuality, I predominantly consider the local context. First, I establish the link between nationhood, religion and sexuality in the region, and then examine the strongly-regulated power structures provided by both religion and the government. This helps me understand why the only solution the characters can imagine is the desire to flee to the West. I then proceed to analyze this desire by exploring the stereotypical way in which the West constructs the East and vice versa.

In the **third chapter** I analyze the Croatian film *Fine Dead Girls*, directed by Dalibor Matanić. The film participates in the political discourse of post-war Croatia and constitutes a microcosmic portrayal of responses to homosexuality. Set in the heterosexual Croatian public space, the film shows a lesbian relationship masked as a friendship; while the two women do not actively disguise their identities, they are not overtly out. As soon as their lesbian identity is publicly

revealed, they are viciously attacked: Iva is raped, and Maria is killed while fighting for her partner. I am interested in the representation of certain types of violence as forms of denunciation. I therefore explore what kind of violence is committed and what the film denounces. I analyze the narrative techniques used to both critique a supposedly virtuous discourse of nationalism and religious purity, and to build queer alliances. A few of these alliances involve compromises, which I study as another form of (internal) critique of heteronormative discourses. The couple's cohabitation and possible alliances with the other inhabitants of the building propose ways to counteract strict heteronormative views. Here I ask: who is actually queer in this scenario? To answer this question, I focus on the distinction between open lesbian sexuality in private spaces and the violence manifested through rape, murder, and kidnapping that the couple undergoes when exposed in a public space. I demonstrate how this film reveals that the lesbian couple challenges masculinities within a male-dominated Croatian society.

In the **fourth chapter** I analyze the Serbian film *Take a Deep Breath*, directed by Dragan Marinković. The story is set at the turn of the 21st century in Serbia, a time when the older generation was still firmly upholding heteronormativity and denying the existence of lesbians. Jelica Todosijević, one of the first lesbian activists from Serbia, notes that at that time, "Being a lesbian in Serbia means that you don't exist at all. You don't exist legally; you don't exist illegally. You are an offensive word, a bad character from a cheap novel or a character from a pornographic film" (1996: 171). The film can be seen as countering the inexistence of lesbians by virtue of focusing on a lesbian couple, like in the previous film analysis, but it is important to examine just how the lesbian characters are represented in the film. Correspondingly, I examine the extent to which the film manages to complicate the notion that lesbians are undesirable elements in Serbian society. By analyzing what the film says about homophobia and the activist tactics used to challenge it, I posit that the film both accuses lesbians of being sick and criminal, while simultaneously showing a way out by proposing lesbianism as a liberating process.

In the **fifth** and the last **chapter** of my dissertation, I focus on Srđan Dragojević's film *The Parade*, a half-documentary, half-fictional dark comedy that revolves around the organization of a gay pride parade in Belgrade in 2011. The film shows how the local police refuse to offer protection because they have strong alliances with homophobic nationalists. As an attempt to resist (and the specificity of this attempt is what is worth analyzing here), queer activists decide to recruit war veterans to protect them from a homophobic neo-Nazi group. This leads to unforeseen connections and complicities. The film also imagines the creation of unexpected post-war alliances between Croats, Bosniaks, Kosovo Albanians, and Serbs – the communities that fought on opposite sides during the 1990s Balkan war. They are strange bedfellows, moved by their solidarity with nationalistic sentiments and sexual preferences. To analyze the potential for political critique in *The Parade*, I take into account the nationalistic and religious backgrounds in Serbia, and the interplay between church, nationalism, and queer activism. I examine the homophobic and nationalistic attitudes portrayed in the film and discuss the paradoxical nature of a space where war veterans and queer communities form new alliances to counter the homophobic, nationalistic, and religious discourses in the region. This helps me answer a new research question: How are nationalistic and homophobic discourses counteracted and appropriated by queer activists to challenge homophobia that will trigger a political change? I pay special attention to the activist potential of the counter discourse this film holds for the community. I also analyze the reception of this film, which was incredibly well received locally and collected a large number of awards from the region and worldwide. I show how it was possible for *The Parade* to become such a hit and represent a mainstream voice in the homophobia rampant post-Yugoslavian geographic region, despite the conservative and heteronormative nature of the area.

CHAPTER 1: A QUEER CULTURAL HISTORY IN THE POST-YUGOSLAVIAN GEOGRAPHIC REGION

Queer activism in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region has gone through several stages, beginning with early initiatives before the fall of the Pink Curtain in 1989 and the period of war and nationalist revival in the 1990s, to the organization of neo-Nazi attacks on queer communities in the 2000s, and the Europeanization and homo-normalization of this region in the 2010s. I investigate these stages by focusing on the following questions: who are the political enemies of homosexuals in the former Yugoslavia? How do these opponents express their voice? What is the response from the queer community? What local strategies do they develop?

The answers to these questions will assist my examination of public discourses on homophobia in the region and identify actors who can manipulate religious and nationalist symbols and practices to alter the patterns of everyday belief and interaction. I combine different homophobic events, examples of artistic responses, and direct activist actions, while at the same time examining the connection between politics, religion, and homosexuality when addressing specific problems in the region. These issues are also addressed during my film analyses later in this study.

The 1980s: Before the Fall of the Pink Curtain

Roman Kuhar argues that a common misinterpretation is that homophobia is part of the heritage of the communist regime and post-socialist transition (2013: 8). In fact, homosexuality was decriminalized in some Eastern European countries earlier than in the West. Franko Dota points out in his lecture on homosexuality in Yugoslavia that following WWI, homosexuality was defined in some penal codes as “debauchery against nature,” and a threat to society as a whole; however, in the mid-1960s the new “Homo Yugoslavicus” emerged from the Stalinist masculine ideology (2015). Placed between the conservative East and the liberal West, this “new man” was free from

traditional Eastern ideology and thus allowed to self-manage his intimate and sexual relations. In the 1970s, “a partial and slow decriminalization and a tacit depathologization” further opened the door to the Western liberationist movements of the same period (Dota 2015). For example, homosexuality was decriminalized in 1977 in Slovenia and Croatia.

Shortly after Yugoslavian leader Josip Broz Tito’s death in 1980, the country was ensnared in a political and economic crisis, which led to the political revolution of the 1980s. The revolutionary wave with new social movements that ultimately resulted in the fall of communism, opened the possibility for alternative political forms and political pluralism in the post-Yugoslavian region, including a terrain for expressing individual freedom and sexuality (Gantar 1994: 355-68). The 1980s thus offered ground for developing subcultures and new social movements. There is, however, one important difference between the East and West. The communist countries lacked the platform for political organization, which was well established in the West (Kuhar 2013: 9). The emancipation movements, under the umbrella of the new social movement, coincided with nationalist movements, which sought political liberation from the central communist regimes. Because they are the main actors against the communist government, they make for very strange bedfellows.

The Slovenian queer movement took advantage of this revolutionary wave. In celebration of the movement’s 20th anniversary, a publication was produced in which editor Nataša Velikonja reveals that it originated in 1984 with Ljubljana’s Magnus Festival⁷ (2004: 9-16). Organized by ŠKUC Forum, the festival entitled “Homosexuality and Culture” [“Homoseksualnost in kultura”] opened with an introduction by members of the homosexual press and screenings of queer films – thus becoming the first gay and lesbian film festival in Europe. According to the organizers, the festival arose as a logical consequence of cultivating their diversity politics, which they expanded to include regular Saturday disco nights in the FV Disco Club (now K4). At the time, this was the only gay and lesbian social event not just in Yugoslavia but in the rest of the socialist countries as well.

⁷ The name evokes dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, founder of the world’s first LGBTI rights movement in Germany.

During the same year, one of the readers of the *Teleks* weekly submitted an anonymous call for a public gathering in Ljubljana, which became the first public coming-out event in Europe. This gathering was the basis for the establishment of the first gay organization in Slovenia: the ŠKUC Magnus organization. The second Magnus Festival in 1985 opened the door for collaborations with activists from all over Yugoslavia, as well as Italy, Germany, Austria, and France. Also, during that year, a feminist group calling itself Lilith was formed, from which the lesbian group ŠKUC LL was established in 1987. They started translating lesbian works, which they collected from foreign lesbian magazines, and published them in their own fanzine *Lezbozine*. 1986 saw an even broader political engagement, mainly because Magnus published an insurgent manifesto which they presented at the New Social Movements festival in Nova Gorica.⁸

It was subsequently announced that the Magnus Festival would be held on May 25, 1987, which coincided with Tito's birthday and the national Youth Day holiday [Dan mladosti]. This attracted the attention of people in Belgrade, being simultaneously the capital of both Serbia and Yugoslavia. Kuhar and Alenka Švab argue that journalists incited their readers and Serbian politicians about the underlying threat of Slovenia not respecting common Yugoslavian history, since the festival was scheduled to take place on Tito's birthday (2013: 29). They go on to suggest that Slovenia was thus seen as becoming non-Yugoslavian because it promoted Western ideals which betrayed its historic political background. Velikonja argues that both political forces and the media claimed that the festival was actually an "international homosexual congress" and was surveilled by a governmental social healthcare unit called the RK SZDL [Republiška konferenca Socialistične zveze delovnega ljudstva Slovenije] (2004: 17). As a result, authorities from Ljubljana prohibited this so-called "congress of homosexuals," due to the perceived danger of spreading

⁸ In four points they demanded: 1) the decriminalization of homosexuality in the republics of Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and the province of Kosovo; 2) the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation in the national constitution; 3) the inclusion of educational programs on homosexuality, not as a pathological sexual act but as a lifestyle, equal to heterosexuality but different; and 4) that the government of Yugoslavia protest against governments which discriminate against homosexual minorities, for example Romania, the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Iran (Velikonja 2004: 13).

AIDS (17). Kuhar and Švab point out that by that homosexuality was abused in order to “create and finally exclude one’s political enemy” (2013: 29).

Instead of cancelling the festival on May 25th, Magnus organized Mobilization Day Against AIDS on the same day. Alternately named “About AIDS, Against AIDS,” it brought together exponents from homosexual organizations that fought AIDS and offered free condoms. The next year ŠKUC Magnus and ŠKUC LL published a political commentary entitled “Democracy yes, faggots not,” in the student magazine *Tribuna*, which Velikonja argues amounts to one of the first warnings about homophobia in the newly-forming democratic political system (2004: 19). They also published an open letter to the president of the RK SZDL in which they demanded that he publicly declare his political views on the homosexual minority, and react to the demands of the social movement for the socialization of homosexuality. He declined.

The 1990s: The Turning Point: Rebirth of Religious National Pride

After the break-up of Yugoslavia, the first democratic elections in the 1990s brought right-wing nationalists into government positions. While communism repressed religion, the processes of national revival strengthened religious identities as the new dominant ideology. This resulted in the rebirth of national pride, the revival of religion, and provoked an ethno-nationalist revolution (Perica 2002: 5), which caused an ethnic war and genocide. At the same time, as Sremac et al. argue, both religion and sexual diversity gained great public importance which brought about clashes (2015: 5). Nationalists in post-Yugoslavian countries exerted constant control over sexuality and its practices. At that time, the Eastern European countries had the lowest fertility rate. This assisted in constructing the homosexual minority as a scapegoat, one that cannot reproduce and therefore presents a threat to the nation and the binary system of gender roles (Kuhar 2013: 11). Sexual preferences were thus heavily scrutinized by governmental institutions which then passed legislation that recognized heterosexuality as the only acceptable norm. During the first election campaign in Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, the first freely-elected president of Croatia in 1990, said that

homosexuality in Croatia must be invisible, since lesbians and gays want to destroy Croatia, national independence, and Christianity (Velikonja 1999: 140). Consequently, a strong connection between homosexuality and the exclusion politics of nationalism and religion was established.

Velikonja argues that ethnic groups strengthen the exclusion praxis of all identities that do not fit the norm (139). The norm was obviously based on pure ethnicity and religious belief. To obtain that norm, medical discourse was used. For example, Anton Dolenc, president of the Slovenian Medical Association, the Association for Democratization of Public Newsletters and a professor at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana, said in 1993 that homosexuals are “degenerates of the society” and a “dead branch on the tree of life” [“izrodek družbe...mrtva veja na živem drevesu življenja”] (qtd. in Velikonja 1999: 145).

Yet, homosexuality was also (mis-)used during the secession processes of Yugoslavia to promote nationalism and xenophobic discourse. As Jelena Pešić argues, “the civil war and the growing impact of nationalism led to the international isolation of Serbia” and a stagnation of Serbian society, which only strengthened traditionalist values, orientalism, and thus homophobic discourse (2006: 290-91). Velikonja points out that there were rumors that Slovenian president Janez Drnovšek was gay, which was used by Serbian politicians to compromise Slovenian liberal and secession politics (1999: 141). Moreover, a local Ustasha newspaper from Croatia published homosexual pornographic caricatures impersonalizing Serbian men. Kuhar describes even more connections between nationalism and homophobia, for example, the case of the so-called Martinović affair, in which two Albanian men raped a Serbian man with a glass bottle (2006: 551).

Homosexuals in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region were portrayed as a foreign import, which Moss argues was one of the tactics of the nationalists (2014: 212). Yet, their perceived foreignness did not come just from the neighboring countries, but from the West as well. For example, when gay activists in Slovenia organized a conference in Ljubljana there was again a growing panic in Belgrade. Many felt threatened by Slovenia and the West, which demands that countries who want to join the EU must promote LGBTI rights. This idea was also well

documented during the NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999, where the protesters hung a banner saying: “Clinton + Blair + Schroeder = a faggot gang” [“Klinton + Bler + Šreder = pederska tolpa”]. They invented a new Serbian hymn, a part of which goes like this: “Mister/ Fuck you gently/ but since you are a faggot/ let Gerhard Schroeder fuck you” [“Gospodine Folke Rije/ Jebemo ti najmilije/ A s obzirom da si peder/ nek te jebe Gerhard Šreder”] (Velikonja 1999: 143).

Sremac et al. argue that the construction of national identity, as an ideology of newly-established post-Yugoslavian countries, is based on exclusion politics, which calls for religion (2015: 3-8). Because there is a mosaic of various religion discourses in the region from Islam, Catholicism, and the Serbian Orthodox Church, the crucial difference among these countries is the national origin mythology, which is supported by native religious institutions (Perica 2002: 5). This is especially the case with the Orthodox Church, which was historically involved in the national politics of the Serbian origin myth, though Catholicism influenced national politics in Croatia during the second half of the 19th century; Islam came into power in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the Yugoslavian time. Although Perica argues that Yugoslavia was established based on the communist regime, which led to a decline of religious beliefs and practices, its former leader Tito’s concept of “Brotherhood and Unity” was borrowed from the Orthodox Church (289). On the contrary, Slovenia followed the Western European trend of secularization, and during its independence process denied its Balkan origins. Except in Slovenia, “religion reappeared as a dominant identification marker” (Blagojević qtd. in van der Berg et al. 2014: 121). During the war, Sanja Sagasta argues that sexism “blossomed under Catholic moral values” in which men, as warriors, “became the new saviors of Croatia, marking the beginning of neo-patriarchy” (2001: 360). Similarly, Sremac et al. argue that religion is a national mobilizer, establishing norms with traditional religious values, which represent the highest moral values of the nation (2015: 3-8).

Re-traditionalizing and re-patriarchialization processes affected the entire post-Yugoslavian geographic region with the exception of Slovenia. Gays and lesbians from Slovenia were the first to actively engage in politics. As Velikonja writes, in 1990 they proposed that the government of

Slovenia form a Pink Center to work on gay and lesbian issues and appealed to all political parties to support their demands in the parliament (2004: 26). They also formed an independent political organization called the Pink Club [Roza klub] whose focus was on the prevention of discrimination and the enforcement of the principle of equality on all levels of private and public life. They issued a press release to the media and political parties in which they argued that homosexuals were still considered second-class citizens and demanded the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation in the national constitution, equality for homosexual partnerships, and an open discourse on homosexual issues in national informative, educational, cultural, and science programs. They also cooperated in local elections in 1990 under the auspices of the Coalition for New Social Movements.

The 2000s: Rise of Organized Neo-Nazi Attacks

In 1989 not only did the Iron Curtain but also the Pink Curtain fell, and consequently Eastern countries faced the explosion of Western gay and queer discourses (Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011: 13-19). However, the Pink Curtain selectively opened within the post-Yugoslavian geographic region, where this explosion occurred a decade later, during the 2000s. As is often the case, in importing queer strategies from other territorial contexts, decades of writing, theory and practice collapsed when transferred from the West. The Western world had already introduced queer theory, which followed a linear discourse sequence: from homophile movement in the 1950s and 1960s, gay and lesbian identity policy in the 1970s, and AIDS activism in the 1980s. In the East, after 1989, there was a simultaneous explosion of the aforementioned discourses. Because they all arrived at the same time, queer discourses collided with nationalism and religion in Central Eastern Europe (CEE).

The period of the 2000s is marked by the public coming out of queer activism and the beginning of organized pride parades not just in Slovenia (2001), but also in neighboring countries: pride parades took place in Croatia (2002) and Serbia (2001), and a queer festival was organized in

Bosnia-Herzegovina (2008). Except in Slovenia, these events evoked organized attacks from neo-Nazi, right-wing, and religious groups, which strengthened their positions within the re-traditionalizing and re-patriarchialization processes of the 1990s.

In Serbia people celebrated democracy after the nationalist Milošević regime was overthrown in October 2000 (Mikuš 2011: 853). The next year queer activists organized a pride parade, which was the first in the post-Yugoslavian region. It took place in Belgrade in 2001 with the slogan: “There is enough space for all of us” [“Ima mesta za sve nas”]. As soon as activists reached the center of Belgrade, they were blocked by anti-parade protesters. A violent fight ensued during which thousands of football fans and skinheads attacked LGBTI rights activists (“Gej Parada U Beogradu” 2010). The streets of Belgrade had become a battlefield that day. There was also a lack of police presence and they did not counter the attack. Similar homophobic discourse resonated in Croatia. The first pride parade in Croatia occurred in 2002 in Zagreb with the slogan, “Coming out against prejudices” [“Iskorak KONTRA predrasuda”]. Around 300 individuals participated, including five members of the parliament, together with the minister of Interior Affairs (“Gay Pride Zagreb” 2008). Nonetheless, religious and nationalist groups attacked the participants. Police managed to protect them with a cordon and metal fences, so that the march could continue. After the march, groups of organized skinheads beat-up about twenty people, which led to the police arresting twenty-seven people. No one was charged with vandalism, assault, or even discrimination. An even worse attack happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the 2008 Queer Festival organized by Organization Q (“Queer Sarajevo Festival” 2014). The five-day program aimed to introduce the life stories of queer people in Bosnia-Herzegovina through exhibitions, films, round tables, and performances. Yet, on the opening night, hooligans, right-wing groups, and nationalists attacked participants both verbally and physically by throwing stones. At least ten people were injured because the police did not sufficiently protect the participants.

The attackers employed a nationalist discourse. For example, in Croatia they were yelling: “Go to Serbia,” “Kill the Serb,” “Fags to concentration camps,” “Heil Hitler” and “Die,” and also

invoked the name of the nationalist leader of the HDZ, a center-right party, Franjo Tuđman [“Marš u Srbiju,” “Ubi Srbina,” “Pedere u logore,” “Umri”] (“Gay Pride Zagreb” 2008). I would argue that the main reason for the paranoia in Serbia was a homophobic discourse focusing on a fear that homosexuals could destroy the Serbian nation. They yelled, “Kill the faggot! Kill the faggot! Ustasha! Ustasha!” [“Ubi pedera! Ubi pedera! Ustaše! Ustaše!”] (“Razbijanje gej parade u Beogradu” 2013). The attackers of the Pride Parade in Belgrade did not just fear homosexuals from their neighboring countries, but also expressed their fears of a so-called homosexual invasion from the West: “Get lost in Paris or Berlin!” [“Marš u Paris ili Berlin!”] was the most common cry (“Razbijanje gej parade u Beogradu” 2013). Xenophobic voices were also heard in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Milanko Mihajlica, president of the Serbian Radical Party of the Republic of Serbia, stated that Sarajevo was the right place for organizing a queer festival, since the Republic of Serbia “won’t ever allow debauchery and perversion” (Durkalić qtd. in Sremac et al. 2015: 61). He used the same word (“debauchery”) that was part of the aforementioned penal code against homosexuality that existed from WWI onwards until the legal decriminalization of homosexuality in 1994. It is indeed a fact that the war during the 1990s in the post-Yugoslavian region affected the entire region; these societies functioned as “frozen conflict societies,” which had the consequence of building up a “construction of the specific narratives about the threats of ‘others’” (Sremac et al. 2017: 16), which they deployed in their homophobic discourse. As Katja Kahlina argues, there are tensions between nationalism and nation building related to the disintegration of Yugoslavia that later led to the transnational processes of EU enlargement (2015: 73-83).

However, there were no substantial opposing voices from the government against these actions in Serbia at that time. Čedomir Jovanović from the Liberal Democratic Party in Serbia [Liberalno-demokratska stranka] said that “violence is not the way to the EU” (qtd. in Veličković 2012: 258). Veličković argues that left-wing parties were reluctant to support LGBTI rights to ensure the minimum requirements of the EU. Conversely, he also argues that nationalists protected the traditionalist values of patriarchal structures and Serbian masculinity from the “overly civilized

European community” (258). Dragan Marković Palma, a former associate of indicted war criminal Željko Ražnatović known as Arkan, said that “if homosexuality leads us to Europe, it is better to remain in a Serbian village raising sheep” (258). President of the Serbian Radical Party [Srpska radikalna stranka], Dragan Todorović, went even further. During the parliamentary debate about the prohibition of discrimination, he handed out pink hula-hoops, and when giving one to the Minister for Human and Minority Rights, said, “You will need this when you enter the EU” (qtd. in Veličković 2012: 258).

There were also some positive voices in the Croatian political sphere. Drago Hedl’s article for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) reported that Furio Radin – head of the parliament’s human rights committee – after the parade was heard to have said that “Croatian homosexuals today taught a lesson to the citizens of Zagreb and showed they had the strength of character to publicly demonstrate for something that unfortunately is still widely unaccepted” (Hedl 2002). His statement was supported by the Minister of Interior Affairs, Šime Lučin, who said to the participants at the parade, “Love each other and fought for their rights!” (Nevašćanin 2002). However, not all the participants of the parade were convinced by the solidarity that the center-left-wing government showed. Hedl argues that the politicians attended the parade only because of the presence of the head of the UN Human Rights Council, Juan Pablo Ordonez, and that they organized the police cordon to protect themselves, not the participants. This so-called duplicity is just one of the issues I examine in the following film analysis chapters. During the following year, the same government introduced a Same-sex Partnership Law [Zakon o životnom partnerstvu osoba istog spola⁹], which defines same-sex couples as one of the legal forms of cohabitation. With this step, Croatia was the first country in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region to create protective legislation for same-sex partnerships. This was just a small advancement, however, since the law only mandated the rights to mutual support and acquire common property.

⁹ www.zakon.hr/z/732/Zakon-o-%C5%BEivotnom-partnerstvu-osoba-istog-spola

Opposing this advancement, a robust religious voice was clearly heard. After the Croatian pride parade, many right-wing nationalist parties condemned the event – not the attackers. The extremist far-right Croatian party¹⁰ described the parade as “sick” and said that it presented a “danger to public morals and even the constitution” (qtd. in Hedl 2002). The Movement for Life and Family – which advocates measures to promote larger families – described it as a “public presentation of sexual abnormality” (Hedl 2002). Robert Francoeur and Raymond Noonan note that shortly after the event, a strongly-worded negative reaction to the march appeared in the official (and most influential) Catholic newspaper. Hedl points out that in *Glas Koncila*, the church’s official media outlet, homosexuality was described as a “severe perversion,” that is “incompatible with Catholic morality.” Attending the march was an older-woman from London named Sister Ruth Augustus – she was carrying a large statue of the Virgin Mary and calling the participants of the parade “dirty pigs and communists” (“Hrabrost zabranjene ljubavi” 2002). Usefully, she points out another strange bedfellow: homosexuals and communists, which I examine in later chapters.

At the same time, strong opposition from the Serbian Orthodox Church was vociferously expressed (Sremac et al. 2015: 54-59). An Orthodox priest, who was interviewed after the attack on the parade participants in Belgrade in 2010, pointed out that the church did not hate the queer community but their sexual practices. He would like to help them “save themselves and find the path to God” (“Gej Paradu U Beogradu” 2010). The church recognized only heterosexuality. They clearly applied medical paradigms that emerged in the early 20th century (Foucault 1984) and forced the so-called mentally ill homosexuals to convert to heterosexuality. Moreover, the church adopted a similar discourse as the right-wing parties espoused. Metropolitan Amfilohije, for example, compared the parade to the “stench of Sodom that is modern civilization which has risen on the divine throne,” by which he suggests that homosexuality comes from the so-called modern civilizations of the West (qtd. in Veličković 2012: 258).

¹⁰ Croatian Pure Party of Rights [Hrvatska čista stranka prava].

A religious discourse was firmly established within Bosnia-Herzegovina's political sphere as well. For example, Edina Nurkić states that Bakir Izetbegović, vice-President of the Party of Democratic Action [Stranka demokratske akcije] condemned the Sarajevo Queer Festival organized in 2008 by saying that it reminds him of "Sodom and Gomorrah" (qtd. in Sremac et al. 2015: 60). Jasmina Čaušević and Saša Gavrić declared queer sexual orientation as a "disorientation they fear will spread," and therefore queer people need to remain "behind four walls" (qtd. in Sremac et al. 2015: 60). Moreover, before and after the festival, Muslim religious groups mocked and threatened the organizers through various public media outlets. For Muslims, the main argument against the festival was the fact that it was organized during Ramadan. The newspaper with the largest circulation, *Dnevni Avaz*, published the headline: "Who is framing the Bosniaks in relation to a gay gathering during the month of Ramadan?" on the front cover ["Ko Bošnjacima podvaljuje gay okupljanje u Ramazanu?"]. The article espoused that queer people are sick, and they organized this festival during Ramadan on purpose, thus they do not respect Islam and its fundamental values (Sremac et al. 2015: 61).

Reactions to the first public coming outs were devastating in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia and resulted in increased homophobia. For example, in 2003 Vedran Miladinović, the first Serbian person to publicly declare themselves a transvestite, known as Merlinka, was murdered. Graffiti in a small Serbian town called Zrenjanin read: "For a Serbian Nation without faggots" and "Faggots are not people" ["Za Srbstvo bez pедера...Pederi nisu ljudi"] (Savić 2011: 105-06). In Bosnia-Herzegovina, all events from Organization Q were cancelled from 2010 onwards, due to pressure and violence from religious and nationalist groups, and the government's continuous unwillingness to protect the queer community. On the counter offensive, in 2009, activists fought back with a virtual queer festival by hanging 100 jumbo-sized posters around Bosnia-Herzegovina, hosting an online video presentation, and appearing on various media outlets (Ivanov 2015).

Robust backlashes during the first pride parades made Bosnia-Herzegovinian and Serbian queer activists review their positions and wait in a "transparent closet" (Švab and Kuhar 2005;

Kuhar 2007, 2011; Kuhar and Švab 2014). Whenever someone comes out, what constitutes homosexual identity is pushed back into the closet; it is noted but not accepted. Kuhar points out that discussions about homosexual identity are avoided as the homosexual is expected to suppress any visible signs of his/her unacceptable identity in order to avoid violent reactions (2005: 117-121). This suppression of identity is a violent act but usually remains unnoticed by society at large because sexuality is mostly a private matter that remains within the boundaries of the home. However, as Kuhar argues, “The transparent closet persistently threatens to be re-established, if a new everyday life situation in which the family might find itself, happens to demand that” (2007: 45). That also means that the so-called coming out from the transparent closet is not irreversible because one can always be pushed back inside.

The 2010s: Homonormalization and Pleasing the EU

After having noticed the consistent police resistance to protecting the 2009 pride parade participants in Serbia, the government finally decided to offer protection in 2010. This was viewed as Belgrade’s first properly organized pride parade. However, right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis attacked participants again.¹¹ No parade was organized from 2011 to 2013 due to security reasons and threats from neo-Nazis. Instead, activists organized a night walk protest in 2013 while chanting: “This is Pride” [“Ovo je prajd”] (“Parada Ponosa Beograd” 2013). Curiously, something changed in 2014; the pride parade was organized and fully protected by the police, who used tanks fitted with water cannons and other military equipment to protect the participants. There were no organized groups of neo-Nazis, just some singular cases of homophobia and hate-preachers on the streets. So, what changed? Homophobia was not deemed a criminal activity and no political rights had been given to the queer community. Moreover, strong secret alliances still existed between neo-Nazi groups and political leaders.

¹¹ They burned several buildings and demolished the headquarters of the leftist Democratic Party and the building of the national TV broadcaster. Around 160 people were wounded but there were no deaths, thanks to the police presence (“Parada ponosa” 2010; “Parada ponosa u Beogradu” 2010; “Parada ponosa uspešno održana u Beogradu” 2010).

What changed was that Serbia was actively preparing for EU membership and therefore needed to adopt a more liberal approach towards the queer community. Following certain integration procedures, Serbia was put on an international watch list when its queer community chose not to organize a pride parade for such a long period of time. By increasing police protection during the parade, Moss argues that the government showed its commitment to Europeanness and its desire to join the EU (2014: 213). Protections offered to 2014 parade participants does not reveal the government's actual stance towards homosexuality – the protections came about from pressure emanating from EU accession talks. What is also visible are the ties politicians have with neo-Nazi groups, which, I suggest, is why there were no organized attacks on the 2014 parade. Again, duplicity and strange bedfellows are being formed, as I argue in the following chapters. Danica Igrutinović et al. point out that the Orthodox Christian Church showed its power just hours after the pride parade (2015: 11). The right-wing movement Dveri hosted their own parade, an “all-national procession celebrating the sanctity of life, marriage and birth,” which followed the exact route as the previous pride parade (11). Two weeks later the government displayed its prowess in a military-style parade organized in memory of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade from Nazi occupation and in honor of Vladimir Putin. Igrutinović et al. argue that with these events the streets of Belgrade were “‘cleansed’ of homosexuality” and re-marked as religious, heterosexual and masculine (11-12). Both the religious procession and military parade came to dominate the use of the word “parade” and in so doing erased any queer connotation. There are strong alliances between religious and political leaders, right-wing extremists and Orthodox Christian Church believers; they are afraid of the queer community gaining recognition in Serbia because they perceive it as a threat to national identity and religion (van den Berg et al. 2014: 121). They do not acknowledge the queer community in Serbia due to the international solidarity and support it receives and the EU directives on human rights. They view this support as an alliance with Western queer communities, who are presumably attacking traditional values and religious identities in Serbia (123).

At the same time, Croatia was also preparing to enter the EU; they officially joined in 2013. In 2011 when the country's EU membership was approved, the queer community experienced hostility from anti-EU protesters. That year, the organizers of the gay pride parade decided to host the parade both in Zagreb and Split, the second largest city in Croatia. The Split parade was organized one day after it was made known that Croatia would be entering the EU. Nationalists organized a large counter-protest and were heard shouting, "Kill, kill the gays!" and throwing stones (Moss 2014: 222). Živica Tucić argues that gay pride itself is viewed as being "imposed by the decadent West" (qtd. in Sremac et al. 2015: 54). Miloš Jovanović and Mariecke van den Berg point out that the region is still experiencing the devastating consequences of the post-war period and on-going transitions, which have brought social crisis and uncertainty to the region (qtd. in Sremac et al. 2015: 53). Consequently, their collective response is a consolidation of heteronormative discourses and staunch conservatism.

Similarly, the government semi-secretly supports the unwillingness to protect the queer community in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the level of violence inflicted on them is enormously high. There are indeed a few queer groups and activists who work on LGBTI rights issues, however, they mainly focus on legal issues and bureaucratic activism to promote "anti-discrimination policies and increased penalization of hate crimes," rather than on visibility in the public sphere, including organizing gay pride parades (Cooper 2014). The lack of response from the government to the ongoing violence against the queer community only attracts more violence since it is not condemned by the key political leaders, police, or even legal systems. In November 2014, the European Commission released reform guidelines in which they included a warning to improve LGBTI rights. Unfortunately, EU integration processes are quite slow and have not yet begun to impact queer activism in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Van der Berg et al. argue that these responses demonstrate the direct connection of queer discourses with patriotism, religion, economic poverty, or EU integration. Homosexuals are perceived as "'external enemies' of the nation – the 'Nation's Other'" (124). Further, they argue

that the more acceptance they gain in the West, and consequently the more defended and promoted by the West they become, the more resistance may be expected in the region. Similarly, the anxieties about joining the EU were expressed in other Eastern countries. Agnieszka Graff argues that for the nationalists, homophobia became a mark of national differentiation in Poland. She goes on to suggest that “the conflict was more about cultural identity and national pride than about sexual orientation or public morality” (qtd. in Moss 2014: 212). Moss concludes that the tolerance of gay people became a litmus test for attitudes toward EU accession. Along the same lines, van der Berg et al. argue that the “oppositional pairing of religion and homosexuality is an important discursive strategy in conflicts over collective identity” (117). Thus, there is a clear line between right-wing nationalists in the Western Balkans, who posit national identity in opposition to sexual diversity, and countries in the West, and specifically in the Netherlands, who claim that accepting sexual diversity is essential for citizenship.

Moss maintains that similar narratives are used by the Western media, local queer activists, and nationalists, but with one difference: for the opponents of LGBTI rights, “tolerance” and “Europeanness” have a negative value (2014: 213). Furthermore, Marek Mikuš argues that this can be regarded as a successful political strategy; yet these policies may also fail and relegate Serbia (and Croatia) to a social periphery – “to a colonial-like condition of pockets of liberty and progress enclosed and threatened by an inert, oppressive society, in turn dominated by a formally integrated and Europeanized state” (Mikuš 2011: 851). However, Kahlina posits that local activists in Serbia and Croatia have been extensively using “Europeanization” as leverage in order to put pressure on high-ranking politicians (2015: 78).

This clear distinction between the progressive West and the traditionalist East reproduce an Orientalizing discourse that presents the West as a wiser counterpart which needs to be imposed on the East. Kulpa criticizes Western hegemony and calls it “leveraged pedagogy,” which is established through the cultural hegemony of Western Europe over the CEE and the requirements that each country needs to meet before entering the EU (2013: 443). Kahlina writes that this was

specifically the case from 2004 to 2007, when most of the Eastern European countries entered the EU and they all needed to change their legislation to include the prohibition of discrimination against sexual minorities (2015: 75).¹² She points out that the EU delegation interfered in Croatia and Serbia and demanded the countries properly protect the queer minority in order to continue with EU accession talks. Kulpa argues that violence towards queer communities became one of the signifiers that posits that this region is “‘not in tune’ with European tradition” (2014: 437, 442).

Farther afield, alliances were formed with anti-gay movements across Europe. In 2012, an anti-gay organization called “March for All” [“Manif pour tous”] organized massive street demonstrations in Paris which targeted the law formally known as “Marriage for All” [“Marriage pour tous”¹³]. They translated the concept of gender equality into a so-called initiative against the viscous “gender ideology,” which they used as a mobilization tool (Kuhar 2015, Kuhar and Patternote 2017). Kuhar and David Patternote note that the so-called gender ideology or “theory of gender” has been used in similar conservative demonstrations in twelve European countries such as Belgium, Croatia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Russia, Slovenia, and Spain (2017: 16). In Slovenia, for example, there were two marriage referendums after the government introduced inclusive marriage legislation in 2011, according to which gender-neutral couples could marry. The proposal states that any two people, not just a man and a woman, can enter into a marriage contract. The legislation passed in Parliament but was voted down in a public referendum. The second referendum occurred in 2015, when the government again tried to pass new marriage legislation. The law was approved by Parliament, but again the public voted against it. Similarly, in Croatia in 2013 there was a referendum on amending the marriage section of the constitution. A new clause would replace the definition of a marriage from “between two people” to “between a man and a woman.” A majority of the population was in favor of this change. Prior to that, the Croatian national constitution was gender neutral, which theoretically allowed any two people to marry each

¹² Kahlina writes that legal requirements concerning family, marriage, and civil partnership were relegated to the domain of national legislation (2015: 75).

¹³ A French initiative for marriage equality introduced by François Hollande’s government in November 2012 (Robcis 2015a: 447-61).

other. Therefore, until recently, heterosexuality was so obviously engrained in Croatian society that the law did not specifically mention that only a man and a woman could marry. When in 2013 homosexual invisibility became more visible, a proposed sanction only allowing a marriage between a man and a woman and thus banning a marriage between same-sex couples was initiated.¹⁴ This regressive act represents a turning point in the history of queer activism in Croatia and shows how heterosexuality – as a political concept – became enshrined and institutionalized in the constitution. Furthermore, the Orthodox Christian Church did not directly oppose the marriage referendums, instead associations appeared such as: “In the Name of the Family” [“U ime obitelji”] (2013), “The Civil Initiative for Family and Children Rights” [“Civilna inicijativa za družine in pravice otrok”] (2011) in Croatia, and “It’s for the Children” [“Za otroke gre”] (2015) in Slovenia. These manipulative initiatives were mostly run by people affiliated either with the Orthodox Christian Church itself or other allied organizations. Kuhar contends that while “both initiatives were focused on the protection of family and children they were simultaneously trying to ‘disqualify’ homosexuality and same-sex families by using (distorted) scientific arguments” (2015: 89). The information that these initiatives produced was viciously backed up fake scientific arguments that made an illusion of eligibility.

Nevertheless, strong alliances were established between regional and Western anti-gay groups, and between the queer community and Western pro-gay initiatives. This reading can erase the agency of the local queer activists who are not just using the EU but also trying to establish their own national culture. Moss maintains that the expansion of homo-nationalist analysis leads to the erasure of local contexts of queer communities or to a distortion, by enforcing Western queer theory (2014: 216). He also points out that the criticism of homo-nationalism is not useful in the CEE, where hetero-nationalism is strongly present (215). Kahlina argues that homo-nationalist practices “facilitated the joining of heteronationalist, religious and anti-EU discourses” (2015: 74).

¹⁴ A similar initiative was formed in 2016 in Switzerland, where a marriage was defined as gender neutral in the National Constitution. The Swiss Christian Democratic People’s Party (PDC) launched a civil initiative called “For the Couple and the Family – against the Marriage Penalty.” Voters did not support the initiative and thus rejected the same-sex ban by 50.8% to 49.2% (“Switzerland: Marriage discrimination” 2016).

Nevertheless, decriminalization of homosexuality in Serbia (1994), Republic of Macedonia (1997), and Bosnia-Herzegovina (1998), as she points out, is more about catching up with other former Yugoslavian countries rather than a determined step towards equal citizenship. Moreover, she argues that legal changes in Croatia and Serbia did not significantly challenge existing inequalities since the nuclear heterosexual family remains the normative one. Kahlina concludes that leverage has negative consequences since this only externalizes the responsibility and produces completely opposite results (81). Instead of increased solidarity with sexual minorities, it increased the consolidation of anti-gay forces and strengthened heteronormativity, which has roots in ethno-nationalist discourses dating from the 1990s combined with anti-EU discourse.

EU enlargement processes contributed to a “temporal stabilization of the heteronormative/homophobic norms” when the queer issue became the topic of public debates (Slootmaeckers 2014). Many politicians gained their political power by portraying queer communities as an external threat to the nation, banning pride parades and changing their constitutions in accordance with their heteronormative history. And yet, the queer movement became more visible and activists managed to garner support from the society-at-large by entering into public discourses. Koen Slootmaeckers points out that the visibility of the queer community and its acknowledgement in society is a result of harsh homophobic events during and after EU accession processes, rather than the positive goal-oriented processes themselves.

Artivism as Activist Tactic

The beginning of the queer movement in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region was both politically and culturally intertwined. Velikonja argues that such cultural activism is an infrequently used praxis not employed in other LGBTI rights movements around the world; it is therefore quite specific to the queer movement in the post-Yugoslavian region (2013: 61-62). The organizers of the annual Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Ljubljana – which is generally accepted as the beginning of the movement – pride themselves on it representing the first gay and lesbian film festival in

Europe. Sanja Kajinić contends that the festival departs from its Yugoslavian roots by intentionally leaving its Yugoslavian-ness behind (2016: 19). This behind the scenes discourse, as she writes, is similar to Slovenian official politics, which distanced itself from belonging to the post-Yugoslavian region. Brane Mozetič, one of the organizers of the festival, said that activists from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia did not plan their festivals for an intentionally opportune moment, but only when there was “no chance to start it without problems” (qtd. in Kajinić 2016: 24). This means that these festivals began during a later queer-movement stage, when homophobia arose because of an increased public interest in nationalism and religion. Slovenia took the position of an “advanced” Western society in relation to the rest of the post-Yugoslavian geographic region – the Orientalized Other – and thus distanced itself further from its neighbors. In contradistinction, Kajinić explains that the festival’s claim to Europeanness was crucial to its survival in the Slovenian cultural mainstream. Other Yugoslavian countries, especially Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, did not react positively to the interference of European politicians – they took a Balkan position. Mozetič’s statement can thus be seen as creating an orientalist approach to the rest of Yugoslavia in terms of a “nestling colonialism” (Bakić-Hayden 1995). Yet, in spite of their unsuccessful alliances with their Yugoslavian brothers through the film festival, Slovenia built strong alliances with lesbian activists from other Yugoslavian countries when they began their own activism campaign during the 2000s (Kajinić 2016: 24).

There are additional reasons that the movement in Slovenia progressed the way it did. In 1993, while Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia were engaged in wars, which resulted in a postponed establishment of queer activism, Slovenia achieved an important milestone in the history of their queer movement. In September 1993 the Pink Club, Magnus, and LL, as a part of the Metelkova Network – an activist project within the alternative social scene in Ljubljana – together with other initiatives of the new social movement, occupied the premises of the former Yugoslavian military and transformed it into a multicultural center. In so doing, they acquired a space that would be the basis for further cultural and political actions. Velikonja argues that this was an important

step towards the stabilization of an open and public gay and lesbian social scene, which, prior to that, was fragile and vulnerable (2013: 61). She further points out that while spatial demands are an integral part of any movement, it is very specific in this case. For example, in the West, she writes, the queer movement emerged from a previously established scene, while at the same time activist movements and the social/cultural scene often did not cooperate. Nevertheless, any public place for gays and lesbians represents an intervention in a heteronormative space. In Ljubljana, as Velikonja maintains, the queer movement found its place within the alternative scene from the 1980s onwards, which shared a similar political environment with the exclusion praxis and systematic repression (61). The same is the case for the Metelkova Network, which represents a similar systematic cooperation between marginalized groups, from which a united emancipatory movement emerged.

From this point on, Slovenian queer activism was further publicly promulgated in the social and cultural scenes. In 1996 demonstrations against the Pope's visit to Ljubljana were organized by feminist groups wherein activists from the Pink Club, Magnus, and LL also participated (Velikonja 2004: 43). Two activist designers, Irena Wölle and Vuk Ćosić organized a poster campaign pointing out the flaws in Slovenian politics, with one directly addressing the Pope's visit, saying, "Pink Club welcomes the Arrival of the Pope" ["Roza klub pozdravlja prihod sv. očeta"] (43). This campaign attempted to find a place for a queer discourse within the religious one, yet it did not reverberate well in public or religious spheres. During the same year, Slovenian queer activists performed a symbolic gay and lesbian wedding during a press conference held in the Marriage Hall of Ljubljana Castle; it was organized to coincide with a special edition of the *Journal for the critique of Science* [*Časopis za kritiko kulture*] dedicated to queer activism in Slovenia.

As a response to the homophobia caused by the rise of religious nationalism at the turn of the 21st century – especially a constantly enforced connection between Western gay concepts – local activists from the whole region worked towards the queering of national and religious symbols by using creative and artistic tactics. In 2004, there was a debate in the Slovenian parliament on legislation about same-sex partnerships, which the Slovenian People's Party [Slovenska ljudska

stranka] was against since they claimed that same-sex marriage is not an inalienable right. In reaction to this, activists from ŠKUC, Magnus and LL dressed in traditional folk costumes and brought a basket of significantly pertinent fennel to the parliament chamber (SIQRD).¹⁵ In Croatia, activists formed a street art group known as kugA (Cultural Street Gay Action [Kulturno ulična gej akcija]). It was a queer-feminist-anarchist group aligned with the anarho-school of thought promulgated by Spanish writer Lucía Sánchez Saornil, one of the founders of the Mujeres Libres federation. It responded to homophobic utterances from politicians, church leaders, and other authorities. One of their 2008 actions was to place rainbow scarfs around the necks of statues of famous Croatians in the center of Zagreb. The idea behind this action was to reveal that at least twenty of them were not completely heterosexual (“Šalovi duginih boja” 2008). In the same year, an even larger action was organized by the Queer Zagreb organization. They installed prodigious posters along the entire coastline with the message: “Homophobes are people as well” [“I homofobi su ljudi”]. This action inverted the homophobic discourse and created a positive one instead.

Moss points out that the logo chosen for the Split pride parade appealed simultaneously to both European and local symbolism: it was a “rainbow-colored laurel-wreath modeled after one discovered on an old flagpole base that once stood on the Pjaca” (Split’s central square) symbolizing both its Venetian and Roman history (2014: 225). Moreover, the Split parade route began next to the statue of Grgur of Nin, a 10th century Croatian bishop associated with Croatian nationalism. Additionally, queer activists managed to further queer the local culture by the placement of banners. One of them read: “Mare and Kate love each other, just so you know!” [“Mare i Kale vole se, da znate!”] (225-26). The slogan employed a popular heteronormative Croatian song and at the same time made fun of football fans, since the song was written by a former football star. Moss also exposes the fact that participants were carrying pictures of Željko Kerum, the mayor who declined to join the parade, Thompson, a right-wing nationalist Croatian

¹⁵ Fennel was used during the inquisition of the Catholic Church to slow down the process of burning homosexuals at the stake so that they would have more time for remorse (“Košara koromača” 2004).

band,¹⁶ and Severina, a Croatian pop singer and one of the biggest pop icons in the entire post-Yugoslavian geographic region. Queer activists also responded to the anti-gay graffiti and queered their homophobic messages from, for example: “Stop gay parade” to “Start gay parade,” and “Everyone to gay parade.” “Pride of shame” became “Pride of Pride.” Furthermore, “It is my right to say no” was changed to “It is my right to say no to homophobia” (227). The parade participants also transformed the chanting of anti-gay protesters from “Kill, kill, kill the faggot!” [“Ubi, ubi, ubi peder!”] to “Love, love, love the faggot!” [“Ljubi, ljubi, ljubi peder!”] (227).

Artivism was also performed during the Croatia referendum when the director of a theatrical performance entitled *Fine Dead Girls* displayed his political engagement.¹⁷ Two evenings before the referendum would occur, a performance of *Fine Dead Girls* took place in Zagreb. After the performance, during the third curtain-call and in front of an exuberant audience, the director appeared and opened the blouse of the actress who played the sex worker. On her breasts, written in large capital letters, presumably in theatrical greasepaint, she had written a politically provocative statement: the word “AGAINST” [“PROTIV”], it was meant to convey the meaning that the entire theatrical company was against institutional changes (Matijević 2013). With this politically-defiant act, he personally and in a spectacular manner, directly engaged with the activist movement. Adding fuel to the fire, the poster for the performance depicted two women garbed as the Virgin Mary embracing each other, which successfully worked in favor of the queer local context. Expectedly, the poster enraged religious groups, both Catholic and Muslim alike, since the image of the Virgin Mary is venerated both in Christianity and Islam. Actually, two versions of the poster were produced. On the Muslim version, created by an anonymous designer, the religious figure dressed in a burka was to be seen (Gavela 2013). Vigilare, a Catholic organization protested the poster because of the “offensive and defamatory depiction of the Virgin Mary, with an allusion to the lesbian themed theatre performance” (Pavičić and Romić 2013). They threatened to protest in front of the theatre and initiate a lawsuit based on “the law of suppression of discrimination and

¹⁶ A patriotic band formed by Marko Perković in 1991.

¹⁷ This is a theatrical remake of film with the same title and director, which I examine in Chapter 3.

other laws and international documents” (Pavičić and Romić 2013). The theatre director reacted protectively towards the performance and its poster, although he had initially forbidden the poster. Opposing him, the Zagreb Mayor held that “I am the mayor of all the city’s habitants and this is a city of tolerance, therefore I am banning the poster” (Kožul 2013). The Catholic church clearly managed to manipulate the Mayor into pressuring the theater director into removing the poster. This was the period preceding local elections, so, of course, it was also a chance to gain votes from undecided church members. The act of removing the poster from the theater and streets, demonstrates that the bending of rules – resulting in a censoring effect – indeed affected artistic freedoms and expressions.

Similar activist tactics were employed in Serbia during 2012 when queer activists, during the planned gay pride week, organized a photographic exhibition entitled *Ecce Homo* featuring the work of Swedish photographer Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin. She reconstituted and photographed traditional religious tableaux and set them within the Westernized contemporary queer discourse. Among her photographic *tableau vivants* was a portrayal of a gay Jesus Christ at the last supper surrounded by queer individuals. The Dveri reacted negatively to the exhibition and requested that it be banned. Prime Minister Ivica Dačić did not oppose the exhibition, however, and remarked that offending religious beliefs is not illegal (Igrutinović et al. 2015: 211). In reaction to this, Dveri protested in front of the Center for Cultural Decontamination [Center za kulturnu dekontaminaciju] where the exhibition was being held. Approximately 2000 police officers were deployed to protect the exhibition and its visitors, however, the pride parade was cancelled that year due to the inability of the government to protect its participants, as I previously mentioned. During the same year, activists initiated a project entitled “Together for LGBT Equality” [“Zajedno za jednakost LGBT osoba”]. They launched their campaign in various Serbian cities including Novi Sad, Belgrade, and Niš where they erected cartoon-like statues of queer people with different messages employing people to stop stereotyping queer individuals before even getting to know them. The news media reported that the reactions from Belgrade citizens were mostly positive (“Akcija sa LGBT lutkama”

2012). Yet, The Serbian Radical Party [Srpska radikalna stranka] urged the public to stop “importing destructive ideas from the West” and thus condemned the action by saying that it threatened traditional family values (“SRS osuđuje” 2012).

The next major queer cultural event was the 2014 Sarajevo edition of the Merlinka film festival, first organized in Belgrade during 2009. Although the organizers asked for police protection, fourteen masked perpetrators entered the event, attacked participants and seriously injured three people. They invaded the Kriterion art-house cinema shouting “There will be no [Pride] parade in Sarajevo!” and “[t]here will be no faggots in Sarajevo!” (“Bosnia and Herzegovina” 2014). Prior to the event, organizers received hate messages on their Facebook pages along with demands to stop the parade. There were also public appeals to physically assault queer community members. Yet, even after constantly escalating homophobic violence in public spaces, the prohibition of blood donations, death threats and violent enactments – queer activism actually found fertile soil on Bosnia-Herzegovinian ground (“Akcije LGBT inicijativa” 2015). Adelita Selmić notes that although the government is keen on joining the EU – and queer activism is supported by the EU – it has quite a limited impact on actual policies and local governmental institutions. Activists therefore decided to take physical and symbolic possession of the streets by initiating public dialogue on a grass roots level (2016: 100). In Sarajevo in 2012, activists wrote queer-oriented graffiti on many structures around the city – an event ever-since called the “silent pride parade” (“INTERVJU: TANKA” 2015). Thereafter, a blossoming period existed; queer street activism grew, and a large number of guerrilla groups emerged at many locations around the country, including: LibertaMo, B.U.K.A. [Banjalučki udruženje kvir aktivista], TANKA [Tuzlanska alijansa nezavisnih kvir aktivista] and Okvir. Activists from Mostar even organized their first queer festival (“mini queer fest”), however, the festival had an inward-facing nature and was not publicly announced (“INTERVJU: LibertaMo” 2015).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that before the fall of communism and the so-called fall of the Pink Curtain, nationalists and queer community members were actually not such strange bedfellows as one might presume. During the 1980s these two groups were united against a common enemy, namely the communist government. Only after the rise of religious nationalism was homosexuality constructed as a political enemy. This tactic was wholeheartedly embraced by religious nationalists. Marina Blagojević points out that with the fall of communism, religion reappeared as a dominant identification marker (qtd. in van der Berg et al. 2014: 121). Consequently, exclusion politics were strengthened, and the social norm became based on ethnicity and/or religious beliefs. There were even stronger connections between religious nationalism and homophobia, as homosexuals represented a threat from abroad – a so-called foreign import – emanating from neighboring countries and the West. This holds true for most of the post-Yugoslavian region except for Slovenia, where a special kind of cultural activism blossomed that was not characteristic of other queer movements. A so-called Western queer leak found its way to Slovenia by way of the film festival; queer activism, however, did not yet exist in the rest of the post-Yugoslavian region. There were no physical attacks at the first pride parade in Slovenia, as was the case in other parts of this region.¹⁸ Slovenia departed from its Yugoslavian-ness and achieved a Western European position from the 1980s onwards. Other countries followed suit, however, their achievement was only a political pink-washing strategy in order to enter the EU. For example, Ana Brnabić, an out-of-the-closet lesbian was appointed as the Serbian Prime Minister in June 2017. In September she participated in the pride parade and activists reported that the atmosphere was much more relaxed than it had been in previous years. Both events were widely publicized in international media. Nevertheless, nationalists and religious groups were still strongly opposed to LGBTI rights. More importantly, no new legislation protecting the queer community was enacted. For this reason, I

¹⁸ Yet, there is evidence of organized attacks on the queer community in Slovenia from 2004 onwards corresponding with the election of a right-wing government. This indirectly supports the argument about secret alliances between right-wing parties and homophobes.

confine my study exclusively to Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina – Slovenia being excluded.

The flow of homophobic intolerance in this case begins with religious and nationalist leaders and in succession trickles-down to everyday social interactions. Alliances between right-wing government officials and religious nationalists led to severe repercussions during the initial pride parades/festivals in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. The causal arrows fly in multiple directions and so do the interactions between nationalistic, religious, and queer discourses. This results in a constant re-creation of new resistance movements and strategies. One of these strategies is the use of various forms of art. It is a powerful weapon against oppressive political systems and has been used as such in the post-Yugoslavian region. Therefore, it is not surprising that the first mainstream queer films – analyzed later in this study – emerged during the same period as the organized homophobic attacks I addressed earlier. In the following chapters I emphasize how post-Yugoslavian-age queer cinema has had an activist and pedagogical effect on the community at large in the post-Yugoslavian region. There, I examine how specific films act as educational tools to de-heteronormalize societies of the post-Yugoslavian region. I pay particular attention to how these films – as a form of political intervention – have the potential to decrease homophobic tensions in this heteronormative environment where conditions for living a publicly-open queer life vary greatly from country to country. I focus chiefly on the first mainstream queer films from the region that I mentioned earlier. I analyze these films from the perspective of a political critique of homophobia within the post-Yugoslavian geographic region and further address the not yet investigated activist potential of exhibiting national and religious discourses in cinemas. While analyzing the queer activist tactics within these films, I view them with an eye for the local queer perspective. I also address how these tactics challenge homophobia through peculiar alliances, for example when queers and nationalists become strange or not so strange bedfellows.

CHAPTER 2: NO WAY OUT – GO WEST¹⁹

Orthodox Serbs hate Muslims. Muslims don't like Orthodox Serbs. The Croats also live there [in Bosnia-Herzegovina], they're Catholic and ambivalent towards Muslims. I think they currently don't like each other. However, this hatred will stop someday. They will lay down their guns and forget about the war. But they will continue to hate homosexuals. In the Balkans, your family would rather you were a murderer than a faggot.

Go West

In this chapter, I focus on Ahmed Imamović's 2005 film entitled *Go West*. It was the first mainstream feature-length film produced in Bosnia-Herzegovina to showcase a homosexual couple and remains so until the present-day. It portrays a love story between Bosniak Kenan (Mario Drmać) and Bosnian-Serb Milan (Tarik Filipović) and was set during the 1990s war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Most of the Bosnian-produced films from that period focused on the war, but none addressed homosexuality. *Go West* is not only the first Bosnian homosexually-oriented film but also the first Bosnian film to address queer identities during the war. In many Western novels and films that explore the intersection between war and homosexuality (*Aimée & Jaguar* [1999], *November Moon* [1984], *Serving in Silence* [1995], *Walk on Water* [2004], *Yossi & Jagger* [2002], *Platoon* [1986], etc.), the encounter always raises issues about non-normative masculinities. What makes this film ripe for study is the fact that it features an interracial homosexual relationship: the couple fear not only homophobic but also xenophobic responses.

The story begins in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Kenan is playing the cello in an orchestra during a concert for peace, amidst the beginning of the 1990s war. Illustrating

¹⁹ A part of an earlier version of this chapter is presented in Vravnik and Sremac (2016). Vravnik, as leading author, was responsible for the majority of the article; Sremac wrote subchapter 2 and contributed to the conclusion and general editing (Vravnik, Vesna and Srdjan Sremac. "Strange Bedfellows: (non/mis) Alliances between Nationalists and Queers." *Facta Universitatis, Series: Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2016, pp. 71-82).

war in the first scene, Milan is depicted simultaneously practicing karate and fighting. These scenes are inter-cut with scenes drawn from the peace concert. In the next scene we learn that the couple is attempting to flee the country in fear of their safety. On their way they stop in Milan's Serbian village, a territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina occupied by Serbians. Both xenophobic and homophobic tensions lead Kenan to dress as a woman and they pretend to live as a straight Serbian couple. Later, Milan is conscripted into the Serbian army and a local female sex worker named Ranka (Mirjana Karanović) discovers Kenan's gender-secret and rapes him. Soon after, Milan is killed at the frontline. In retribution for his perceived perversity, Ranka castrates Kenan and destroys his cello. Milan's father Ljubo (Rade Šerbedžija) then kills Ranka. With the assistance of Milan's friend Lunjo (Haris Burina), they help Kenan continue his journey Westward, although this time he is alone, heartbroken, and with an empty cello case.

I begin this study with the role of the cello, which I view as a symbol for hope as manifested in the form of classical music. In the opening scene, in a documentary-style face-to-camera close-up shot on French television, Kenan begins the story by explaining the hateful relationships that exist between Croatians, Serbians, and Bosniaks. As the epigram suggests, all of which have a common enemy, homosexuals. Kenan plays the cello beginning at the peace concert and throughout the film when he is trapped in Milan's village because of a war. In the last scene, he is still playing his instrument, only this time it is an invisible one. As problematic as the direct transfer of ideas are between East and West, here, in the film, East and West are symbolically talking to each other. This documentary-style dialogue frames the film with one segment at the beginning and another at the end. The cello is deployed to challenge homophobia and xenophobia. Nevertheless, as he plays the invisible cello, we the viewer can hear the music, but the journalist cannot and asks him to play louder.

The cello and its invisible counterpart correspond to the division between the local and Western perspectives. The cello is presented as a localized reason for hope and the West is perceived as a way out. It is a point of departure for the couple in a Serbian village where religion

propagates homophobia and xenophobia. They require protective camouflage, so they present themselves as a Serbian heterosexual couple. The boundary between visible and invisible plays a crucial role throughout the film and attaches a label to what does and does not pass for normal. Before proceeding Westward, they pass successfully at their heterosexually-organized wedding, which is, in actuality, a wedding between two homosexual men. This gender and nationalist closet does not protect them for very long since there is a complication in the village: the sex worker Ranka. She cannot, however, stop Kenan from proceeding Westward (after the death of Milan) nor can she take away his hope. Even though she destroys his cello, Kenan retains the instrument's case.

Yet, the element of hope lies not only in the cello, to which I will return at the end, but also in the relationships developed by the main characters. For instance, Lunjo assisted them with cross-dressing gender transformations and the preparation of counterfeit passports. Milan's father and Ljubo (a supposed traditional patriarch) ally themselves with Kenan after Milan dies and help him continue his journey Westward. Both Lunjo and Ljubo act to protect the main characters and stand united to challenge homophobia.

The film aids me in probing the encounters between homosexuality and the specificity of the Balkans' masculinist culture. Alternately expressed, I am interested in the non-normative masculinity that manifests itself in a region which is not only a complicated mix of ethnicities but also a mosaic of different religions, namely: The Eastern Orthodox Church, Islam, and Roman Catholicism. *Go West* is a film that paradoxically succeeds in shedding light on homosexuality in the Balkan region but fails to provide a positive or optimistic portrayal of homosexuals. The title of the film alludes to the extremely limited maneuvering room for sexual minorities and offers a suggestion. The only option, in the film at least, is for homosexuals to move (or escape) Westward. However, this is not my main notion, rather it illuminates the background of my concentration point: the relationships between the agents of various colliding groups. Specifically, I explore the unlikely alliances and activist tactics that challenge homophobia. The film provides viewers with

specific strategies – which could be considered rather dubious – but prove to be quite viable in the context of the film’s setting.

Political Positioning: A Cultural Coming Out and Visibility Politics

Go West is an original cultural intervention that took place in a region where national origins and religious beliefs are usually good predictors of the kind of message a story will convey. Regarding the war, most films produced in the region tend to take one political side or another. They mostly focus on the role that each political group played during the 1990s conflict. Most of the Bosnian films – produced during and after that period – portrayed Serbian people as aggressors. Imamović’s film did not. He also did not intentionally desire to be the spokesperson for any specific community. His film portrays characters involved in multi-ethnic relationships. In other words, the portrayal of gay characters and of the catastrophic homophobic violence occurs within a very specific geo-political context, i.e. Kenan is a Bosniak and Milan a Bosnian-Serb. This was not the case earlier in multi-ethnic Yugoslavia, but beginning at the start of the war, ethnicity played a major role and became a demarcation factor. Religious nationalism was erupting, and interracial relationships were perceived by these nationalists as a threat to national security. Homosexual relationships were similarly considered to be treasonous.

This film received more public attention than any other Bosnia-Herzegovinian film in most of the post-Yugoslavian countries. Moss remarks that it received twice as much local media coverage than any other film with a gay or lesbian theme (Moss 2007: 361). But in this case, visibility certainly does not mean acceptance or even a change in mentalities. Most commentators reported on the film in an enraged demeanor. Right-wing and religious groups violently critiqued the film and even sent Imamović death threats (Hawton 2005). Additionally, he received negative responses from queer community members who suspected him of cultural exploitation and of using homosexuality as a self-serving publicity tactic (Simić 2006b).

One of the first striking contradictions I noticed while studying the reception of the film was that conservative people were outraged by a film wherein homosexuality is neither celebrated nor presented in a positive way. It seems to send a rather pessimistic message about the homophobic construction of masculinities in the region. It portrays an immense imaginary homosexual threat; however, it is only one character, Ranka who believes homosexuality is a threat. Also, the narrative proposes only two solutions for a gay couple: to stay in the closet or flee the country in search of political, religious, and cultural freedom.

It is not my intention to suggest that globally queer people should rejoice or hail this film as a successful attempt to make homosexuality visible or as a positive portrayal. All the films included in the corpus of this study follow this logic: the films still cannot be celebrated as a cultural coming out or a clear marker of political progress. On the contrary, this is a film about homophobia rather than homosexuality. It is useful to analyze the specific kind of localized homophobia that emerged around the time the film was released to understand why violence was inflicted on homosexual men. *Go West* is the first film to portray such violence and to suggest survival strategies, limited as they are. Because they are limited, I focus on the complicated politics of visibility and the ambivalence of the film itself.

The various discursive voices that made their positions clear were often extreme and negative, yet the project had begun on a positive note by receiving government funding.²⁰ Perhaps then, it was not so absurd to imagine that queer communities would be encouraged to envisage the construction of alliances with governmental institutions. I suggest that this acceptance by the government and all the critiques promulgated by specific communities reveal a profound ambivalence for a film whose message remains mostly opaque. I do not propose to decide whether the film contributes to or denounces specific types of homophobia and xenophobia that the film narrative makes visible. Instead, I focus on the contradictions that make it difficult for queer activists, as well as for heteronormative voices, to lay claim to this tragic film.

²⁰ The national Foundation for Cinema Sarajevo [Fondacija za kinematografiju Sarajevo].

This first film from the region wherein homosexuality is represented can hardly be called a gay film because of the complex and contradictory visibility politics at play. Neither Kenan nor Milan are the film's focalizer and homosexuality seems to be filmed in such a way to make it acceptable to straight and/or homophobic audiences. Similar to Kenan's cross dressing or straight acting, the camera also remains in a sort of closet. On screen, Kenan and Milan never appear engaged in intimate scenes. Their only on-screen kiss is obscurely filmed in a dimly-lit corridor set during nighttime. In the scene, we see only silhouettes of two people who kiss at the end of a tunnel and the darkness perpetuates the mystery. Shortly thereafter, there is another intimate moment – without kissing this time – that takes place in their darkened room in Milan's village. In my view, homosexuality is filmed in such a way that does not break taboos. This was, however, enough visibility for the media to respond.²¹

The actors' reactions are more than ambivalent and can hardly be hailed as homosexual icons. Tarik Filipović, the actor who played Milan, distanced himself from the kiss scene and insisted that he was only playing a role.²² He claimed that he had never kissed a man and added that he would never again agree to play the role of a homosexual man (Moss 2012: 363). Apparently, distancing himself from the kiss seemed a necessary professional step to protect his career and shows an amount of acceptance of such violence. However, Mario Drmać who played Kenan, was proud of his role as a gay character. He even publicly lamented that the depiction of homosexual sexual relations was not included in the final version of the film (Moss 2012: 363).

The media's obsession with homosexual kissing and the contamination effect of a homosexual role on an actor's resume, is a pattern that is certainly not restricted to the Balkans. In the West retaliatory measures could include the withdrawal of sponsors and financial losses from advertisement revenue. The West, which the characters perceive as a kind of sanctuary, is actually rife with such occurrences. We only have to remember the scandal over the billboard depiction of

²¹ Especially in the articles of Iličić and Petrinović (2005): "How I was kissed by Tarik Filipović" and "The Secrets of my Feminine Side" pointed out by Moss (2012: 363).

²² A well-known figure who hosts the local version of *Who wants to be a Millionaire?* [*Tko želi biti milijunaš?*] on the Croatian national television channel HTV from 2002-2007 and 2009-2010 (Reić 2010).

two men kissing which appeared in a marketing campaign for Suitsupply, a Dutch fashion company which caters to men (“Zoenende mannen? ‘Mensen schrikken’” 2018). Vandals destroyed over thirty billboards; yet the very next day a political center-right party (VVD) launched a campaign by placing 100 posters depicting a homosexual kiss for each vandalized Suitsupply billboard (“VVD start postercampagne zoenende mannen” 2018).

Survival Tactics of Cross-Dressing

Cross-dressing has a long tradition in Western films dating back to the early days of the silent film era during the 1930s, with actors such as Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel. Nowadays the stakes are different because the reasons for passing vary from one film to the next. Cross-dressing can be presented in a playful manner in comedies, or – in paranoid narratives – as a serious threat to social stability (Phillips 2006: 5). John Phillis points out that in comedies such as *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), *Victor/Victoria* (1982), and *Some Like it Hot* (1959), cross-dressing is positioned as a functional pursuit to achieve a specific aim and a pragmatic solution to a problem. It is a temporary transgression which does not threaten the *status quo* and in fact reinforces heteronormativity. In thrillers, however, cross-dressing characters are almost exclusively presented as killers, sexual predators, or psychopaths, such as in films like *Psycho* (1960), *Dressed to Kill* (1980), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and *Freebie and the Bean* (1974).

Yet, the practice of cross-dressing or rather living as a woman, as presented in *Go West*, is radically different from what we see happening in Western and US cinema. *Go West* is inscribed in a very different local tradition where cross-dressing as a theme is governed by different socio-political norms. The constant fear of violence has consequences concerning the kinds of choices fictional gay characters are expected to find plausible. In *Go West*, the depiction of cross-dressing is not a defiant drag performance such as in *Paris is Burning* (1991) where voguing is both an art form and the manifestation of a chosen sexual and social identity. In *Go West* cross-dressing is not a

choice but a survival tactic. Kenan never actually feels like a woman, and there is no allusion to gender dysphoria or transgenderism in his case.

Two films that focus on cross-dressing were released in the region during the 1990s: *Dupe od mramora* (*The Marble Ass* 1994) directed by Želimir Žilnik and *Virgina* (*Sworn Virgin* 1991) directed by Srdjan Karanović.²³ *The Marble Ass* is a film about a real-life character named Vedran vernacularly known as Merlinka, a male transvestite and sex worker in Belgrade. Merlinka is a personage who is mocked and considered by some to display a deviant form of masculinity. Merlinka's boyfriend Johnny is drafted into the army and is subsequently killed. However, this film presents the main character as someone who chooses to cross-dress. The idea is not to hide one's sexual preference as in *Go West* but there is a striking similarity: the two stories are both set during wartime although this time in Serbia. Masculinity is systematically associated with violence, while femininity is limited to the domestic milieu. Sex in this story is used to convey the idea of maintaining peace. The famous anti-war slogan "Make Love, Not War" is befitting to this film since Merlinka is a sex worker who strives to make peace in her own way. This is certainly a similarity with *Go West*, but on the other hand, Kenan is raped by a sex worker and sex is used as a survival strategy.

Sworn Virgin is an even more important example to the extent that it highlights a cultural practice that is not completely recognizable in Western LGBTBI discourses and representations. Cross-dressing here has to do with one form of transgenderism, yet in a different context than in *Go West*. While Kenan is a homosexual man who lives as a woman because he fears discrimination and violence, Stevan is a woman who needs to become a man for social rather than sexual reasons. She is a straight woman but needs to accept the role imposed upon her by another aspect of a male-dominated culture. Because none of her siblings are male, Stevan, by default, cross-dresses as a

²³ Želimir Žilnik is one of the major film directors of the Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema known for his social engagement. Vedran was his favorite actor in *Beograd, dobro jutro* [*Good morning, Belgrade*] and *Lijepa žene prolaze kroz grad* [*Beautiful Women Passing through the Town*] both produced for television in 1986. He then played a major role in *The Marble Ass* before being killed in 2003. The perpetrators were set free in 2004 due to a lack of evidence (Kalaba 2017).

man in order to maintain the patriarchal tradition of Montenegrin and Albanian rural society. Known as sworn-virgins these woman-born women are pressured to live as men because the absence of a man at the head of the household is unthinkable in those societies, as Antonia Young writes extensively in her book *Women Who Become Men: Albanian Sworn Virgins* (2001). For the sworn-virgin, this specific form of transgender transformation only serves to reinforce the prestige and power of the symbolic male – the potentially transgressive sexual element is simply bypassed. The so-called new men are extracted from cultural sexual exchanges, this perpetuates the idea that the possibility of creating more potentially homosexual or deviant subjects, is foreclosed.

In *Go West*, however, the scenario is even more problematic since cross-dressing represents both a concession to heteronormativity and a cover-up, which functions as a dramatic incendiary device because a cross-dressing homosexual male is likely to create sexual panic and paranoia. Perhaps more importantly, while the sworn-virgins not only reinforce gender hierarchies but also uphold the cultural norms legitimized by their community, the hero-character of *Go West* transgresses not only gender and sexual norms but also the implicit taboo forbidding ethnic and religious exogamy. Kenan must metamorphize in order to survive; he must appear as a woman so that he may appear as a straight Serbian woman married to a non-Muslim Serbian man.

If sex is what the sworn-virgins must forgo, then it follows that it is also a weapon of oppression which is visually exhibited in *Go West*. Kenan, cross-dressed as a woman, is raped by a woman. While the kiss between the lovers is hidden in a deliberate silhouetted long-shot depicted at the end of a tunnel; the rape scene, conversely, is filmed in a daylight setting. The rape is depicted as being more desirable and appropriate: the camera does not flinch away from a shot which captures the raped person experiencing sexual satisfaction, whereas a legitimate homosexual kiss is taboo.

Kenan's first encounter with Ranka occurs the day after he arrives in the village. He is seen urinating standing in an outhouse located behind Milan's home. The doors only partially conceal him: from his ankles to his shoulders. Ranka sees him, but Kenan excuses himself because sitting

on such toilet would be considered unhygienic for a city girl. He maintains the deception this time, but while Milan is fighting at the battlefield, Ranka discovers Kenan's penis when she accidentally falls on him and feels his genitals beneath his skirt. Shortly thereafter she takes advantage of him and rapes him. He tries to resist but Ranka is persistent and continues pushing Kenan, eventually backing him up against a wall, when she finally – beyond the frame – grabs hold of his penis and says, "I'm so glad that you are not a woman," while the camera captures their faces in a close-up shot. There is no allusion here to whether he is homosexual or not, she seems only interested in his identity as a biological male. She uses him for her own sexual gratification, and in Kenan's case, the male body does not amount to masculinity.

One of the particularly disturbing elements of this scene is that Kenan does not actively fight back against Ranka. In order to keep his secret from spreading, he is required to have sexual relations with her. Sex now becomes currency: Kenan is both being raped and used as a sex worker, to the extent that the price of the sexual act protects his homosexual closet. There is, however, a sense that he is transforming, not only hiding: the closet changes him but the transformation is the opposite of coming out of the closet. The closet not only makes him look heteronormative, but it also, progressively, harms his body to the point of mutilation. Ranka's rape reiterates his position as a male body, but a male body who has lost the power that he was supposed to enjoy as a privilege. The pleasure that he seems to experience when he has sex can be read as a form of alienation from himself. If he is going to be a gay male, then he is, here literally, forced to indulge in heterosexual sex. Yet, this alleged pleasure is merely a strategy to survive. In the next scene Kenan pretends to enjoy the sex to keep Ranka from guessing that he is actually homosexual. To the extent that we know that he is at the mercy of Ranka, one wonders what the narrative is trying to transmit here. Perhaps because his body betrays him, he has no choice but to feel pleasure at the hands of someone who is coercing him.

The character is ensnared in a web of contradictions, all of which have to do with the necessity to be someone else, if he wants to survive. Socially, he is always in some sort of closet

that seems to uphold the conservative norm: his cross-dressing act is not a preference, it's a performance. He dresses as a woman so that his love for Milan can be perceived of as a heteronormative construction, but he is freely homosexual when he is alone with his partner. He is no transvestite, no drag queen, and certainly not transgender.²⁴ Yet, the film exhibits an apparently conservative and rather ironically transgressive perspective of cross-dressing. On a symbolic level, Ranka seizes the dominant masculine position while feminizing Kenan. However, when he is with Ranka, he is viewed as a lesbian. Soon thereafter, during their second sexual encounter, their roles become reversed. In order to retain the heterosexual perspective, Kenan – still dressed as a woman – assumes the dominant masculine position and penetrates Ranka anally. The scene opens with the sounds of a cello, which Kenan had played in the previous scene. The musical score serves as a leitmotif to homophobes who would think “Yes, finally!” but the film critiques the heterosexual perspective of this act since, the sound of the cello is presented as a tool to challenge homophobia, an issue to which I will return later.

Furthermore, the transformation will lead him towards a caricature of transgenderism. This can be observed during a nighttime scene filmed in the local graveyard. Kenan is shown sitting next to Milan's grave, without a dress or even a wig, almost naked – amidst a fit of tears. Moonlight illuminates his half-naked body while he plays his cello. When Ranka approaches him, there is dramatic music playing in the background. She then tries to save him, dress him up and hide him in her arms, Kenan resists and pushes her away. He expresses his love for Milan, but he also points out that he is a Muslim and does not belong on Serbian soil. This is the second reason he masquerades as a woman. Ranka replies that she can accept the fact that he is Muslim, since she has a son whose father is also Muslim. Kenan, however, continues to comport himself as a homosexual man and insists that he has never loved a woman as much as Milan. “Do you understand?” he shouts. Ranka refuses to believe him, hurriedly undresses him and attempts to initiate sex, saying that he belongs

²⁴ Being forced into heteronormativity reminds me of Iran's supposedly liberal trans-policy. Homosexuality is treated as gender identity disorder not as homosexuality *per se*, which enables some subjects to avoid repressive laws. This policy opens up some safe space for homosexuals, yet they need to undergo gender transformations to be able to express their same-sex desire in a heteronormative way (Najmabadi 2013: 1-3).

to her. Kenan finally manages to thwart her advances. The dramatic music then becomes louder while the camera travels around and behind a wooden cross that stands before a tombstone. When Kenan rejects the notion of continuing to be her sex toy, she punishes him in a harshly possessive way. Clutching a knife, Ranka raises her hand, and in one fell swoop, separates his testicles from his body.

When Kenan refuses to remain in the internalized or a so-called transparent closet – while he is telling Ranka that he loves Milan – she attacks him and focuses her attention on his genitals. Now she is trying to turn him into a castrated man and attempts to eliminate a part of the male body that represents masculinity in a hetero-normative patriarchal society. What she cannot eliminate, however, is the fact that he still loves Milan. The price he must pay for the self-disclosure of his sexual orientation is that his body must bear the marks of homophobia: he becomes a man without testicles, who has endured a barbaric punishment for not complying with the rapist's coercive tactics.

The film suggests that the only desperately cruel and tragic way for him to continue to relate to a heterosexual male body is to deny what is problematic about his maleness: the physical sign of maleness which, in the warped logic of the narration, is supposed to be in contradiction to his sexual preference. Ranka's jealous and disturbed character, redesigns Kenan's body to make it compatible with her own gruesome morals. The narrative denounces her acts by presenting her as a sadistic clairvoyant who predicts the future from a coffee cup and places a curse on Milan's body. The price of her corrupted logic is that someone's body must be mutilated. Thus, the mutilated body becomes the physical representation of the price to be paid in order to propagate such apparently normative – but in fact incredibly violent fantasies – of binary oppositions. When institutionalized sexism, intersecting with homophobia/Islamophobia, Kenan is raped not just as a woman but also as homosexual and Muslim.

The film presents a theme which is rarely addressed, namely the fact that men are also victims of rape, in a context where women are so often the victims of rape more than men. The

narrative makes it particularly clear that rape is a weapon that can be deployed within both homosexual and heterosexual structures. Dubravka Žarkov argues that rape is a way to realign or eliminate a person's ethnicity. Sexual violence against male bodies also has to do with castration: it can be symbolically seen as a means to emasculating entire ethnic groups (2001: 78). In Žarkov's eyes, sexual intimidation or violence serves to humiliate an entire ethnic group. In the case of the homosexual male cross-dressed as a heterosexual female, the group that is targeted is the entire sexual minority community, regardless of their ethnicity and/or sexual preference.

Ambivalence in Local Perception

Gendered identity and sexual practices are constantly being policed by governmental and religious groups. Consequently, any narrative that depicts homosexual characters must also consider the dominant and conservative definitions of what constitutes a nation, a traditional family, and a so-called normal body. To expose the homophobic and xenophobic tensions within this film, I investigate how nationalism, religion and sexual minorities become intertwined.

Firstly, this geographic region is traditionally homophobic, therefore homosexual people can expect little assistance from the legal system. Governmental institutions and legislation are still officially heteronormative. Neither homosexual marriage nor partnership agreements exist. Homosexuality was decriminalized relatively late (in 1996 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in 1998 in Serbia²⁵) and the only existing legal protection²⁶ is the 2009 Anti-Discrimination Law that makes it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of "sexual orientation, gender identity, or sexual characteristics."²⁶ However, this law has never been properly implemented. Vladana Vlasić, a program coordinator at Sarajevo's Open Center [Sarajevski otvoreni centar] argues that there is no harmonization between the existing legislation and the 2009 Anti-Discrimination Law, which should have been implemented by 2010. Additionally, no discrimination register has ever been

²⁵ The film focuses on a Bosnian-Serbian Republic established within the borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

²⁶ 2009 Anti-Discrimination Law, Article 2.

established, which was supposed to be introduced by the Ministry for Human Rights. Furthermore, the government did not educate the public about the prohibition of discrimination nor did they explain the mechanisms of protection (Sekulić 2013).

Secondly, when it comes to promoting national autonomy, the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina does not hesitate to use openly homophobic rhetoric. The country is also systematically equated with or imagined as a homogeneous heterosexual society. While countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, France, and the Scandinavian countries, along with a rising number of US states, proudly proclaim their acceptance of sexual diversity, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, however, homosexuality is still perceived of as a threat to national, cultural, and religious security. Tomasz Sikora suggests that “as long as the construction of masculinity (a male-inflected nationalism) involves a ban on homosexuality, the figure of the homosexual will be (as it has been) represented as anti-national” and in my opinion, ostracized in various ways (2004: 74).

Thirdly, beyond the law and the fact that the nation embraces heterosexual masculinity, homosexuals also suffer from an alliance between government and religious communities. In several religious discourses, homosexuality is presented as sinful, unnatural, and even as a mental illness, and the war has reinforced this latent homophobia (Jovanović 2013: 87-88). There is no natural progress towards liberalization. During the war and its aftermath, homophobic discourses were mobilized in the context of a societal re-traditionalizing trend and national re-patriarchialization. Importantly, at the turn of the 21st century, homophobia is a form of xenophobia and vice-versa. For instance, during the attacks on Belgrade’s gay pride celebration, neo-Nazis were chanting: “Serbia for Serbs, faggots out!” [“Srbija Srbima, napolje pederima!”]. In their opinion, queer people may not belong to the nation. Similarly, in Croatia, homosexuals were viewed as Serbians. During Croatia’s 2002 pride celebration, a throng of demonstrators were heard chanting “Go to Serbia” and “Kill the Serbs.” Homosexuals are considered by various strata of society as a subaltern other, being a domestic enemy, and a threat to the nation – internally and abroad. Croatian nationalism is profoundly homophobic, and homophobia is perceived to be in the national interest.

Moreover, homophobic xenophobia has added another component to the rhetoric: The West is accused of infecting the region with hemophilia and homosexuality. On the one hand, this is a very familiar trope: sexual deviants are also strangers and traitors. Their presence triggers the kind of “homosexual panic” described by Eve Sedgwick in her book *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). What is specific to the region, however, is the emphasis given to the interwoven forms of homophobia and xenophobia. Contrary to what Sedgwick describes as homosocial contradictory impulses – the panic caused when “intense male homosocial desire [is] as at once the most compulsory and the most prohibited of social bonds” (1990: 187) – the crisis here centers around the suspicion that Western discourses are infiltrating the Balkan region because of the presence of homosexuals. Part of the process of joining the EU addresses changes in human rights laws, which makes it more hospitable to the queer community. That situation has prompted a backlash because Europeanization is seen as a threat to the Muslim community and religious nationalists. In other words, homophobia has its sources not only in traditional religious and nationalist sympathies but is also caused by new forms of anti-globalization sentiment.

Meanwhile, ultra-rightwing nationalists and religious groups were accused of attacking homosexuals and were violently opposed to what these Westernized bodies symbolized. On the one hand, homosexual relationships are not protected by domestic laws and there is already a strong homophobic discourse coming from religious and nationalist voices. On the other hand, homophobes feel threatened by the (perceived) continued Western liberalization: their homophobia becomes now linked with anti-Western rhetoric. This paranoid plot assumes that queer people are vectors of conceptual infection. It follows then that a narrative of this genre produced within the geographic region is *de facto* already influenced by these discourses, and *Go West* is no exception.

Consequently, it is no surprise that the myth of the West as promised-land was appropriated by filmmakers. At the end of the film the West is presented as the only refuge from homophobia. At this point in the film, Kenan has been the victim of horrific homophobic violence and his lover Milan has been killed. Milan’s friend, Lunjo, is shown waiting with Kenan for the train to the West.

The camera shows us the train station in the distance. It makes the spectator aware of the Serbian flag flying atop a building and of the presence of soldiers in the background. Meanwhile, Kenan and Lunjo are sitting on a bench. Kenan is again cross-dressed as Milena and appears seated quietly exhibiting an empty stare. Lunjo gets emotional and begins to cry. He says:

I plan to desert as well. War is a crap. Do you know how much industry has progressed? But we're fighting instead. We must catch up, bro. But we'll never catch up. How can we catch up? We never will! Fuck, we're persecuting each other like we are still in the Middle Ages. Abroad they're producing computer chips. Do you know how much data a computer chip the size of a fingernail can hold? A million! And what's happening with us? We're attacking each other on hills and in forests. Don't we have anything more intelligent to do? You must go West, that's my advice!

The quasi-orientalist myth of the West as peaceful and technologically advanced is appropriated by a desperate character who sees no way out except emigration. The film accuses the warring communities of being caught in their own barbaric past. The West is about production and industry, in contrast, the Balkans are somewhat underdeveloped, rural, and self-destructive. The film shows that this is the form that homophobia takes.

Imamović thus reproduces some of the stereotypical views of the Balkans that can be found in travelogues directed by Western filmmakers (*In the Land of Blood and Honey* [2011], *The Whistleblower* [2010], *Welcome to Sarajevo* [1997], etc.). The fact that the director is from the region does not make much of a difference in this case. Jordanova points out that filmmakers from the Balkans internalize the foreign point of view (2001). However, here, a bit differently. The West is presented as a place where queer people could escape homophobia, a dreamland where one longs to live. However, the West is a sort of home that was never a home, it is only nostalgia for a

(dream) home, which no longer exists. And now, Kenan is almost like a foreigner, although the couple never left the home that does not recognize them. The title *Go West* alludes to the pessimistic conclusion of the story: if you are queer in the Balkans, then the only solution is to emigrate West, which is seen as the promised land of sexual liberation. Although, the West is presented as a dream domicile for homosexuals, Western nations, however, do not hear the local realities: metaphorically, they do not hear the cello. The West is not just presented as ambivalent because it welcomes people and ignores local issues but also, because – in the eyes of homophobes – it is threatening, and it is thought to attract homosexuals.

This is also a common approach in other post-Yugoslavian homophile films. It creates schizophrenic audiences who might identify with all these messages concurrently. When the film is seen by Western audiences, however, the same sort of in-and-out positioning will lead to other interpretations. The Western viewer might be willing to resist the idea that the West whom he or she knows well, could be such a safe haven. Queer people in the Balkans may also refuse such a myth. Homophobes in the West may find it frightening if Balkan queer people should see the West as a safe-haven and reproduce the same xenophobia – from within the West – that Eastern countries are espousing. The film continuously interweaves Eastern and Western notions to illustrate a struggle for dominance.

The film seems to be a pessimistic tragedy, yet I would argue that one of the positive elements is that it serves as the beginning of a public dialogue between the queer community and homophobes. The film's dialogue is indeed violent but at least it contributes in another way to the visibility of the queer community and public discourse on homosexuality in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The film received much attention in national, regional and international media: there was twice as many articles published about *Go West* than any other film included in this study. Before the film was even released, director Imamović and co-writer Enver Puška were physically attacked and received death threats from enraged conservatives and Islamic religious groups (Hawton 2005). A right-wing pro-Muslim magazine *Walter* even published an edition where the main actors and the

director were depicted on the cover engaged in an anal orgy. The cover characterized the film as blasphemous, a religious term that equates homosexuality with sin. Journalist Fatmir Alispahić wrote that homosexuality is a physical disease. He criticized the director for appealing to what he calls the “faggot lobby” to promote himself (Spahić 2005). Since the film was promoted as a “love story between two soldiers on the front,” the protesters claimed that it is “the most controversial film” ever produced in Bosnia-Herzegovina (qtd. in Moss 2011: 358, 361). Islamic intellectuals criticized the lack of distinction between the victims and aggressors (Pavičić 2006). During an episode of *Hayat*, a pro-Islamic talk show on NTV, the film was introduced as making a “mockery” of the Muslim genocide during the war (Soares 2005). Enver Čausević, an editor at *Walter*, claims that “by addressing the issue of homosexuality in a film about the Bosnian war, it belittles the real issues at stake during the conflict” (Hawton 2005). Right-wing and religious leaders were incensed by the fact that the issue of homosexuality could be the focus of a story about the Balkan war.

One of the most original and provocative elements of the narrative is that the borders of ethnicity and heteronormativity are simultaneously transgressed. Any love story between a Bosniak and a Bosnian-Serb would obviously be controversial. Before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, mixed marriages were considered to be a positive and significant characteristic of the region (Korac 1998: 162), after the war in 1990s a re-traditionalizing and re-patriarchialization process started which made mixed marriages a target of conservatives. They were described as “bastard families, that are polluting the biological national source of family” (Mitić qtd. in Korac 1998: 162). Korac argues that this rhetoric was only a pretext for further ethnic cleansing (1998: 162-64). As a result, homosexuality is almost only an extenuating circumstance in the view of homophobes. The fact that the story is about a bi-ethnic but homosexual couple can be perceived of by homophobes as a relief, because it gives them the ability to focus on one transgression and deliberately turn a blind eye to the other.

At the beginning of *Go West*, we hear Kenan say:

Orthodox Serbs hate Muslims. Muslims don't like Orthodox Serbs. The Croats also live there [in Bosnia-Herzegovina], they're Catholic and ambivalent towards Muslims. I think they currently don't like each other. However, this hatred will stop someday. They will lay down their guns and forget about the war. But they will continue to hate homosexuals. In the Balkans, your family would rather you were a murderer than a faggot.

It is clear that there is hatred towards different ethnic groups which is a result of the rise of religious nationalism and an ethnically-based war. Yet the monologue also exposes the hope that xenophobia will someday be surpassed, and the war will end. But all ethnic groups will continue to have a common enemy: queer people.

On one hand, Kenan helps us imagine a hierarchy of acceptability when he points out that as a homosexual, he is less likely to be accepted than a veteran. That statement reflects the recent history of alliances forged between Croatian, Bosniaks, and Serbian war veterans. When Croatian and Bosniak veterans came to understand that their Serbian counterparts received no pensions, they decided to collect money for them ("Ujedinjeni u siromaštvu" 2012; T.V. 2012). This clearly shows a historical possibility of alliances between inter-racial war veterans. Apparently, nowadays, it does not even matter which side the soldiers were on. But while the borders of ethnicity may now seem more porous, no such thing happens with sexual borders. Sexual minorities are perceived of as threats to the national security. And alarmingly, the level of homophobia has actually increased after the war. No narrative of progress or automatic increase of acceptance is possible.

On the other hand, homophobic religious groups were not the only vocal critics. The queer community also objected to the film's content. The director was not gay himself and was accused of cultural appropriation: issues surrounding his finances and rise to celebrity was viewed as problematic. Croatian theorist and vocal lesbian Mima Simić, accused him of using homosexuality in a story about the war to make it more dramatic and to attract wider international audiences

(2006). In her view, he did not want to help the community to challenge homophobia but rather he took advantage of the oppressed sexual minority. The director's response was unexpectedly dismissive and aggressive. He addressed her as "it" ["ono"] and then invited her to perform fellatio ("Redatelj filma 'Go West' kritičarki" 2006).²⁷ This incredible hostility reflects what is at stake in this struggle for a contested cultural terrain. Also, any kind of attack on an openly homosexual activist should be considered homophobic. Imamović claims that his remark was not homophobic: he said in the interview with Moss that his remarks about Simić was not levied against her for being homosexual, but "for her putting words in his mouth" (qtd. in Moss 2012: 365). He might not be a homophobe, but he certainly acts sexist. He admits that he does not know what it is like for queer communities-at-large, yet he expected the local queer community to accept and defend the film. This is confirmed when he says: "I started things rolling, and you didn't join in. I have the balls to make this film, and you didn't have the strength to join me" (qtd. in Moss 2012: 365). He employs a classic macho image of courage to defend himself. It follows then that his sexist and homophobic statement can generate meanings that the director himself cannot control. He is not willing to give voice to a community that suspects his motives. On the other hand, his argument: "I have the balls" makes a clear distinction between him and the queer community. Setting the metaphor aside, he is clearly upset that the community do not recognize any sort of alliance. However, it is impossible to ignore the masculinist reference to genitalia as a form of courage. Does the statement mean that he literally has testes and they do not? Or does it mean that only men have the correct genitalia to create a revolution, but women and homosexuals cannot? I argue that the lines of alliances are far from clear and contaminated by homophobia, sexism, nationalism, and religious discourses.

Regardless of the fact that the film offers conflicting arguments by both religious and homosexual communities, Svetlana Đurković, a leader of Organization Q argues that this film helps promote LGBTI rights:

²⁷ "It" ["ono"] is a neutral pronoun and when used for a person it has a dehumanizing effect.

I support this film [*Go West*]; it represents a big challenge and offers an alternative. It shows the human perspective of a story that is stronger and much more important than many of the so-called big issues. I believe that afterwards, things will no longer be the same again; our people will overcome many prejudices. This film is indeed a promotion of human rights. (qtd. in Spahić 2005)

Đurković also remarks that the director portrays untold stories from the war. Due to religious and nationalistic mosaics in Bosnia-Herzegovina there were many ethnically mixed relationships, also within queer communities. Đurković is not afraid of negative criticism but rather she argues that it exposes the immaturity of journalism: “Homosexuality is something that has always been hidden in this society. So, people don’t know how to react when it comes to the surface. They feel threatened.” (qtd. in Hawton 2005). Despite, or perhaps precisely because of the controversy, activists from Bosnia-Herzegovina were satisfied to see a homosexual couple as the focal point of the narrative.

What is also important to consider is the fact that the film received governmental funding and resources which helped the queer community gain national recognition. A countrywide fund, the Foundation for Cinema Sarajevo (Fondacija za kinematografiju Sarajevo), donated €175,000 to offset the production costs of *Go West*.²⁸ We could expect to see from the strong alliance between the government and the church during the recent war, that they would take the same stance to the common enemy – homosexuals – but this was not the case with this film. The request for financial support was not rejected; it therefore implicitly acknowledged and permitted a film to be produced about homosexuality. However, according to the director, this was not enough money to fully support the film, therefore a Croatian co-producer Alka Film offered his technical equipment as part of a joint venture (Jovičević 2005). It is common for films from this region to search for

²⁸ This foundation allocates €750,000 annually for cinema productions.

international co-producers (Bubalo 2004). Iordanova argues that after the 1990s, many Eastern European countries enacted massive budgetary reductions and withdrew funding from many areas – this had a severe impact on film productions (Iordanova 2001: 571). Therefore, co-production practices played an essential role in filmmaking. She contends that “during this difficult decade, cinematic co-productions came to play a vitally important role within the film industries of all Eastern European countries” (2001: 517). The director did not just form an alliance with the government but also with neighboring countries. I suggest that the focus of these alliances was not on the content of the film, but on supporting artistic production in general, which clearly was not the case with religious groups.

Until now, I have investigated the ambivalent reception of an ambivalent film, now I highlight the rare moments where the homosexual characters are assisted by people who are aware that Kenan and Milan are not an ordinary Serbian heterosexual couple.

Activist Tactics: Rhetoric of *Détournement* and Music as (Inaudible) Critique

The robust homophobic elements present in and centering around *Go West*, either in the film’s implicit cultural references or in the way it was received (including the actors’ desires to distance themselves from their homosexual characters) are not good reasons to simply ignore it or refuse to welcome it into the archives of queer cinema. Instead, I propose a queer approach to other elements that can easily be ignored if we do not read against the grain. In the last section of this chapter, I focus on what can be seen as moments of unexpected solidarity and alliances that develop in the midst of – and often without directly confronting – omnipresent homophobic religious and nationalist discourses. I expressly address moments of solidarity that, when translated into the world of activism, offer the beginning of a repertoire of tactics.

One spectacular and unexpected alliance develops between a heterosexual father and his homosexual son. It is certainly intriguing for queer activists to understand how a father-figure can stand for patriarchal structures and at the same time, form an alliance with the partner of his gay

son. In order for alliances between heterosexual men and the queer community to succeed, heterosexual men need to question the dictates of religion and governmental bodies. The film deploys a form of resistance to seize upon dominant discourses of religion and nationalism that produce heteronormativity in the region. It exemplifies a rhetoric of *détournement*: it invites us to focus on these alliances, rather than on homophobia as a dominant discourse.²⁹ Guy Debord and Gil Wolman argue in *A User's Guide to Détournement* (1954) that it is a rhetoric of subversive misappropriation of a dominant discourse in which “any sign is susceptible to conversion into something else, its opposite” (1954/2006: 18). Nedra Reynolds further argues that this tactic can be most effective in “draw[ing] attention to ... marginalized speakers and writers” as well as to “the ideological workings of discursive exclusion” (1998: 60). My own contribution or adoption of *détournement* consists in focusing on elements of the film that were rarely discussed and may not constitute crucial statements. Therefore, this form of analyzation can prove quite productive. I do not only focus on the challenging alliance between father and son but also on the thought-provoking role of the father in this conservative setting. This alliance can be better understood through an analysis of the regulation of power structures by the government and different religions. In *Go West*, Ljubo is the patriarch of the family. Spectators aware of the dominant ethos in Bosnia-Herzegovina will therefore expect a typical authority figure whose role as a father cannot be completely separated from nationalism because the *paters familias* can also be viewed as fathers of the nation. What kind of solidarity can be forged with their minority-loved-ones or with what they represent?

Firstly, how do alliances between hetero- and homosexual men work? Kenan and Milan form a strong alliance with Milan's heterosexual friend Lunjo who deserts the Serbian army and helps them obtain a wig and counterfeit passports. This alliance seems to work only by breaking the laws of the nation-state: i.e. army desertion. Similarly, and in order to protect his son, Milan's father Ljubo resists the patriarchal father-figure image and offers to help his son's partner escape to the

²⁹ *Détournement* is a French term with several meanings including: “turning expressions of the capitalist system and its media culture against itself” Holt (2010: 252).

West. Both Lunjo and Ljubo betray one rule to respect another. As we see, religious and nationalist extremists oppose the queer community and are in constant conflict. Only by the rejection of a traditionalist patriarchal heterosexual position, can one actually cooperate with the queer community.

Ljubo also directly confronts a discourse that defines family equality, bloodlines, and by extension national values. When soldiers come back from the front with news that Milan has died, the local priest is depicted singing nationalist songs; Ljubo asks him to stop alluding to political rhetoric. The priest prays for Milan's "hero blood" ["janačka krv"] but Ljubo counters with another tune: "Whose blood? Whose blood? My blood!" ["Čija krv? Čija krv? Moja krv!"].³⁰ Ljubo is presented from an unfamiliar angle and as not being in line with stereotypical father figures of the post-Yugoslavian geographic region. It seems as though bloodlines are only an illusion in traditional patriarchal structures of male-dominated societies. In this scene the director manages to transgress the nationalist bloodline discourse and presents it as a fantasy. Ljubo occupies a balanced position between Bosniak and Bosnian-Serb while transgressing their conservative patriarchal boundaries. He rejects his traditional identity not just because he sides with his dead son and his partner, but also because he refuses to allow Milan's body to be used by nationalists as a symbol of ethnic violence.

The father image brings even more contradictions to light. After Ranka screams repeatedly to Ljubo: "Your Milan is a faggot" ["Tvoj Milan je peder"] his reaction is to invoke a concept that is normally appropriated by the Church. He claims that his son is "holy" to him and bypasses his sexual orientation. His reaction is to abruptly push her away; he does so with such force that she falls, hits her head and dies. This is confirmed by a close-up shot showing her face, and then time seems to march on with a montage, showing Ljubo taking wounded Kenan with him. What now becomes important is that Ljubo helps Kenan go West.

³⁰ Milan also refuses to present his fiancé(e) as a symbol of nationhood, a Serbian woman, when he is asked at the military check point, "Is she ours?" ["Ali je ona naša?"], meaning does she belong to the Serbs, he answers "She's mine, bro" ["Moja, brate. Moja!"].

The fact that a straight father should support his son even after being told that he is homosexual, comes as a surprise after the scene where Ljubo kills Ranka. On the one hand, the father is a figure of authority, he is an allegory of the nation, which should make the audience expect him to be violently homophobic, but this is perhaps, in itself, a form of critical homophobia that the film denounces. This also marks the end of the journey for the father. Having helped his son's lover escape to the West and entrusted him with the legacy of his wife, he commits suicide as if there was nowhere else to go. Regardless of the nature of the alliance that existed between father and son, it was saturated with violence. Because he commits suicide, we might assume he breaks the alliance. Yet, we might also assume he has finished his mission.

However, the film proposes two images of a father: one that fits the patriarchal role and its counterpart, a liberal father, who opposes patriarchal structures. Ljubo is happy to marry his son off; he organizes a large-scale Serbian-style wedding with loud music, excessive drinking, and a banquet that lasts for three days. The film also depicts him as an ordinary villager who goes to Church every Sunday. Given the conservative context, the spectator may be forgiven for assuming that the figure of the father will be perceived – including by his homosexual son – as the guardian of patriarchal and heteronormative norms. In *The Unbearable Comfort of Privacy: The Everyday Life of Gays and Lesbians* [*Neznosno udobje zasebnosti: Vsakdanje življenje gejev in lezbijk*] (2005) Švab and Kuhar conclude that revealing one's sexual identity to one's mother is a radically different gesture in Slovenian society than revealing it to one's father: the father remains feared as an authority figure and the mother does not (76-78). These expectations are already contradicted by the name of the character, an element that will most likely not be perceptible to viewers who do not understand the local language. Ljubo means Ljubomir in Bosnian³¹ and is comprised of "love" ["ljubi"] and "peace" ["mir"]. Love and peace are present as a sign to decode, or an oblique allusion. The film thus proposes a narrative that questions, rejects or at least complicates accounts drawn by sociologists.

³¹ Also in Croatian, Serbian, and Slovenian.

A liberal image of a father is a character who will protect his son (and his memory) by assisting his homosexual lover. After Ljubo kills Ranka, he assembles the family jewelry and gathers his savings to give it to Kenan for his traveling expenses. Ljubo then gives him the counterfeit passport and places Milan's passport inside Kenan's shirt – close to his heart. He says: “Go and find your happiness. For your and Milan's soul” [“Idi i nadji svoju sreću. Za tvoju i Milanovu dušu”]. He then gives him a photograph of Milan and Kenan (dressed as Milena) at their wedding. With this interchange, Ljubo makes Kenan their heir, however, Kenan is still concealed as a Serbian woman, but this time the fake filiation is life affirming. Kenan will carry the memory of Milan's mother; this is the moment when Milan's mother and Ljubo spiritually become Kenan's mother- and father-in-law. As opposed to during the sham marriage where it was all just a performance and a strategy to survive.

Setting up an alliance between a traditional father figure and a homosexual figure in Bosnia-Herzegovina is only one rhetorical tactic of *détournement* – a constant conflict between male-dominated society and the queer community. The idea of an alliance between a father and his homosexual son displays solidarity between nationalists and the queer community. Similar alliances are also addressed in the film *The Parade* which I examine in Chapter 5. These alliances are imaginary opportunities for queer activists.

The second example of *détournement* I wish to focus on is the use of classical music. To underscore the visual scenery that challenges homophobia, the director employs classical music in various ways. It is used for theme music, the background score, and to make a political statement – indeed, music plays a pivotal role in this film. It exemplifies the debate between dominant discourses and counter discourses. Music emanating from the Serbian village includes not only sounds made by nationalistic trumpets and religious stringed-instruments such as the gusle, but also abrasive sounds such as the sound made by a chainsaw accompanied by two singing villagers. This is the dominant sound; the classical music is to be considered a counter-sound. Piano music can be heard in the background when Ljubo helps Kenan reach the West. An even stronger element,

however, are the resonant sounds of the cello. Kenan is depicted playing his cello on numerous occasions: first at the peace concert in Sarajevo, then several times in the village when Milan is recruited into the army, and after he dies, and during the TV interview, where the French journalist could not hear the sound of an invisible instrument. Richard Terdiman points out that “for every level at which the discourse of power determines dominant forms of speech and thinking, counter-dominant strains challenge and subvert the appearance of inevitability which is ideology’s primary mechanism for sustaining its own self-reproduction.” (1985: 39-40). In this case, artistic output becomes a symbol of resistance: the act of playing the cello is intended as a weapon in the war of hatred between nations and towards homosexuals.

Dominant and counter discourses are in constant flux and conflict. The sound of the cello is often cross-cut with sounds from church bells or a gusle. This signifies an oscillation between the dominant discourses of religion and nationalism, and the power of resistance incarnated in the cello. Imamović uses cross-cutting techniques and parallel editing to show Kenan playing the cello at the Sarajevo peace concert before the war began. This is inter-cut with images of Milan training at the karate club, during a period where all nationalities present in Sarajevo could live and train together. The karate fight impersonalizes the conflict between Croats, Bosniaks, and Serbians – this being the dominant discourse, while the sounds of the cello performance act as a counter language and discourse that is desperately trying to establish peace. Then, when messengers from the warfront arrive in the village, we hear church bells while the priest descends from atop the hill. Kenan starts to play his cello, which ends in a visual montage of the priest playing his gusle and singing nationalists songs. After Milan’s death is announced, the priest attempts to play the gusle but Ljubo attacks him and prohibits him from delivering the eulogy at the funeral. Both instruments attempt to commemorate war victims: the gusle represents a dominant instrument and the cello a counter-instrument and symbol of resistance.

Classical music, or more specifically the cello, became a symbol of cultural resistance during the siege of Sarajevo thanks to first-chair cellist Vedran Smajlović, who I expounded on in

Chapter 1. The closest resemblance with Kenan is, when Kenan plays cello after Milan dies, but Kenan is seen as taking the position of resistance throughout the whole film. Ranka, however, refuses to hear the message of the cello. After she castrates Kenan she removes a wooden cross from Milan's grave and begins to attack Kenan's cello, which she eventually destroys. Here, a Christian religious symbol is used to destroy an instrument intended to challenge homophobia. Yet, as we see at the end of the film, the cello is destroyed, sounds become inaudible, but Kenan can still play to an audience. The viewer can indeed experience the melodious music, yet the French journalist cannot. She is incapable of tuning-in to the sounds of homophobia. This scene represents Imamović's ideas regarding the problem of knowledge transfer through the East-West divide, wherein the West could not properly see or understand the East.

CHAPTER 3: WHO'S QUEER HERE: HOMOSEXUAL COHABITATION IN POST-WAR CROATIA

They lick each other. ... Now I know why their families abandoned them. That's why that little whore refused my Daniel. These whores need to be taught a lesson!

Fine Dead Girls

In this chapter I analyze the Croatian film *Fine Dead Girls*, directed by Dalibor Matanić in 2002. It is the first – and currently the only – mainstream Croatian film that focuses on the lives of lesbian characters. Because of this, it is ripe for analysis as an important example of lesbian-focused film whose mainstream production has helped it spread queer discourse to a wider population.

The film depicts a love story between a lesbian couple, Iva (Olga Pakalović) and Mare (Nina Viočić), who move into a new apartment in a building with an apparently friendly landlady named Olga (Inge Appelt). She gives the impression that her place is a quiet and safe environment. Besides Olga, her cowardly husband Blaž (Ivica Vidović) and conservative son Daniel (Krešimir Mikić), there are also other tenants: a sex worker Lidija who receives her clients in her room, a doctor who performs illegal abortions, his mentally disabled son, an old man who hides the body of his recently-deceased wife, in order to continue to collect her pension, and finally a housewife who is constantly abused by her husband – a violent nationalist war veteran who plays loud music late at night.

The couple choose to remain closeted and they are perceived as two friends. They do not actively disguise their identities like in *Go West*, nor have they publicly revealed their sexual orientation. Soon the couple realize that the building is under continuous surveillance by Olga, who polices the building meticulously. This eventually leads to abuse and violence once Olga discovers the couple's secret. After their forced coming out, they are violently pushed back into the closet

which results in Iva being raped and Mare being killed while fighting for her partner. Then, Iva returns to her former boyfriend Dalibor, gets pregnant and bears a child.

The film contributes to the discourse about the political situation in post-war Croatia and displays a sort of micro-cosmos in its portrayal of homophobic responses to homosexuality. It shows these characters as others, living on the edge of normality. Their otherness is also visually underscored: the apartment building is located next to railway lines and a road which perpendicularly bisects the tracks – these trajectories can be viewed as lines of normality and abnormality. The film is set up in such a way that in one rail direction people are seen as being normal and in the other direction as being deviant. The hierarchy that exists in the building places the lesbian couple at the bottom of the pecking order and are persecuted by all the other tenants. Yet, the couple's cohabitation with the other inhabitants and the forming of strange alliances indeed propose ways to escape the strict heteronormative views portrayed in the film.

First, I analyze a moment during which Olga's husband Blaž finally acknowledges that his wife's homophobic actions have gone too far. When Mare is killed, he decides to help Iva escape the building. To analyze the political potential of the alliances between Blaž and the couple, I first investigate the local heteronormative perspective of post-war Croatian society to observe how compulsory heterosexuality/heteronormativity and homophobic violence contributes to the creation of a transparent closet. I am also interested in the representation of certain types of violence as a form of denunciation of homophobia. I aim to explore the kinds of violence perpetrated and how the film denounces them. The film critiques a supposedly virtuous discourse of nationalism and religious purity. Since *Fine Dead Girls* is the first mainstream film that focuses on lesbian characters, it is itself a sort of coming out. For the first time, a lesbian theme is introduced to Croatian society through a film's narrative. Therefore, to understand local realities and homophobia in the region, it is important to analyze how Croatian society received it and what discourses the film deployed.

Secondly, I analyze specific scenes to illuminate the activist tactics deployed in the narrative. Several alliances involve compromises and suggest that radical heteronormative discourses are also questioned from within. I demonstrate how the lesbian couple challenges masculinities within the male-dominated Croatian society. Asking “Who is actually queer here?” enables me to focus on the distinction between open lesbian sexuality within private spaces and the violence manifested through rape, murder, and kidnapping that the couple undergoes when their sexuality becomes public.

Heteronormativity and Homophobic Violence

The alliances between heterosexual males and lesbians in post-war Croatian society are determined by a high level of heteronormativity, a concept that travels easily between West and East. As early as 1980, Adrienne Rich suggested that heterosexuality needs to be recognized as a political institution (1980: 637) and her argument is still heard in Croatia today. She argues that the government – through its laws, legislation, informal social and cultural regulations – enforces compulsory heterosexuality by creating powerful instruments to control relationships between the sexes. This allows men to enforce heterosexuality on women (640), who thus become their sexual objects. As a result, women are constructed as physically, economically, and emotionally dependent on men. Rich further argues that the existence of lesbianism represents an act of resistance and a rejection of this compulsory way of life; which explains why it is perceived as an attack on men’s rights to access women (649). At the same time lesbians are trapped in a closet (675), since the basic social unit is constituted as a heterosexual family. They must live a double life, reside in a gay ghetto, or address the consequences of coming out.

I am not saying that Croatia is backwards or left behind but Rich’s vocabulary is still relevant today and they are some of the Western concepts that translate to the region. More recently, Sara Ahmed has argued that heterosexual societies operate as “straightening device[s],” where all forms of queer desire are considered deviations (2006: 107). She warns us that heterosexuality as a

compulsory orientation not only demands a reproduction of heterosexuality but is perceived as a mechanism for the reproduction of culture with a requirement that we bring home “the same race” (127). In the case of *Fine Dead Girls*, however, ethnicity and religion are re-produced. This is meant to be a revelation, of a hidden secret, a dynamic or a logic that we no longer see.

While compulsory heterosexuality has been mostly rejected in the West at the federal level, Eastern queer communities still have a long way to go. To be clear, the comparison here is not meant to suggest that the East is following a path similar to that of the West. Today, Western countries pride themselves on having opened gender borders and on granting equal rights to homosexuals, a stance that challenges compulsory heterosexuality by deinstitutionalization. Western Europe currently takes pride in the loosening of heteronormativity and de-institutionalizing normative heterosexuality; it appropriates a narrative of progress that implicitly accuses the East of being unadvanced. A careful examination of what has happened in former Yugoslavia reveals a cautionary tale because progress and backlashes unfortunately go together; there was even a time when Croatia was more advanced than the so-called West. Until 2013, the Croatian constitution was actually more liberal than that of the United States for example, in terms of homosexual marriage because it did not explicitly mention that a legal union could only take place between a man and a woman. The referendum of 2013 changed the situation. As I explained in the first chapter, nowadays, only a man and a woman may marry.

Heteronormativity often goes hand in hand with homophobic violence, both in the West and the East. Rich demonstrated that at the end of the last century, heterosexuality needed to be imposed, managed, organized, imposed by propaganda, or maintained by force (644). According to the Furies Collective, the heterosexual norm is not really a sexual norm at all, but a powerful instrument in the perpetuation of the power relationship between the sexes (Seidman 2009: 20). Steven Seidman points out that compulsory heterosexuality not only enforces the normative status of heterosexuality, but also enforces a normative order within heterosexuality and establishes a standard of so-called normal heterosexuality (23). Along these lines, Tanja Renner also points out

that heteronormativity can only be established with repression and violence (2005: 10). She asks why heteronormativity – if it really were so normal and natural – would need such an enormous amount of violence to reproduce itself, and why it needs to work on itself to ensure its constant expression and acknowledgment.

The Death of Lesbian Desire

In *Fine Dead Girls*, violence takes the form of intense surveillance, scrutiny, and control once it becomes clear that Mare and Iva are a lesbian couple. Shortly after they settle into their new residence, it is revealed to the viewer that landlady Olga observes her tenants by spying on them through a keyhole and then using the information to control their lives. She does not require sophisticated surveillance technology to create an environment rife with secrets and where privacy does not exist. To make matters worse, viewers are forced to occupy the same focal position as the landlady when the camera turns us into voyeurs; we are forced to either follow the surveillance or stop watching the film.

In one scene, Iva and Mare are making love in their bedroom and Olga decides to spy on them. The two lovers are kissing by the window and then move to the private space of the bed. During this scene, the camera provides close-up shots focused on specific parts of their bodies; they are depicted touching and kissing in sensual and erotic ways. The private space of their bedroom becomes de-privatized by observers: Olga and the viewer, who sees the scene from her perspective. This scene is cross-edited with Olga's preparations to surveil them: uplifting music plays in the background as she dresses and makes up her face. Because this scene is cross-edited with shots of Olga, Iva and Mare's love making appears interrupted. Thus, the viewer is prepared for an interruption that takes place within the narrative. Olga, Iva, and Mare are formed into a triangular threesome that will become violent. Olga rings their doorbell and knocks on the door but does not get any response. Undeterred, and clearly oblivious to the fact that the material border (the door) is

also a legal and symbolic border between private and public spheres. Viewers see her reaching for a spare key. *Fine Dead Girls* teaches us that one can be interrupted anywhere and anytime.

Before she enters their room, the camera travels upwards and the vantage point changes: we are now viewing a scene from above; the camera captures the women's naked bodies. This bird's eye view, producing a distancing effect, de-solidarizes itself from Olga's spying position; it makes the viewer aware that there is at least one other possible viewpoint. Yet, when Olga enters the apartment the camera again adopts her point of view. Upon entering, orchestral music adds excitement to her discovery that Iva and Mare are making love. The director uses the kind of dramatic music reminiscent of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (1990-91) to create a sense of foreboding future misfortune. Since the music seems to comment on the thrill of Olga's discovery, it can therefore be interpreted as mocking either Olga or the secret of the couple. For the viewer, this is a position of ironic ambivalence – to the extent that we are enlisted as involuntary voyeurs.

Soon after her discovery, Olga gossips to the other tenants which results in escalating violence and eventually leads to rape and murder. The first person to respond is Olga's son Daniel, who sends the women a phallic sex toy to remind them of the missing masculinity totem. Mare calls him an impotent imbecile with a mother complex. The following day, Daniel visits Iva and attempts to seduce her while pretending to seek help for a bogus skin laceration. Iva rejects his advances and the violence begins in earnest. When he pushes her towards the wall, the camera zooms-out and the angle changes to a shot from the corridor. Iva tries to protect herself, but since he is stronger, she is seriously wounded. The camera angle then shifts to provide a shot outside the window while we hear trains roaring past. This shift indicates how the violence in this building is hidden behind brick walls and nobody from the outside has access. The camera position denotes critique while avoiding the position of complicity adopted by the other tenants. The window can be seen as a border and offers a reflection of society outside.

On the one hand, as spectators observing a rape scene, we are complicit; our position, however, makes us feel helpless, unless we decide to flee the narrative and exit the theater. The

camera shift provides viewers with the possibility not to watch the act directly but pushes us to consider that even if we do not watch we are complicit through our silence – we have no way out. There is also another perpetrator in the room who occupies a viewing position: observing and not intervening, Olga stands at the door witnessing Daniel's assault.

When Iva suddenly opens her eyes, she looks directly at Olga. The camera moves to an extremely-low-angle shot that implies superior and inferior positioning. Olga seems to enjoy the violent spectacle unfolding before her eyes. Her attention to Iva makes her a sadistic participant in the rape. Viewers can infer this from Olga's comments after finding out that Iva and Mare are lesbians. She remarks that "these whores need to be taught a lesson" ["Marš, kurve, treba njih naučiti pameti"]. By witnessing and doing nothing to stop the rape, Olga is seen to assert her omnipotent power over the building and its inhabitants. She is in a position of authority and control; always spying on others and only selectively interacting with others to reinforce her police-like activities. Everything she sees turns into a form of pornography and viewers are placed in a powerless position.

When Mare comes home and finds out that Iva was raped, she immediately searches for Daniel. The camera begins to shake while dramatic instrumental music plays in the background. On her way – alongside the railway line – Mare breaks the windows of Daniel's shop as Olga is heard screaming: "What are you doing you fucking whore? Your girlfriend has finally enjoyed sex like a real woman!" ["Šta radiš, kurva? Tvoja prijateljica konačno je uživala kao prava žena"]. When Mare finds Daniel, they become embroiled in a physical fight. The scene takes place in a train's boxcar while the screeching of other passing trains is heard. Symbolically, they are fighting on the border between the spaces occupied by normality and deviance, in a no-man's-land where the norm is contested. When Mare kills Daniel by pushing him out of the boxcar and under a passing train, Olga screams, calling the other tenants to help her catch Mare.

From this point on, the action occurs quite quickly. The camera becomes erratic and chaotic; it cuts quickly from scene to scene while dramatic violin music arrives at a crescendo to underscore

the visual violence. While the tenants gather in Mare and Iva's apartment all the secrets are revealed: the nationalist finds out about his wife's abortion conducted by the doctor and Iva finds out that the necrophiliac's wife is dead. They all begin to yell and chase Mare; she is portrayed as a scapegoat for the hidden violence. In the next scene Mare lies dead on the staircase but we do not know who killed her. The chaotic atmosphere ends when the camera shifts to an exterior shot of the building. This time it jumps to the other side of the railway lines and we see the building in the background while the barriers close and the red lights flash their warning signal. This shot signals the violence taking place on the other side of the tracks – I would suggest also on the other side of the norm – which is framed by the beginning and ending moments of the film like a prologue and epilogue depicting a scene set in Dalibor's residence, Iva's future husband's home. It is how the film is framed; from the heterosexual perspective on the other side, the heterosexual world, to which Iva will ultimately escape. This is a discourse of violence distorted and turned inside out to blame Mare for involving the police, whom Olga manages to trick in order to protect herself from the lesbian couple and be seen as a victim.

After Mare's death, Iva goes back to her former boyfriend Dalibor, gets pregnant and bears a child. But even this return to heteronormativity and motherhood does not protect her against Olga's violence. Imagining that the baby could be Daniel's child, Olga kidnaps the child. She assumes the role of Daniel and asserts the parental rights of a biological father. When she calls the police and accuses Olga of kidnaping, Olga manages to convince the police that she is innocent by impersonating an old frail disabled woman. Usurping the place of vulnerability that the government is there to protect, she convinces the investigators that she is a victim. Although it is obvious to viewers that Olga is lying to the police, it is just as clear that the lesbian character will get neither help nor justice from the government.

It is useful to examine additional examples of how *Fine Dead Girls* critiques homophobic violence and lays the blame firmly at the doorsteps of nationalism and Catholicism. In the film nationalist and Catholic symbols are to be associated with violence. The nation-state and Catholic

religion – instead of opposing officially sanctioned violence – tolerate or even encourage it. When the film opens, viewers see a Croatian flag waving from a window of the building into which Iva and Mare will move. The flag owner, a war veteran, periodically discharges his gun while wearing a military uniform, he acts violently towards the other tenants, and repeatedly attacks and rapes his wife. Later the camera follows a group of young nationalist skinheads tying a Roma boy to the train tracks and leaving him there to be run over by a train. Religion is just as meaningless in this environment, which is underscored by images of the violent veteran regularly taking his neglected family to Sunday mass. An even stronger connection between religion and violence is present in the rape scene. Focusing on Daniel, the camera offers viewers a close-up of a crucifix necklace Daniel wears as he is raping her. It is not clear whether the film emphasizes Daniel's betrayal of his religion or accuses Catholicism of justifying the crime of rape.

On the other hand, one benevolent character is presented as having to break religious and governmental laws to accomplish virtuous work. The doctor helps his patients by performing abortions. In one scene, a group of Catholic nuns pay him a visit. They are there in the capacity of patients and we quickly understand that this is not an isolated incident but that they regularly call on him to perform abortions. He is thus breaking the law since they forbid abortion and at the same time he is complicit in the act of nuns breaking their celibacy vows. In the film, he is constructed as a helper who protects women from the dictates of religion and government.

Homophobic characters, instead, believe that sexual preference is a form of religious belief: lesbians are equated with infidels who must be converted. Lidija, the sex worker, receives money from Mare's religiously conservative father to seduce his daughter's girlfriend. A plan is constructed wherein Lidija will break up their relationship; and in so doing, make Mare straight again. Her father asks Lidija to do god's will and "help the sinner return to the right path" ["Pomažemo grešnici, da se vrati na pravi put"]. Iva soon discovers Lidija's plan; she confronts her, and the plan fails.

The plot also critiques the religious and nationalist framing of lesbianism as a contagious disease by suggesting that coincidences can be interpreted as God's intervention. When Lidija wants to return the money and offer sexual services to Mare's father, he decides to stay overnight while sounds of thunder strike in the background. At this point, the irksome neighbor begins performing boisterous nationalist songs; a scream is heard, and Mare's father is depicted as having died during coitus. Ironic and biting satirical allusions to hypothetical divine interventions implicitly critique narrow and conservative versions of governmental and religious discourses.

A Long-Running Societal Confrontation

The producers of *Fine Dead Girls* had difficulties obtaining funding for this first Croatian-produced lesbian-oriented film; especially because they firmly criticize homophobic violence. The film took six years to produce because the central focus on a lesbian narrative was "too shocking" for national television networks, the Ministry of Culture, and the HDZ, a conservative center right party (Simić 2012: 94). At that time, funding was impossible to find because of the subject matter. Things changed, however, in 2000 when, after ten years of being the leading party, the HDZ lost its lead position. Simić argues that this political turn had many advantages for filmmakers. For example, the ministry-lead film committee was replaced with a non-governmental commission. Politically speaking, the atmosphere became liberalized which freed directors from self-censorship and enabled them to make films containing political statements (2012: 95). The Ministry of Culture and national television networks indeed supported the film, even though it only received €450,000 euros, quite a small amount compared with what was allocated to other funded films which addressed less sensitive subject matters. Necessarily, the producers had to apply for additional private sector funding.

Political power relationships in Croatia are responsible for policy construction and social attitudes towards art production. I suggest that the topic of lesbianism, rather than the quality of the film, reflects the influence governmental authorities have on artistic production. *Fine Dead Girls*

was doubly problematic: it not only depicted lesbians but portrayed them in an empathic way. Yet, the film was warmly received by the public at home and abroad. The film won the Special Jury Award at the Sochi International Film Festival³² and Matanić was awarded the Young Jury Prize at Geneva's Cinéma tous Ecran festival, among other accolades. In Croatia, it received five Golden Arena awards from both the jury and audience at the Pula Film Festival, the oldest film festival in the region. Dating far back from the before the 1990s war, the Pula Film Festival offers an interesting perspective on the transformation of politics.³³ *Fine Dead Girls* was heralded as the best Croatian film second only to *Maršal* (*Marshal Tito* 1999), a “mildly provocative, populist political comedy dealing with the Croatian past and the present” (Simić 2012: 93). Some even claim that it is the most noteworthy film in the history of post-1991 Croatian cinema (Polimac 2002).

The warm reception is not, however, evidence that the general public's opinion suddenly became less homophobic; consequently, the actors felt that it was necessary to take certain precautions. In order not to be confused with their characters, the lead actresses chose to repeatedly respond that they were straight when asked by the media. I would argue that they internalized the public's homophobia and acted as though they were ashamed of playing lesbian characters. They certainly did not publicly defend their characters in the limelight of media scrutiny. In the behind-the-scenes video made to accompany the film, viewers see Nina Violić, who played the butch lesbian Mare, looking at a naked man on her computer screen. Later, she is shown pregnant, sitting on a sofa and leafing through a book while interpretive cues are superimposed. With a strange twist, the actress' and character's name appeared: “Nina Violić – Mare,” then “Roza” (presumably, the name of the baby) with an arrow pointing to her bulging belly. It seems that much effort was made

³² This is the largest national film festival in held in Russia. Established only in 2016 it aims to build cultural bridges between Russia and the UK; it symbolically takes place at the location where the 2014 Olympic Games were held. The festival's vision is to promote humanity and connections between ethnicities beyond international borders.

³³ The festival began in 1954. From 1961-1991 it was called the Festival of Yugoslav Feature Film, when it was cancelled due to the war. After the war, it continued under the name of Pula Film Festival and in 1995 it was renamed as the Croatian Film Festival to emphasize Croatian nationhood. In 2001, the festival began accepting international films and was renamed the Croatian and European Film Festival.

to shield the actress from any doubt about her sexuality. The naked man is a crude representation of Viočić's supposed sexual desire and the arrow visually links the pregnant woman to the male figure.

The film triggered quite different reactions from critics and queer activists. Croatian critic Nenad Polimac argues that “although *Fine Dead Girls* is not a typical gay film that auto-reflexively concerns itself with the hidden nuances of homosexual relations ... [it] succeeds precisely because of the realistic portrayal of the heroines' personal relationship” (Polimac 2002). On the other hand, Simić argues that Matanić directed a “sexist and patriarchal product that operates within the same repressive film tradition which represents lesbian (and female) characters as victims and establishes lesbian relationships as an impossibility” (Simić 2006c). She claims that the film is using a lesbian couple to criticize Croatian society and argues that the film shows lesbians only from a superficial perspective, while not focusing on the characters' sexuality and relationship; which a so-called real lesbian film would indeed do. Moreover, she criticizes the film for not creating a space for feminist resistance, and instead represents lesbianism as a choice and deviant medical condition that must be overcome (Simić 2010: 213). Yet, she admits that by focusing the narrative on a victimized woman who tells the story through a flashback, the director questions the position of women in society precisely to point out the accusations they face daily for not resisting patriarchal structures.

In a response to this critique, Matanić doubts the power of film to change homophobia. He remarks: “I would like to help all of society if I could, but I don't know how powerful art is to help at present since it is so marginalized. How is it possible to cleanse people, to galvanize them into action?” (Trajkov 2003). He is clearly aware that the film might not work the way he had intended, yet his film does add another perspective to the issue of lesbianism in Croatia.

Activist Tactics: Queering Normalization

This film presents the audience with a strong critique of homophobia and homophobic violence. Heterosexist authority is always the result of brute force and violence. Examples include that the heteronormative characters are guilty of surveillance, rape, homicide, and kidnapping. An implicit

alliance is created between the viewer and targets of homophobic attacks which is justified in the name of nationalism and religion. Despite their tragic fate, the lesbian couple is constructed as being content and emotionally fulfilled, certainly not as victims. The perpetrators on the other hand, are far from joyful. The couple is presented as self-contained, loving, and independent, even as they are persecuted by the heteronormative characters.

The film's affection for these characters is also indicated by the introduction of other queer relationships within the building which are useful to examine. As if to counterbalance the relentless violence of Olga and her son, the narrative suggests that other forms of connection between tenants are possible. These marginalized characters on the other side of normality – imposed by religion and nationalism – are invited to organize and search for alliances elsewhere. The relationship between Iva, Mare, and the other tenants is crucial to the plot, especially after it is discovered that they are a couple. The tenants are all victims of a system established during the transition period of post-war Croatia, a system which saw the revival of patriarchal and traditional values. They all cohabitate in a building that symbolizes and depicts their alienation from society-at-large and particularly the government's imposed social norm.

After Olga discovers Iva's and Mare's secret, she immediately spreads the information throughout the building. Matanić takes a journalistic approach to show the many responses of the other tenants. Olga tries to mobilize them against the couple, but they disappoint her. The tenants are definitely not in agreement with the landlady: the abused wife does not want to express her feelings at all, the sex worker has lesbian friends, the doctor suggests that they are too young to be condemned, the nationalist's ego is hurt but he is not hostile, the aging necrophiliac gossips, Olga's husband is completely benevolent, and Daniel remains speechless. These reactions reflect that only Olga's son is willing to form a homophobic pact with her and that the director is attempting to present their homophobic reactions as being stupid. Viewers are generally inclined to quickly ally themselves with the tenants' non-hostile reactions.

The film portrays a harmonious couple who does not interfere in other people's affairs, whereas the violence in the film originates from those who accuse them of violence. If anyone leads a balanced and fulfilling life here, it seems to be the supposedly minority couple whose life is apparently peaceful and quietly normative. The dangerous ones, the violent ones, are the ones who are afraid of the lesbian couple. Yet, the straight characters' crimes remain hidden or implicitly condoned, and thus remain unpunished. The film tries to establish a sort of hierarchy of possible normative and non-normative rules and then singles out lesbians. Whereas the normality of the lesbian couple is foregrounded, the quirkiness of the other characters is exacerbated as if to question the alignment between the norm and feelings of normality.

The important plot events finally reach a crescendo with Iva's escape to her previous heterosexual relationship. In this way, the violence is made unpalatable rather than justified. The film argues to condemn this sort of foolishness, although it is still tolerated in reality and public discourse: where lesbians should stay in the closet or, if they do come out, should be violently pushed back into the transparent closet. Criminals, however, are actually protected by nationalistic and religious forces, while lesbians are relegated to silent subjects and often slain.

The film also suggests the possibilities of alliances between the lesbian characters and other figures who are also pressured by the norm and especially by the narrow definition of masculinity. Marko Dumančić notes that "Matanić produces masculinities that are damaged beyond repair; the gendered system he presents is so thoroughly dislodged from its heterosexist axis that the impossibility of homosexual unions would hardly be sufficient to compensate for the masculine lack" (2012). He claims that both heterosexual men and lesbians contradict the stereotype of a society governed by a hetero-centric principle. Masculinity in the film is made synonymous with violence and death: Daniel rapes Iva and dies, and the nationalist veteran tells his wife that she must have an abortion if the child is not a boy. Even the doctor's role is reduced to performing abortions. As for Olga's husband, he is portrayed as a marionette controlled by his wife and being ashamed of his son who is incapable of his own initiative.

And yet, in *Fine Dead Girls*, a relationship forms between the lesbians and Olga's husband; it is a queer alliance that redraws the boundaries of what is understood as normal. Even though Blaž is controlled by his wife and cannot control his own son, he does manage to create a hidden bond with the couple on two occasions. His first act of resistance, after Olga cancels their lease, he secretly helps them find a new apartment. He does not openly defy her, and he is shown whispering when talking to Iva and Mare because he is afraid of being overheard by Olga. She ordered him to throw them out, but he only pretends to comply and instead offers them a solution. An even more important moment of misidentification with the norm occurs at the end of the film when Olga kidnaps Iva's child. At this point, Blaž seems to have finally reached a point of no return. The scene begins with him sitting in the kitchen. The camera slowly enters the room and there is silence as the viewer is slowly brought close to him. The camera then offers a close-up of his face. He is clearly concerned. In this scene, which is very slow and accompanied by lighthearted music and what sounds like water slowly dripping from the edge of a bucket, he finishes enjoying a cigarette and extinguishes it in a nearby ashtray. He then stands up and slowly walks up the stairs to the room where Olga plays with the child. The soothing music accompanies him as he confronts Olga, insisting that the child is not their grandson. The camera, which often depicts a view of Olga from a low angle, changes perspective while she shouts at her husband that he is responsible for Daniel's death. The camera shows Olga on the floor with her husband positioned above. He then kills her.

Like the other characters, he can only imagine secrets and hidden alliances. The film never suggests that he could have asserted himself earlier or was able to avoid the violence. Even this very last moment of action has to do with a child who was born to a now straight family. Blaž's intervention is a rather chaotic and individualized reaction which leans towards severe violence. This is a vendetta, a sort of lynching, and not justice.

This film criticizes Croatian society for its negative approach towards lesbians by: exposing homophobia with an excess of violence on the screen, condemning the police for not protecting lesbian victims, presenting the church as self-sabotaging, criticizing nationalists views, and

criticizing the connection between violence, nationalism, and religion. In an interview, Matanić suggests that the film is “an acerbic social criticism and compassion” (Trajkov 2003). The film is a coming-out narrative that criticizes nationalism and religion and proposes a queer alliance. Although it is the first film to focus on lesbians in Croatian mainstream cinema, the lesbian community was never directly involved in its production. The film’s title – *Fine Dead Girls* – suggests self-contradictory tensions within the story. This is an ironic allusion to the commonplace homophobic phrase that “the only good gay person, is a dead gay person” yet it goes further. Some viewers may indeed interpret the murder of Mare as a pessimistic *no-way-out* scenario, expect perhaps that the audience is asked to care about her death.

CHAPTER 4: SICK CRIMINAL LESBIANS

Saša: This is not Paris, Lana. We don't tell our parents who we fucked the previous night.

Lana: If you did, maybe you wouldn't be so fucked up. Maybe your folks would still be together.

Take a Deep Breath

In this chapter I analyze a Serbian-produced feature film entitled *Take a Deep Breath* directed by Dragan Marinković, written by Hajdana Baletić and made its première at Belgrade's Sava Center in 2004. While the film is indeed the first from Serbia to present a lesbian couple as its main protagonists, the director did not specifically address lesbianism as a theme nor did he promote it as being a lesbian film, as Marija Grujić points out (2012: 182). Marinković focused not on representing the Balkan war of the 1990s, which many other films at the time had – instead he marketed it as a story about a generation gap. Despite his attempts to shift the focus away from the lesbian relationship and the central theme of lesbianism, the film nevertheless acts as a cinematographic coming out that breaks the silence surrounding the taboo of lesbianism in Serbia.

The film centers on Saša (Ana Franić), a student from Belgrade, who dreams of emigrating to Canada. At the beginning of the film she has a boyfriend, Stefan (Branislav Tomasević), but soon we find out that she is a closeted lesbian. After announcing their decision to move during a family dinner at Saša's home the couple has a car accident and Stefan is admitted to the hospital. Upon hearing the news, Stefan's sister Lana (Jelena Djokić), a photographer and a lesbian herself who had moved from Belgrade to Paris, returns home and begins an affair with Saša. After Saša comes out as a lesbian, a Pandora's box is opened, and many family secrets are revealed. Viewers learn that Saša's heterosexual parents are not the exemplary couple that they pretend to be: Saša's father Miloš (Bogdan Diklić) suffers from impotency and sexually harasses his female cleaner, while

Saša's mother Lila (Mira Furlan) has an affair with a younger male lover. Finally, the lesbian relationship between Saša and Lana brutally ends after Miloš' intervention when he accuses Lana of being mentally ill and exerts his power in the court to have her incarcerated.

The story is set in the beginning of the 2000s, a time in Serbia's history when older generations were still firmly upholding heteronormativity and denying the existence of lesbians. One of the first lesbian activists from Serbia, Jelica Todosijević, notes that at that time, "Being a lesbian in Serbia means that you don't exist at all. You don't exist legally; you don't exist illegally. You are an offensive word, a bad character from a cheap novel or a character from a pornographic film" (1996: 171). This label clearly continues in 2003. At the time the film was produced, the background of homophobia in the mainstream media was still considered offensive and pornographic (Vučković 2006: 14-15). While the film can be seen as countering the in-existence of lesbians by virtue of centering its narrative around a lesbian couple, it is important to examine just how the lesbian characters are deployed in the film. Therefore, I examine whether the film works to both document and critique the notion that lesbians are the so-called bad guys of Serbian society. By analyzing what the film says about homophobia and the activist tactics used to challenge it, I posit that the film tells a story that accuses lesbians of being sick and criminal – and can be therefore accused of homophobia – but also displays a way out, by proposing lesbianism as a liberation process and thus offering a critique of homophobia.

Voyeurism and Identification: A Thin Line

Pride parades and public demonstrations involving queer communities may still attract the attention of homophobes, but they have become ubiquitous in Europe and in the West in general. The situation in the East is different and collective coming outs continue to be occasions of violence. Peter Davies argues that coming out is "a constant struggle against those who, on the one hand, accept the disclosure and then, on the other, refuse to accept its implications" (qtd. in Kuhar and Takács 2007: 42). In the post-Yugoslavian region there is a silenced and privatized treatment of

homosexuality which forces sexual nonconformists into a transparent closet. The film illuminates the core problems of internalized homophobia as a coping strategy of survival in nationalist and homophobic surroundings. It also assists our understanding of the most recent nationalist perspective on lesbianism in Serbia.

Popular media such as *srbinfo* have been misusing existing sexual theories to prove their point. Misinterpretations of the Kinsey Reports (1948/53) are a case in point: Ilija Vuksanović, not only misspells the name (Kinsey becomes Kinski), but also accuses Alfred Kinsey of being a pedophile who sexually abused children and even babies while experimenting with orgasms (2015). Vuksanović has also argued that homosexuality is a threat to society because it spreads sexual diseases and pedophilia, and, using Kant's categorical imperative as a tool, has argued that if all of us were attracted to the same sex, the human race would be extinct in 70 years.³⁴ Lesbians are not considered criminals in contemporary Serbian society. Yet, same sex attraction is often attacked by voices that support heteronormativity and portray lesbians as diseased, and as such, harmful to the nation. The film indexes such discourses while exposing how lesbian characters are considered to be affected by a mental illness that needs to be surveilled, policed, criminalized, and ultimately eliminated.

When Lana comes out as Saša's girlfriend to Miloš, he slaps her and threatens Saša: "If I see you again with this psycho, I will kill you both" ["Vidim te još jednom sa onom ludačom, ubit ću i tebe i nju"]. He is clearly convinced that homosexuality is a mental illness. Saša, however, is quite capable of internalizing her father's definition of homophobia. In the next scene where she is alone with Lana in her bedroom, she says "[t]his is sick, Lana" ["Ovo je bolest, Lana!"]. The homophobic perspective of her father pushes Saša back into the transparent closet. This definition of homosexuality as a mental illness does not mean that the logical response should be caring for and curing a patient. Instead, pathologizing immediately leads to criminalization, surveillance, and policing. Throughout the film, lesbian love is depicted as a crime. Moreover, a strong nationalist

³⁴ These discourses are similar to the mis-appropriation of gender equality discourses by Catholic organizations, as demonstrated in Chapter 1.

fervor undergirds the definition of lesbian love as being sick and criminal. The depiction of surveillance in this film is quite different from that of *Fine Dead Girls*. There, the landlady spied on the lesbian couple to heterosexualize them and punish them for being lesbians. In *Take a Deep Breath*, however, the way in which surveillance is portrayed questions the voyeur's powers.

Early in the film, Saša and Lana seem persecuted by hostile gazes: when they come out as a lesbian couple, a series of scenes make the point that they are being watched. First, we see a car following Lana through the streets of Belgrade while tracking her every move. The viewer is placed in a position that adopts Lana's gaze, looking back at the follower. Shortly thereafter, the camera-angle changes to an aerial view and viewers see both automobiles traveling along the street. We are not told or shown who is following her and the stalkers' intentions are not narrativized which creates an atmosphere of threatening uncertainty. Another series of scenes follow the couple walking along the river bank, hugging and kissing. Viewers can plainly see that they are not hiding their affection for each other and that they are clearly an emancipated couple. At this point, viewers are in a position to observe them – we share the same view as their stalkers. I interpret this to mean that the director wants to share the perspective of surveillers. Also, in these scenes, viewers are asked to understand that the women are not aware that they are being observed. But shortly thereafter, a different interpretation is proposed: when the camera begins to zoom in on the couple, we hear the voices of the stalkers: Miloš, the judge, and his assistant converse about why they are spying on the couple. Only then does the camera cut to a shot of the two men in a parked car while watching the women through binoculars.

At that point, viewers only see the couple through a frame of surveillance: we see what the men see. They are observing the couple, although the camera makes a point of not adopting the view through the binoculars. In these scenes Miloš and his assistant watch them, and the viewers are forced to do the same. He appears to have power and control over the situation. He is the symbol of surveillance to the extent that he does not even need to see for himself and this is supported by the fact that he does not look through the binoculars. Instead, he orders his assistant to direct the

contraption at the women and the obedient observer then reports what he sees. The act of giving orders only intensifies Miloš' power and control, which makes us aware of the danger of the chain of command trickling down the social ladder. He can delegate to his subordinates just as fascist regimes deploy their administrative tentacles.

At the same time, the film also provides us with another narrative regarding his position of power. He is more pathetic than powerful: his disease is to see the world as a pornographic scene. The lesbians are filmed by a camera which deliberately alludes to the code of pornography. It is not such a far-fetched proposal given that as Todosijević argues that lesbians in Serbia exist only as an offensive word or characters from a cheap novel or a pornographic film (1996: 171). When considered from that perspective, the consequences of spying seem rather harmless. Miloš is not so much in control as obsessed by his childish curiosity: he is a pathetic voyeur who transforms everything that he sees into pornographic theater. The women are imagined as objects of consumption and masturbatory fantasies for heterosexual men. Male desire is incorporated into the lesbian relationship as a parasitic gaze.

The first intimate scene between Saša and Lana shows them drinking and making love. It begins with a close-up on a box of matches as Lana lights one. Next, the camera is positioned from above and we see the couple lying on a sofa, drinking red wine and smoking cigarettes. In the middle of their conversation Lana mentions to Saša that she is the first of Stefan's girlfriends whom she has found attractive and with which she can converse. The camera slowly approaches the women while they continue their conversation about love and passion. Suddenly they are interrupted by water overflowing the bathtub. Realizing that their apartment is being flooded, they frantically take off their shirts to absorb some of the water. The director obviously made a choice here: instead of providing his actresses with a script involving towels, he chooses to have them get undressed. This is not, however, a scene about sex and desire between the women. Yet, this visual cliché might trigger the viewer's internalized male gaze and produce a moment of objectification of the women's bodies.

Given what follows, this scene seems to be a prelude to the representation of sex between the two women. First, they end up in the bathtub, drunk and naked. The camera gets closer towards them, suggesting that their relationship is becoming increasingly intimate. Saša leans over Lana and kisses her softly on the cheek. But the representation of sex does not appear. The next shot is a view of the whole living room, a temporal disconnect occurs, since we see them sleeping on the sofa, apparently a few hours later. The spectator cannot witness or testify to the existence of a sexual act. The question remains in the imagination of the viewer, this is visually supported by the camera that seems to be scanning the room as if to investigate, slowly moving laterally over the women's bodies underneath the bedsheets. It is useful to critique this objectification of their bodies. This cinematic tactic is a predictable way of objectifying women's bodies, especially lesbian bodies. The camera looks down on them, making them powerless and available for visual consumption. We are not so far away from a classic re-appropriation of lesbian desire for heterosexual male consumption, a phenomenon that has been already well documented, including by Laura Mulvey who points out that women are usually filmed as passive objects who appear submissive when the camera peers down upon them (1975: 10).

Similarly, the following scene is constructed to trigger the same phantasies even though nothing sexual is precisely shown. On the balcony, when Saša comes out to her mother Lila, she responds with a story from her teenage years explaining that she almost had a sexual encounter with one of the girls from her gymnastics class. As she explains, this girl approached her and put her hand on her breasts. Then there is a pause. The camera focuses on Saša, then on Lila who says "I will never know what would have happened if I had not taken her hand away" ["Nikad neću znati šta bi se dogodilo ako ne bi izvukla ruku"]. Lila's story, and this dialogue in particular, leaves the issue unresolved and the viewer is free to imagine what could have happened. The allusion to a locker room – a highly charged and politicized site of nudity and social segregation – is more likely to trigger images of men swapping stories from a pornographic male perspective than to participate in the creation of a lesbian imaginary. One would hope that this had become an old stereotype by

now, but unfortunately, allusions to lesbian love in such a setting does not protect the characters from a predatory heteronormative interpretation.

Cinematographically, the film does indeed depict same-sex love but does not seem able to celebrate it. Or rather, the camera is still using the familiar and conventional gaze used to depict straight love making scenes: the women's nudity is objectified in a manner that indexes an old-fashioned and dominant heterosexual male gaze (Mulvey 1975). Lesbian love is merely wrapped into the standard plotline of popular heterosexual romances, which as Mandy Merck argues dilutes the social and political implications in such films and reduces them entirely to the personal level (1993: 379-80). It is a familiar pattern that does not need to be perceived as an Eastern phenomenon. We may remember Bernadette Barton's analysis entitled "Male phantasies about lesbian desire" critiquing Spike Lee's *She Hates Me* (2004) which she reads as the construction of a lesbian relationship from a male perspective (2005). Richard Dyer has gone even further by suggesting that the heterosexist plot was central to the structure of mainstream lesbian films (1984: 34). He suggests that gayness is used merely as a way to reinforce the appropriateness of heterosexuality when he writes that "the true sexual definition of a woman is heterosexual and that she gets that definition from a man" (34). Similarly, *Take a Deep Breath* borrows straight conventions and situates Miloš as a constant voyeur who observes and attempts to control the women, making it difficult for the viewer not to be complicit with the represented male gaze.

On the other hand, the film is also a coming-out story which offers a rare representation of lesbian desire. *Take a Deep Breath* tries to increase the visibility of lesbian love but cannot avoid turning lesbian desire into a heterosexual male fantasy. The type of femininity that the couple represents is also relatively stereotypical and panders to masculinist appropriations. Here, the aesthetic of lesbian embodiment is resolutely femme and there is no allusion to any butch code. It would be too facile to blame it on an Eastern contextualization. Popular television series such as *The L Word* (2004-09) are clearly playing on such stereotypes and as Susan J. Wolfe and Lee Ann Roripaugh have argued, the representation of women in that context is "shamelessly pandering to

the male, heterosexual gaze” thus promoting “assimilationist visibility” (2006: 43). On the one hand, the lesbian is not dismissed as a non-woman because she is masculine (although the stereotype of a so-called masculinized diesel-dyke can also be harmful). On the other, the so-called normalization of the feminine lesbian makes it difficult to avoid the confusion between voyeurism and identification. And from that perspective, the film treads on shallow water.

Take a Deep Breath is neither clearly homophobic nor straightforwardly pro-gay activist, and the ambiguity leaves the spectator questioning how lesbians can be accurately represented in film. Hollinger argues that ambiguous films refuse to identify unequivocally as a portrayal of female friendship or lesbian romance and thus can seamlessly appeal to both a lesbian or heterosexual female audience (1998: 6). She argues that “in this way, they offer their audience the voyeuristic satisfaction of seeing two beautiful women interacting in sexually provocative ways on the screen without overtly challenging heterosexist norms” (6). Ambiguity as a tactic thus works two ways: (i) it creates a safe zone for lesbians in an overtly homophobic milieu, and (ii) it minimizes threats to heterosexist ideologies of the heteronormative world. Hollinger also argues that, as opposed to ambiguous films, an open portrayal of lesbianism can pose a significant threat to the heterosexist patriarchal *status quo*. Instead, ambiguity acts as to “deauthorize and foreclose cinematic representations of actual lesbianism” (de Lauretis qtd. in Hollinger 1998: 129). *Take a Deep Breath* can be read as being not entirely ambiguous. While certain to provoke heterosexual male fantasies, the lesbian relationship in the film is controlled, surveilled by the male gaze, and finally criminalized when Lana is imprisoned for being a lesbian and thus pushed back into the (not-so-) transparent closet.

Because the viewer has been made aware that Miloš was watching the women and that Lana has now been jailed, we can only assume that he is responsible for her incarceration. Miloš has indeed misused his position as a judge. The scene is shot in low-light and we briefly see Lana being escorted to a cell by a policewoman. As the armored cell door opens with a squeaky sound, Lana asks her jailor why she is being locked up. There comes no answer, no phone call, and no

explanation. There are no legal grounds to incarcerate her because of her sexual preference but the scene suggests that Miloš is not the only one to abuse the system and that corrupt individuals who represent the government trample protections supposedly offered by that same government. The incarceration is the logical output of Miloš' homophobic definition of lesbian love as a mental illness.

Lesbianism: An Imaginary Threat from the West

Not only does the film present lesbians as mentally ill criminals it also suggests that they are connected to the West. The West is responsible for the problem and it also constructed as the enemy who has exported homosexuality. When Saša has a breakdown after her coming out and begins to doubt her sexuality again, she says to Lana, "This is not Paris, Lana! We don't tell our parents who we fucked last night" ["Ovo nije Paris, Lana! Mi ne kažemo svojim starcima sa kim smo preživeli noć"]. This statement reinforces the stereotypes that persist between East and West: in Paris you may be gay and talk about your sex life with your parents; while in Eastern Serbia, you need to hide your sexuality while parents surveil you while knowing about it. In the film, there is a slight reversal of this one-sided view of the West, since it is both the place Lana moves to and where she comes from, which positions the West as a place where Eastern failures go and where successful Easterners come from. The distinction between the two poles of failure and success is articulated in the scene where Miloš and Saša argue after she has come out to him. Miloš is worried about Saša moving abroad, to which she replies, "I'll finally be able to breathe!" ["Prodisat ću!"] a statement which equates home with death and Paris with life and rebirth. This is also a response to the figure of illness – they are not sick, but the environment disables and poisoned them. The nationalist imagination assumes that Lana only became a lesbian once she migrated to the West and became ill, and it is difficult to find a position that breaks out of that mental mode. When Saša says, "This is not Paris," she is implying that Lana would always have the option to say she is gay when in Paris. Not only does her remark disregard the fact that Paris is a place where homophobia exists as well,

but she ignores the fact that Lana was gay before moving to Paris and may wish to express her orientation at home too.

The nationalist perspective presents homosexuality as a threat to the nation and society and the film is capable of addressing that issue. Before the balcony scene described above, a sequence of scenes presents the viewer with windy exterior night shots: first we see a close-up of leaves fluttering in the wind. Then there is another close-up shot of the tinkling wooden chimes on the balcony. Afterwards, the camera focuses on a small light mounted on the outside wall surrounded by leaves. The last close-up before the shot of the women on the balcony is of a wooden rocking horse teetering in the wind, as if someone had just been using it, leaving only a creaking sound that causes an eerie and mysterious feeling. The editing of one scene with another is akin to shots in a thriller film. The scenes are intercut with one another, accreting weird elements to create a certain kind of mystery that provides viewers with feelings of mirroring, or cause and effect. This signals that there might be a link between the eerie scenes and lesbian love making, because in a traditional thriller, such shots cause us to expect danger and we are prompted to equate it with lesbian love.

Two additional scenes follow the same logic. After Saša and Lana meet, Saša discovers that her mother has a secret lover. As she walks through the park alongside the river bank talking on the phone with Stefan, Saša sees her mother kissing a man. The camera shows them from a distance, it focuses on them while the surroundings become blurry. The next cut is a close-up of Saša's face while she tells her friend: "My mother has a lover" ["Moja mama ima ljubavnika"]. This time, the lesbian daughter is in the position to surveil her mother and she discovers that her parents' supposedly perfectly-functioning heterosexual marriage, is riddled with guilty secrets. In the very next scene, Miloš experiences a heart attack while playing tennis with his younger colleague. His wife is not present while he is in pain, instead she is experiencing joy with her lover. The same music links the similarity between the two events. The parents' relationship is presented as being dead. The supposedly healthy normal model of straight relationships is exposed as being flawed at the very moment that Saša announces her intentions to move to the West. National borders become

unstable when Saša opens her Pandora's box; this reveals a violent national legacy inherited from older generations. As long as that closet is locked, the normativization of straight relationships can be maintained. In other words, the opening of the box reveals that the norm is a dirty secret.

The illusion of the lesbian threat is presented as coinciding with the demise of traditional family values and the heteronormative structure is exposed as a failure. In the meantime, there is a possibility for salvation, although fraught with danger. The film paints a picture of conservative Serbia where homophobia is considered a punishable illness which leads to internalized homophobia and a conception of same-sex love as something that only happens in the West. These scenes suggest, however, that there is no real threat coming from the lesbian couple or the West. The heterosexual relationships are not threatened by outside forces but are collapsing on their own accord.

The film also manages to insinuate that lesbian love is a way out rather than a threat. The myth of Pandora's box communicates that the only thing left in the box after all the other forces have escaped is hope, and this is also suggested by the film. One way the film presents hope is to construct the lesbian relationship as a form of liberation. While the heterosexual relationship is a site of conflict where both partners are miserable and collapsing under the weight of hiding and pretending; Saša and Lana's partnership is presented as being harmonious. Lana came from the West to help Stefan after his car accident and she is depicted as an improved alternative to Saša's former boyfriend. Soon after her arrival, Lana takes Saša for an automobile ride and says, "Don't be afraid, I'm a better driver than Stefan" ["Ne boj se, vozim bolje od Stefana"]. The proximity of the two scenes makes it clear that the viewer is expected to make a comparison between the two mirroring scenes. By taking the wheel, Lana symbolically takes over. There is no accident when Lana drives, and the viewer is invited to draw the conclusion that while the heterosexual relationship is uncertain, there is safety in the lesbian relationship.

Societal Confrontation

Given the context in which *Take a Deep Breath* was produced, how did the director choose to advertise his film? During the film's premiere, writer Hajdana Baletić and Majda Puača from the Stani pani collective,³⁵ in an interview with liberal TV and radio station B92, admit that they advertised the film as a story about a family that falls apart because of poor communication. The local press pointed out, however, that it was the first gay-oriented Serbian film.³⁶ When a journalist asked Marinković whether he used homosexuality because it is fashionable, the director responded that he was not interested in issue, but he was fascinated by problems posed by untold stories and secrets that the society-at-large wishes to keep hidden. Thus, he wanted to address taboos, of which homosexuality is just one (G.J. 2004). He also insists that he is in favor of protecting privacy. According to the screenwriters, the film denounces the hypocrisy of their society, where a dysfunctional family represents itself as the norm while refusing to deal with its own closet. From that perspective, lesbian desire is only one of the secrets. People do not discuss homosexuality; they oscillate between "tacit tolerance" ["prečutna tolerancija"] (Kupres 2004), latent, or violent repression. Mainstream media seem to alternate between sensationalist or anti-gay approaches as pointed out by Baletić and Puača (Kupres 2004).

Was the film then viewed by the public as being a gay film or not? Ana Franić (Saša) reports that there was much interest surrounding the film during the pre-production phase because it was labeled as the first Serbian gay film, yet after the premiere the audience was pleasantly surprised: "Well, well, well, this is nothing horrible" ["No, no, to ni nič grozno"] she remarked (Rajković 2009). The film was quite successful in the United States and received an award for Best Foreign Film at the 38th annual Houston International Film Festival, as well an award for cinematography. It certainly received much attention from the cinematic world within the Post-Yugoslavian geographic region. The leading actress, Ana Franić received a YU Fipresci award for Best Serbian Actress and

³⁵ "Stani pani" collective is a Serbian organization against discrimination of any kind.

³⁶ The example of cover titles in the local press: *There's a Generation Conflict in Serbia* (G.J. 2004), *A Love Triangle Game* (Babović 2005).

many more accolades from film festivals across the country – in Belgrade, Novi sad, and Niš.³⁷ Her role in *Take a Deep Breath* brought her much attention and she began accepting leading roles in other films and TV series.³⁸ Bearing this in mind, the film was well received as a gay-oriented film in the West yet closeted as a gay-oriented film in Serbia but still accepted. We are left with two speculations: whether there is a special kind of tolerance towards lesbian issues, or whether it is due to the pornographic potential of the representation of sex between women. The reception of *Go West* in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, makes me suspect that the reaction would have been much different if the film had been about two men.

As usual, the reasons why the film was celebrated and criticized has everything to do with not only the artwork itself but also the way in which critics deploy their interpretations to forward their own agenda. For example, Ana Janković Piljić points out in *Kinokultura* that “to a large extent, this film has been suppressed from the Belgrade public scene even though it is far from a ‘backward community’s manual for gay relationships’ – as some have interpreted it” (2009). The film is clearly no how-to-manual. It voices only one possible message: the only real option for a lesbian is to either not be a lesbian or go back to the West, from where and whence she presumably came. But rather than ending on such a pessimistic note, it is useful to evaluate the elements of the film that can be thought of as queer activist tactics.

Activist Tactics

Anti-homophobic tactics are never obvious, and the viewer is expected to undertake some interpretive work while viewing the film. In Chapter 2, I demonstrated that homophobia manifests itself as a fear that Western and United States concepts will infiltrate the post-Yugoslavian geographic region via the queer community. To a certain extent, the film turns this paranoia into a

³⁷ She received an award for Outstanding Female Role and the Best Actress Audience Award at the Niš Film Festival; and Best Female Role at the Film Festivals in Novi Sad and Supot (Ječmenica 2015).

³⁸ See for example TV series such as *Mixed Marriage* [*M(j)ešoviti brak*] (2003-2007), *The Lime Street* [*Ulica lipa*] (2007-2009), *Stop the Weather* [*Zaustavi vreme*] (2008), *The Truth Play* [*Igra istine*] (2011) and films like *Awakening from the Death* [*Budjenje iz mrtvih*] (2005), *Deadly Motorist* [*Smrtonosna motoristka*] 2007, *The Reject* [*Odbačen*] (2007), *The Beautiful Blue Dunabe* [*Na lepom plavom Dunavu*] 2008, *Passing by* [*U prolazu*] 2009 (Ječmenica 2015).

successful form of conceptual and artistic smuggling. If *Take a Deep Breath* is to be thought of as being progressive, it is because it works obliquely by making unexpected use of concepts. The film can be said to “vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers” (de Certeau 1984: 37). This is a form of re-empowerment that Michel de Certeau has described as a form of “poaching,” which involves being in a place that refuses to see you as the owner (175).

When I say that the viewers need to do some work, I do not mean to suggest that the infiltration of anti-homophobic concepts are purely accidental. Activist tactics within the film appear to be accidents and have the power to turn perspectives upside down, as I demonstrate in the following analysis. The night during which Saša and Lana make love is also a moment of incomprehensible queer symbolism: Miloš, the representative of homophobic injustice turns his world upside down. He literally deconstructs and then reconstructs his domicile while revealing that the home of his happy marriage is merely a façade. Within the plot, the reason for this episode is Miloš’ accidental ingestion of ecstasy pills and alcohol. As if pushed out of his rigid closet of masculinist and nationalistic homophobia, he begins to dance uncoordinatedly and to kiss family pictures hanging on the wall. Viewers see him with a necktie wrapped around his forehead; he pours an alcoholic beverage into a huge bowl and drinks. Local sentimental music – a song about lost love – accompanies his actions. He then starts to alter the apartment with a drill and saw. The camera offers a close-up of his face with the necktie still around his head. He sings, “You can’t hurt me!” [“Ne možeš mi ništa!”]. A series of facial close-ups while he is sawing and singing, hides what he is doing from the viewer. We must wait until – what in the plot is – the next morning to be able to appreciate the results of his efforts. He has literally managed to turn the whole apartment upside down. A table is hanging from the ceiling and other bits of furniture, artistically intertwined with each other, dangle from it. It looks like some type of artwork, a sculpture maybe, or even installation art, but the apartment has lost its functionality. Miloš has changed what were supposed to be commonplace useful structures in a traditional home setting into an art gallery which

transforms this space into a bourgeois kitchen with an artwork hanging from the ceiling. The home where the supposed normal relationship lives is now queered. It might now be capable of welcoming a new queer relationship. Or at the very least it denounces the relativity of the norm, pointing to the easy reversal of the up and down, normalized and non-normative. Here the film symbolically transforms the norms of the heterosexual relationship.

Of course, the possibility of turning reality upside down is limited. This scene can be described as Bakhtinian carnivalesque: when the effects of the ecstasy wear off, order becomes restored.³⁹ The drug is introduced as an accident because Miloš – being a well-established judge, a firm believer in traditional family and national values – is not supposed to use recreational drugs. This notion of the accidental, however, is precious in a fictional-based film because it constitutes a sort of tactical opening of the closet that the film uses to contest and challenge the homophobic environment. Ahmed points out throughout her book entitled *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) that accidental or chance encounters have the ability to lead us away from the beaten path and re-orient us away from normative directions. In the film, the ingestion of a mind-altering substance can be read as a tactical accident. In retrospect, we may also appreciate that the beginning of the film also has to do with a different type of accident: a car accident that enables an opportunity to introduce the leading lesbian characters. Other such accidents include Saša's discovery that her mother has a lover and Miloš' sudden heart attack. None of these events are expected and viewers begin to see parallels emerging between the failure of the heterosexual family and the apparently serendipitous presence of a lesbian couple who actually represent a positive way out.

Besides this implicit theory of accidental change, the film also makes several allusions to what certain members of the audience will recognize as references to gay sub-cultures. An encounter between the two women is filmed in a style that references a lip-sync culture, commonly used as a presentation technique in drag performances. If one is familiar with gay culture, then lip-

³⁹ Bakhtin's concept of the carnival challenges fixed orders and de-constructs the dominant culture (1965). He argues that the carnival is "a special condition of the entire world, of the world revived and renewed;" a world turned upside down (7). This applies perfectly to this scene: it is a temporary state as opposed to a revolution which changes the order for good.

synching indexes drag shows, and their complex politics of tactical repertoires.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, there is not much research or documentation on drag culture in the post-Yugoslavian region. Yet, Velikonja documents that lip-synching performances were common practice in Slovenian queer communities (2004: 21, 25). Although existing much earlier, drag performance moved into mainstream culture at the turn of the 21st century. One of the first public performances of the drag queen trio Sestre [The Sisters] occurred during the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest where they finished in thirteenth place. In 2007, Marija Šerifović, a singer in drag, participated and won the contest for Serbia with a song entitled “Molitva.”

Returning to the film, Lana and Saša are depicted in a nightclub. Lana sings a love song, which is obviously but obliquely addressed to Saša. The camera begins alternating between Lana singing on stage and Saša. From one shot to the next, the camera zooms in, gradually giving the impression that they are the only ones in the packed venue. They are depicted looking at each other; the more the camera zooms in on Saša’s face, the more the two women seem to connect with one another. At some point Saša begins to lip-synch to Lana’s song. Lana helps Saša to articulate her desire, which allows Saša to come out to herself as she realizes that she has feelings for Lana. It is clear from the beginning that there is a difference between them, since Lana lives openly as a lesbian and is conscious of her identity, while Saša lives a closeted life and has a boyfriend. However, in this scene, her heteronormative identity is exposed as being precarious, even though Saša accepts her father’s heterosexual matrix. The film thus addresses communities that – like the two characters – arrive at the gay scene from very different perspectives. Each viewer will see something different and position themselves as either insiders or outsiders.

Another activist tactic in the film addresses an attempt to bypass the gender binary to facilitate a positioning that does not directly confront nationalistic homophobia. This proposal is precarious because it is close to, and easily interpreted, as denial. For example, the morning after Lana and Saša make love, Lana insists that she is Saša’s girlfriend, yet Saša refuses any connection

⁴⁰ For example, drag shows as political tactics through entertainment settings challenge dominant gender and sexual orders and offer a space for constructing collective identities (Taylor et. al 2004).

with a gay gender identity. She screams at Lana, “I’m Stefan’s girlfriend, and I’m not gay, you hear?” [“Ja sam Stefanova djevojka i nisam gej, čujes li?”]. Typically, this type of denial is interpreted as internalized homophobia, which would be in keeping with the situation in Serbia. Yet, I argue that the vocal denial of any lesbian identity by one character introduces a more interesting and subtler hypothesis: rather than defending a traditional coming out, the film introduces the possibility of forms of sexuality that simply refuse to visually confirm the male/female binarism, which complicates the opposition between gay and straight.

An example of this hypothesis occurs during the opening credits, which is a love scene where only one body is gendered. The camera focuses on two bodies, but viewers cannot see their faces, nor can we identify more than one article of clothing, a brassiere, which suggests that at least one woman is present. It is incumbent on the viewer to fill-in the invisible pieces of the scene. Two bodies (or perhaps more) are depicted in the throes of passion. In the first close-up shot we see a hand opening a shirt. The leading actors’ names then appear on screen. In the next shot, also a close-up, the same hand touches the bra-straps and slowly pulls them down. In another cutaway the director’s name and the film’s title appear on the screen. The close-ups shots continue to focus on a disrobing woman while the flesh of her body is revealed. Internalized heteronormativity will probably lead viewers to conclude that this is a man and a woman. The film challenges us to notice that the lover, who does the undressing, is visually genderless and could indeed also be a woman. The film plays with the notion that gay is the marked element of the straight/gay binary. Thus, in the absence of markers, one will assume that the scene is presenting heterosexuality. Viewers are provided with a double-take experience through which expectations and biases are exposed. The opening montage suggests to me that it is possible to frame a sexual act without including gender identity politics, and that sex does not necessarily need to be viewed from that perspective. In that case it would always remain a guessing game. For example, an open-minded liberal viewer might assume that we are looking at two female bodies since the two protagonists are having a lesbian

relationship; while a conservative viewer might assume that these bodies are of opposite genders since this is the norm in Serbian society.

The director chooses to avoid most gender markers which means that we cannot definitively say that we saw two women. For instance, when the camera pans down the torso of a naked body but stops short of showing any genitalia. This attempt, to de-gender the body or at least to avoid any marker that would allow viewers to identify one of the lovers, curiously resembles the theoretical definition of bisexuality proposed by Hélène Cixous (1976) and Marjorie Garber (1995). They both argue that bisexual desire destroys the dichotomies and rigid identity markers that align sexual preference and gender identity. Cixous elaborated on the Freudian concept of bisexuality by arguing for the “other bisexuality” as a destructive force for binary positions so that sexuality gets closer to a universal bisexuality of polymorphous perversity, a precursor of queer theory’s later emphases (884). Similarly, Garber argues that bisexuality is a destabilizer of heteronormativity since desire is “unquantifiable” (283). The opening montage of the film attempts to establish a representational grid that suggests that desire does not necessarily need to be pinned to gender.

This might be a precious tactic in a homophobic society where “Out and Proud” mottoes lead to polarization and confrontations. I am certainly not suggesting that the film is arguing that one should hide in order not to disturb the homophobes, but rather, *Take a Deep Breath* seeks other ways to challenge their rigid norms. After all, the desire to go beyond the opposition between gender polarities may be matched by a desire to avoid constructing two radically opposing political camps.

This issue is even more important now because polarization also occurs in the realm of ethnic categories. I suggest that the film attempts to redraw the borders of sexual orientation and to communicate across ethnic borders. It was marketed as film that was not about the war in a period where cinema audiences were fascinated by ethnic conflict. It focuses on the minutiae of individual relationships, thus avoiding “important historical and political issues” as Baletić points out (Kupres 2004). Yet Moss argues that, war and ethnicity are the “elephants in the room:” they are a

structuring absence (2011: 365). The film implores its viewers to comprehend a more fluid definition of sexual preference and orientation; it also warns against the disintegrating effect of binary oppositions. *Take a Deep Breath* is not specifically about the 1990s war, but still manages to insinuate parallels between the splitting up of Miloš' patriarchal family and the dismantling of communist Yugoslavia.

CHAPTER 5: STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: WAR VETERANS AND QUEER ACTIVISTS⁴¹

Chetnik, a derogatory term for a Serb by Croats, Bosniaks, and Kosovo Albanians. Ustasha, a derogatory term for a Croat by Serbs, Bosniaks, and Kosovo Albanians. Balija, a derogatory term for a Bosniak by Croats, Serbs, and Kosovo Albanians. Shiptar, a derogatory term for a Kosovo Albanian by Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. Faggot, a derogatory term for a homosexual person. Used by everybody.

The Parade

In this chapter I examine Srđan Dragojević's 2011 film entitled *The Parade*, a semi-fictional documentary and dark comedy which revolves around the organization of a gay pride parade in Belgrade in 2011. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the pride parade is a serious political issue and homosexuality remains a highly controversial taboo in Serbia to the current day. Despite this fact, the film was an unprecedented box-office success in the post-Yugoslavian region and won several regional and international film awards. This film graphically depicts the events leading up to and during the first attempt to organize a parade in 2001. Unfortunately, the event ended in a deadly struggle. The film managed to attract many production companies from various parts of the region including: Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, and even several countries belonging to the European Union. After its Belgrade premiere, more than half a million people in the region chose to see the film – a number that is not often achieved by other films from this region.

⁴¹ A part of an earlier version of this chapter is presented in Vravnik and Sremac (2016). Vravnik, as leading author, was responsible for the majority of the article; Sremac wrote subchapter 2 and contributed to the conclusion and general editing (Vravnik, Vesna and Srđan Sremac. "Strange Bedfellows: (non/mis) Alliances between Nationalists and Queers." *Facta Universitatis, Series: Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2016, pp. 71-82).

The director addresses the paradoxical, even comical, challenge of recruiting war veterans to protect Belgrade's queer community during the parade. Dragojević deploys comedy as a political tool, which on first inspection could seem contradictory, since comedy might appear less capable of influencing politics. He changed both the meaning of a comedy and the means of delivering his political message: with the use of humor Dragojević detached himself from the power of a political message and downplayed its value. I first saw *The Parade* at a screening in Slovenia; the beginning was filled with humoristic interventions and the audience laughed often, while I was embarrassed. During the second part, the audience was silent and finally embarrassed. No one laughed anymore, despite a few comic scenes towards the end. The film had a powerful, almost hypnotizing effect on the audience.

The film is not a hard-core documentary that displays victims or attempts to create sympathy, although it does achieve these objectives. Neither is it a theoretical treatise, yet it does make a theoretical point about homophobia in the region. Regarding this point, the film depicts how local police refuse to offer protection because they have strong alliances with homophobic nationalists. As an attempt to resist (and the specificity of this attempt is alarming), the parade's organizers decide to recruit war veterans to protect them from homophobic neo-Nazis who have vowed to attack the parade's participants. This leads to unforeseen consequences such as the abandonment of current allegiances and the rekindling of others. The film envisions the growth of unexpected post-war alliances between Croats, Bosniaks, Kosovo Albanians, and Serbs: these communities fought on opposite sides during the 1990s Balkan wars. They make strange bedfellows because, on the one hand, they focus on solidarity with nationalistic sentiments and on the other, on sexual preferences. Another potential alliance introduced by the film is the relationship between father and son. The father being a war veteran who is hired to protect the pride parade and his neo-Nazi son, who is a member of a group who has vowed to disrupt it. It is a problematic alliance that emphasizes an unexpected generational regression from a progressive father to a conservative son.

Cultural and national memories, identities and practices do not flow simply from one generation to the next, but paradoxically in both directions.

While analyzing the political critique and queer alliances in the film, I take into account the interplay between the Catholic church, nationalism, and queer activism in Serbia in order to assist in understanding the unexpected alliances proposed by the film. How can war veterans be expected to protect a pride parade? In some people's minds, an image of a male war veteran can be equated to a threatening militarized masculinity within a strict heteronormative and homophobic military milieu. Why then would the queer community be willing to accept their solidarity? To this end, I examine the paradoxical nature of a space where war veterans and queer communities form new alliances to counteract homophobic, nationalistic and religious discourses in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region. I also investigate how it was possible for *The Parade* to become such a public success as well as present a mainstream voice, despite the conservative and heteronormative nature of the region. How are nationalistic and homophobic discourses counteracted and appropriated by queer activists to challenge homophobia that will trigger a political change? During my analysis, I pay special attention to the potential of the counter discourse that this film holds for queer communities.

Alliances and Non/mis-Alliances

The main plot of *The Parade* is the lack of protection afforded to the queer community. It features footage of the 2010 parade during which neo-Nazis violently protested, resulting in the activists seeking alternatives to protect themselves. In the film, the parade organizers hire a Serbian war veteran named Limun (Nikola Kojo) to coordinate the parade's security. A known criminal, he was recruited into the war, he is divorced, and he owns a judo club in Belgrade from which he also operates a security agency. As a war veteran, he is looked upon as a hero, having fought for national pride. He is dating Biserka (Hristina Popović), a young effervescent woman who operates a beauty salon. They are soon to be married and are introduced amidst the planning phase of their wedding. This is how they meet their wedding planner Mirko (Goran Jevtić) who is also an activist engaged

in organizing the pride parade. After Limun finds out Mirko is gay, he immediately assaults him. Biserka then demands that Limun think of positive approaches towards the queer community, such as “non-violent communication” (*The Parade*) – a serious expression that becomes a positive tongue-in-cheek pun during the evolution of the film. Limun reluctantly accepts this as the only way to reconcile with Biserka and offers his security service for the parade. However, this proves to be an extremely difficult (and at times comic) task. First, he calls his local criminal friends and asks for their help, but they turn him down flat. He then approaches members of his dojo, but they too refuse; being homophobic nationalists who do not wish to protect the local queer community. Limun continues to search for partners and then decides to gather his old war buddies (who fought on opposite sides of the war) and have managed to remain life-long friends. He recruits a Croat, a Bosniak, and a Kosovo Albanian to help with his task; he simultaneously remolds old alliances and forges new ones with other veterans.⁴² Despite the fact that they fought against each other during war, the small group of comrades-in-arms unite to protect the pride parade and fight a common enemy: the vociferous Serbian neo-Nazi movement.

Why am I interested in this phenomenon of seeking unlikely bedfellows? Firstly, because governmental authorities are unwilling to offer physical protection, therefore the only foreseeable solution is to find alternative partners; secondly (and more importantly), because alliances between governmental authorities and the queer community are problematic due to the normalizing power of the government. Butler points out that “there are reasons to worry about requesting state recognition for intimate alliances and so becoming part of an extension of state power into the socius” (Butler 2002: 27). She makes the point that by bypassing the government and finding alternative ways to protect the parade is not completely useless.

The newly reformed group of war veterans, during a meeting with the organizers, agree to oversee the security of the parade. The veterans cite veteran solidarity as the reason for their

⁴² War veterans constituted a special political community in the post-war period and were usually regarded as nationalists. However, twenty years after the war they began forming alliances. For example, Croat and Bosnia-Herzegovinian war veterans helped collect money for the veterans from the Serbian Republic living in Bosnia-Herzegovina (“Ujedinjeni u siromaštvu” 2012; T.V. 2012), as I pointed out in Chapter 2.

acceptance of the task. However, these newly formed alliances are actually based on a solidarity with the queer community and it therefore becomes a queer alliance. Their relationship seems organic since it is based on the historical roots of Yugoslavia and Tito's concept of Brotherhood and Unity, popular during his years in office.⁴³ The film suggests that these relationships are so strong that they are capable of overshadowing the homophobia of the veterans who end up protecting the queer community during the parade. If the community of war veterans is based on the concepts of Brotherhood and Unity; on which concepts are the alliance of the war veterans and queer community based on? Another important question is whether or not the organizers are willing to accept their solidarity. Is it something for which the community hopes, or does the solidarity emanate from fear?

These relationships are difficult to define because they are volatile and have unexpected outcomes. Audiences in the post-Yugoslavian region might expect the alliance (particularly the alliance between the veterans who are fighting against the Serbian neo-Nazis and therefore against homophobia) to be implausible due to the historical background. One such example is the alliance between the Welsh miners during their 1984-85 strike in as presented in the film *Pride* (2014). Diarmaid Kelliher points out that activism of Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) and their alliance with the miners "suggests that in suitable circumstances, the solidarity of small groups of politically active people can have a significant impact" (2014: 258). Similarly, in the current political atmosphere in Serbia it is important for fragile groups to build binding relationships with one another. It is useful to explore the impact of such alliances, namely between two politically excluded entities: veterans and the queer community.

The common ground for their alliance with the queer community is a shared exclusion because the veterans are marginalized as well. They both stand in opposition to the police and are excluded from the government in a struggle against a common enemy. This resembles the alliance

⁴³ Brotherhood and Unity was a popular slogan of the Yugoslavian Communist Party. Established during WWII it was used to mobilize people against Fascist occupation. Later, it symbolized the official inter-ethnic policy of the six republics united within Yugoslavia.

of LGSM and the Welsh miners, especially regarding the mistreatment by the police as common ground for this alliance. It “was frequently pointed to as a shared experience” (248). They developed mutual solidarity based on shared experiences of oppression. These examples tell us something about the possibilities of forming such alliances in other regions, although in Serbia they are uncertain and potentially contradictory. Such gay-straight alliances have negative connotations within the queer community if they are seen in a superior/inferior positioning of the straight/gay community in terms of idealized heteronormativity and hegemony over a secondary queer community.

Furthermore, the film introduces other problematic relationships and addresses even stranger alliances. Limun has a son named Vuk from a previous marriage; he is an automobile mechanic and a member of a Belgrade right-wing neo-Nazi group. Along with his compatriots, he plans to attack the parade participants, including his father who was hired to protect the event. The father-son relationship is complicated by their different political commitments. Limun represents the last generation born during Yugoslavia’s sovereign existence and the common cultural bonds within multiculturalism. His son, however, represents a younger generation, born during the break-up of Yugoslavia who witnessed the birth of various forms of nationalism.

The representation of the father-son relationship especially in relation to politics is quite original. In the contemporary post-Yugoslavian geographic region, fathers and sons are not similarly politically motivated. The unhealed collective trauma can be transmitted and perpetuated into future generations – or what Marianne Hirsch calls “the generation of post memory” – which evokes intolerance and extremism (2012: 106-7). I would suggest that future generations could become increasingly intolerant. In the post-Yugoslavian region, we have the opposite formula to what happens, for example, in the *Godfather* (1972), where the focus is placed on the son who cannot avoid acquiring the views of his father. One assumption is that sons and fathers are always going to be alike, but also that sons are more liberal and progressive. *Sasha* (2010) is a film by Dennis Todorović, born during the Yugoslavian break-up in Germany to immigrant parents from

the post-Yugoslavian region. The film depicts a story about a gay son born into a homophobic family and implies that older generations are always more conservative than the younger. Today, however, another script is becoming increasingly plausible. In Hanif Kureishi's novels, particularly in *My Son the Fanatic* (1994), the liberal father is a first-generation immigrant from Pakistan and his religious-fundamentalist son was born and lived his entire life in the United Kingdom. These examples show that the teleology that predicts that the younger generation's political progress is not systematic. *The Parade* reminds us that we cannot expect that newer generations will automatically relinquish their homophobic beliefs. A father's authority might also fail; thus, providing homophobia with a path that can cut through familial lines and form unexpected alliances.

This film addresses a potential change and shows the transgression of this non/mis-alliance between Limun and Vuk. In the film they do not have much contact except during the night preceding the parade. Limun suddenly decides to pay his son a visit because he recently watched *Ben Hur* (1959) – a film that, it could be argued contains clearly homoerotic scenes which I analyze later. Limun arrives at Vuk's home in the company of queer activists and war veterans. This nighttime scene depicts Vuk exercising on his balcony. A portion of their dialogue is filmed through a broken window which can be interpreted as alluding to their rather broken relationship. Limun tries to convince his son that it is better not to fight the following day. The camera then zooms in on his face while he tells his son that he will protect the parade. He also tries to bribe him, offering him a substantial amount of money for not attacking the parade. The discussion escalates into a physical fight while the camera zooms out; alluding to the fact that the connection Limun wished to establish has collapsed. Although Limun tries to prevent his son from attacking the parade, Vuk refuses and shows up with his neo-Nazi friends the following day. In the next scene, Vuk is depicted together with hundreds of young male skinheads while Limun stands on the frontline between the neo-Nazis and the parade participants. During the ensuing violent confrontation – when Limun is hurt and needs help – Vuk turns against his compatriots and protects his father. He then offers the parade participants his protection.

Activist Tactics

Strange alliances and duplicitous tactics abound in this film and constitute a counter discourse which I see as the only way to challenge homophobia within the storyline. Queer activists recruit nationalistic veterans to advance their cause. As a result, the following conditions occur: (1) veterans fighting on opposite sides become friends again; (2) the homophobic veterans become LGBTI rights activists themselves by protecting the parade and; (3) the relationship between father and son is repaired when the homophobic nationalist neo-Nazi son metamorphizes, at the point he realizes that his father truly needs him.

The film is a kind of Trojan horse, adopting and perhaps advocating the use of indirect activist tactics which are obfuscated by the film's storyline and aesthetic. Like the ten-year conflict between the Trojans and the Greeks, the conflict between the queer community and the heteronormative society in Serbia is a long and chaotic confrontation. Like the Greeks, the queer community needs to find an entrance into a fortress that denies them entry – the fortress being here the recognition of political rights. They attempt to enter the homophobic environment which is protected by a thick wall of heteronormative rules and legislation. Their horse represents the united war veterans and it is just one of the unlikely alliances I investigate in this study. This tactic is used to communicate while deploying a positive message regarding protecting LGBTI rights.

This is achieved indirectly when veterans – former nationalists from all parts of the post-Yugoslavian geographic region – come together to fight against younger nationalists from Serbia. These veterans travel outside of their national borders which creates a conflict zone with similarities to the Balkan wars. They are recruited along the value lines of Brotherhood and Unity – a kind of nostalgia, or more specifically “Titostalgia” (Velikonja 2008). The young neo-Nazis were all born after the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was officially dissolved in 1992; it was a multicultural nation-state with three main religions which then became six autonomous nation-states where nationalistic sentiments and religious practices reemerged during the early-1990s.

Younger generations were not able to understand the Brotherhood and Unity values to which their fathers were devoted.

These can be viewed as being contradictory forces. The conflicting forces resulted in a unity within the post-Yugoslavian region, despite national and international conflicts among the post-Yugoslavian nation-states. Were veterans during the Balkan wars temporarily stuck with the nationalist sentiments of the different nations that previously formed Yugoslavia? Or were they stuck with Brotherhood and Unity values from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia? Assuming a nationalist position of protecting national pride, the veterans fought against nationalists in opposing countries, but what is more important is that they eventually rebel against homophobia as well.

Just as the horse was sacred to the Trojans (Haviland 2012: 134), the veteran community is an unusual political community and deemed sacred in Serbia and other post-Yugoslavian countries. Representing an alliance with the queer community is a form of activism, since veterans are usually seen as homophobic nationalists. It suggests the possibility of solidarity with the queer community instead of reiterating the obvious assumption of homophobia and therefore perpetuating it. Since the queer discourse is embedded within the discourse of cultural bonding between different countries, the homophobic viewer is challenged to accept the film as a whole.

A strategy that helps connect the old cultural characteristics of the region is also a main feature of the film – a rollick road trip through the entire post-Yugoslavian region. Figuratively, the car takes the form of a Trojan horse in which Mirko's partner Radmilo (Miloš Samolov) and Limun make their journey in search of other veterans, former friends of Limun who would willingly protect the parade. This Trojan horse undergoes a curious metamorphosis and becomes a palimpsest. They travel to the homophobic environment of small villages in various post-Yugoslavian countries. Before the trip even begins, the pink-painted automobile is a constant target of homophobic graffiti: for example, "Death to Gays" ["смрт педерима"] or "Faggot Motherfuckers" ["Pederske pičke"] is spray-painted along the sides of the automobile. Radmilo

does not report these events to the police; instead he drives the car to his father's workshop where he removes only some of the graffiti. As they drive with "Faggot Motherfuckers" still visible through different post-Yugoslavian countries, the automobile becomes progressively covered with trans-nationalistic graffiti, applied by various local nationalists. Before Radmilo and Limun cross the Serbian-Croatian border, viewers see a Serbian cross, a national symbol which means "Only Unity Saves the Serbs" ["Само слога Србина спасава"]. Eventually, the graffiti do not add up to a coherent slogan any more. At the beginning of the journey the automobile is already marked with homophobic graffiti, but then, when it crosses national borders, the graffiti begins to interact with its locality and becomes transformed. In Croatia someone corrupts the Serbian cross by adding to it. Another corruption occurs when the travelers enter Bosnia-Herzegovina and meet a Muslim friend, a veteran who owns a video store in the suburbs. There, young men apply even more spray-paint and change the graffiti from "Faggot Motherfuckers" to "Chetnik Motherfuckers" ["Pičke četničke"]. The same occurs in Kosovo when they meet with a Kosovan-Albanian veteran; other young men again spray-paint the automobile. They scribble on top of the previous graffiti and change "Chetnik Motherfuckers" to "State of Kosovo."

Written in the languages of the various regions in which it traveled, the graffiti-covered automobile conveys the ideals of homophobia and nationalism for everyone to see. Dissimilar national or gay symbols are transformed into similar bigoted statements through the automotive palimpsest. Beginning with a homophobic statement which is then overwritten by a xenophobic one, the Trojan horse cum automobile continues to gain access to the countries of the post-Yugoslavian region. Their multiplicity shows how the graffiti become superimposed in a collective production of national liberation movements. This symbolizes the political situations in each country, where the new generation claims that their territory belongs only to their nation; and clearly expresses self-nationalist and xenophobic positions. On the other hand, the pink Trojan horse cum automobile, with its passengers, becomes a symbol of resistance and complements the nationalist forces and homophobic environments in which they travel. The automobile now appears

to be an advertisement with a nationalist slogan, which allows it to infiltrate the fortress of homophobia and simultaneously enter hostile nationalist environments. While the automobile continues to accrete additional textural layers, there are still traces of older ones visible.

Homophobic and nationalist discourses make for a schizophrenic palimpsest, layers are being added without completely eroding the previous ones. As soon the automobile crosses a border, graffiti artists express a nationalist discourse. Yet, at the end of the journey, it does not matter how many new layers have been added; there are still traces of the first homophobic graffiti layer visible. The interactions between sexuality, religion and nationalism are multi-directional and multi-dimensional, and should not be oversimplified.

The ever-accumulating homophobic and nationalist graffiti can be equated with additional soldiers being inside the Trojan horse; thus, increasing the amount of force to stave off its enemies. Not only does the group resist being labeled, but they even empower themselves and bypass national sexual norms. The stronger the nationalist force from the outside is, the stronger the resistance within the Trojan horse cum automobile becomes. Their historical trans-national connection embedded within their Brotherhood and Unity ideals becomes stronger. The film uses this myth to challenge the ethnic divisions along nationalist and religious lines. By doing this, the rhetoric of other veterans is appropriated and challenged by historical bonds to re-unite so-called brothers from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Kosovo, even though they fought on opposing sides. Limun manages to enlist his old war buddy veterans into his cause. Their goal is to challenge homophobia, although the veterans are blissfully unaware of this outcome. In other words, their fight against homophobia, which takes the form of protection from violence, ends up reuniting communities and protecting them from violence.

Let us not forget that these veterans are homophobic nationalists. Sexual nationalism and homophobia have the same roots and function in the same way, as I have previously argued. In the film, the Trojan horse cum automobile is comically and accidentally transforming homophobic veterans into LGBTI rights activists while not deliberately transforming the nationalistic sentiments

among the citizens of specific post-Yugoslavian countries. They had become friends before the wars had begun and when they meet again after a long period of time, their friendship resembles the meeting between Ben Hur and Mesala in the 1959 film, when they meet again after fifteen years. They hug in the same way, drink with their arms crossed and shoot an arrow at a target. Their close friendship and cultural bonds are stronger than homophobia and this becomes a recruiting force in the fight against homophobia. While the car functions like a Trojan horse for the actors in the film, the idea of veterans fighting homophobia functions as a Trojan horse for the viewer. However, Jasna Koteska validates that Limun is a mythic character similar to that of Ben Hur and adds to the idea of “an attempt to re-universalize the Balkan myth of the indestructible hero” (2012: 118). She argues that *The Parade* is a stereotypical camp production with a dubious ethnic message and a storyline which moves from one nationalist joke to another.

These veterans have all been reared in the multicultural environment of undivided Yugoslavia. Irrespective of the Balkan wars, the previous national sentiment still binds them together. Queerness becomes irrelevant for them. Dragojević suggests that the multi-culturalism from the unified Yugoslavian era is now in opposition to homophobic nationalistic practices that have found fertile ground after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Paradoxically, it is being employed as a Trojan horse against their own rules and ideologies of excluding queerness. The fortress of heteronormativity is tricked into accepting a gift, an idea of nationalism that no longer exists but can be reintroduced. When the obviously enlightened veterans re-infiltrate the heteronormative environment of Belgrade, a new form of hybridity is proposed. While the hope that harmonious multicultural cohabitation between various ethnic and religious groups collapsed during the Balkan wars, now, some sort of reconciliation can be imagined but it is based on types of identities that bypass religious and ethnic markers.

After the gift of protection is accepted, a queer activist named Mirko delivers a speech. Moments before the parade is scheduled to begin, hundreds of neo-Nazis appear and aggressively

approach the participants; some supporting protesters are intimidated and begin to leave. To prevent further departures, Mirko moves to the front and says:

Before any of you take off, look at these people! This is not a question of who is gay or straight. These are two different kinds of Serbia! One part is persuading you every day to be what you are not. It forces you to have six different roles. One for the parents, for friends, for the street, for work It forces you to be what you are not! It undermines your strength! I know we will get beaten up today like never before in our life! But even that beating is better than the humiliation we endure our whole fucking life!

Mirko's character is that of a so-called gay soldier who exposes his sexuality to the neo-Nazi group which has gathered before the parade begins; they are there to protect their perceived border of heteronormativity. Mirko points out the role-playing that the queer community must perform in order to fit the norms of heteronormative hegemony. In his monologue, he encourages the other participants to endure the attack, which, to him, seems less painful than having to undergo daily humiliation. Mirko also expresses the opinion that there are two sides to Serbia: the homophobic and heteronormative neo-Nazis on one side, and the queer community on the other. The queer community has purchased the support of the veterans, so they are finally able to retaliate. Unfortunately, it is still a fact that violence is the only way to protect LGBTI rights in some parts of the world, but the queer community – as the film suggests – is not an unimportant minority anymore. The parade participants ally themselves with the band of veterans, who themselves are a small marginalized community and actually become stronger.

Because of the solidarity between these two communities, the film suggests that certain changes occur within the group of nationalists. For example, a change occurs in Limun's son, who abandoned the neo-Nazi group and joined the queer community troop because of the relationship

with his father. The visual aesthetics of the alliance is also useful to note. The band of veterans resembles a group of men who affiliate themselves with the gay bear subculture. For instance, when the veterans position themselves between the participants and protestors – on the front line so to say – they appear as older chubby veterans and remind the viewer of the stereotypical gay bear. Opposing the younger and more dangerous nationalists, the veterans appear as affectionate bears who have infiltrated the gay culture. This is a productive reason to sympathize with the veterans and accept their Trojan horse gift.

Standing Ovations and Ambivalence: Right and Left Radicals

The script for *The Parade* received wide international support including from the European Cinema Support Fund (Eurimages), the Ministries of Culture of Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia, the Croatian Audio-Visual Center (HAVC), and the embassies of The Netherlands, Germany, and France (Cicović 2011). It attracted a large number of production houses, including those from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Republic of Macedonia, Slovenia, Serbia, and the United Kingdom. However, most of the Serbian companies that Dragojević approached for financial help during the pre-production stage refused because of a fear of being accused of producing homosexual propaganda. The only exceptions were the insurer Dunav Osiguranje and Serbia Broadband (SBB) (“Srđan Dragojević” 2011). The film premiered in Belgrade in October of 2011; it broke all box-office records in the post-Yugoslavian region and the audience reached more than half a million people.⁴⁴ The film crossed national and sexual borders since this was the first Croatian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Serbian, and Slovenian co-production after the Balkan wars (Kirschbaum 2012). Furthermore, the cinemas across the region screened the film without subtitles which expressed a cross-national acceptance.⁴⁵ Astonishingly, when news media outlets from the

⁴⁴ Not only in Serbia but also in other post-Yugoslavian countries, no other post-war film has been so widely screened (Gec 2012; Milek 2012).

⁴⁵ After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, all Serbian films screened in Croatia needed to include special subtitles with an emphasis on Croatian, even though there are only minor differences between Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian languages (“Bez kravate Srđan Dragojevic” 2013).

region wrote about the film, they all claimed that it came from their country (van den Berg 2012). In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serbian-produced film attracted the largest audiences since the wars ended. It received a standing ovation in many Serbian cities such as Novi Sad and Niš. The audience's applause lasted more than ten minutes in Croatia's capital Zagreb. Surprisingly, the film was most positively accepted by audiences in Split, where violent attacks on parade participants took place in 2011 ("Parada' obara rekorde u Hrvatskoj" 2011). The film attracted a wide range of viewers while having a potent effect on the collective consciousness of the region's general population. This is evidenced by continuing public discussions about the film which lasted months after its premiere (van der Berg 2012). For example, Croatian actress Ana Gruica said she was not a supporter of pride parades but after she saw the film, she felt sorry for not being a supporter (Njegić 2011).

Dragojević insists that art is political and that artists must try to change the world. He does not see hooligans as bad, but rather as uneducated (qtd. in Milanović 2011). Nevertheless, Dragojević denies any direct connection to his activist intentions. He holds that the story of organizing a pride parade in the film is only a McGuffin plot device used to trigger a discussion on tolerance and understanding (Njegić and Dugandžić 2011; Milanović 2011). Dragojević says that one journalist even thanked him because of the effect the film had on his homophobic teenage son who stopped "hating fags anymore" (qtd. in Hoad 2012). The son had been enjoying the hatred he felt towards queer people; possibly, the more he hated them, the more he felt accepted into the Serbian homophobic environment. Yet, after viewing the film, he changed his homophobic perception and does not hate them anymore.

The Parade had an immense effect on the audience and its activist purpose was served and rewarded. Nationalists were now turning away from homophobia and some of them even became queer community supporters. Jacques Rancière argues there are no criteria for relating art to politics, however, art already effectively makes communities and creates real effects producing "regimes of sensible intensity" (Rancière 2004: 39). He would say that a political formula in *The*

Parade is identifiable, since the film managed to create new communities and new ways for people to relate to one another, especially the way nationalists managed to relate to their feelings of homophobia and overcome them after viewing the film.

From one perspective the film was widely accepted and became a success, while strange alliances formed within the audiences as well as in the film. *The Parade* was rejected by groups on the radical left and right wings of the political spectrum. Neo-Nazi groups in Serbia called for a boycott and openly protested the screening of the film (van den Berg 2012). In a milder action, nationalists among football fans in Croatia only protested the fact that Radmilo, the gay character in film wore a T-shirt saying “Hajduk forever” [“Hajduk živi vječno”], Hajduk is Split’s local team. They did not care about the homosexual nature of the storyline but rather about the problem of aligning homosexuals with a football fan community (“Parada’ obara rekorde u Hrvatskoj” 2011). At the same time, Croatia is also the only country that has a football fan group fighting against homophobia.⁴⁶ The film expresses the notion that it is acceptable to be queer but not within the neo-Nazi community. To use Bal’s concept, the object is “speaking back” and stating that homosexuals should not be a part of their community (Bal, 2002: 45).

Unfortunately, anti-gay discourses developed and progressed. After the premiere, the actor Miloš’ automobile was engraved with large letters spelling “gay” [gej] (“Bez kravate Srdjan Dragojevic” 2013). The perpetrator did not use the insulting word “faggot” but the politically correct and neutral expression for the homosexual community. Is it possible that by eliminating the word faggot and changing it to gay, they also eliminated its negative connotations? The word “faggot” (“Kill the Faggot!” [“Ubi pедера!”]) has a more negative connotation and it is frequently used by anti-gay communities at pride parades. In this context the word gay is still used in an insulting way. This shows that the praxis of homophobia in the post-Yugoslavian region had changed and intellectually developed its vocabulary of hate. The result was the same: homophobia, which infiltrated its way into new discourses about the queer community. Nationalists are deploying

⁴⁶ See, for example, Grief (2012) for more on the connection between football fans and homophobia.

their own techniques by masking the homophobic discourse and making it more acceptable.

Therefore, this cunning tactic of using the word gay, might be even more dangerous.

The film was also not positively accepted by many Serbian war veterans and they distanced themselves from the proposed mutual solidarity with the queer community as presented in the film. In 2012, one year after its release, veterans from Serbia announced plans for their own parade to take place on the same day as the pride parade (G.V. 2012). This was clearly a strategy attempting to reclaim public spaces and streets. Their motto, “The Pride of Shame,” was clearly developed to jab at the pride parade. They claimed their right to be acknowledged by the Serbian government because they felt that veterans are the most marginalized community in Serbia. With this protest they placed themselves in opposition to the public majority and aligned themselves with the queer community; they both struggled against a common enemy. The film thus continued to participate in a form of cultural resistance. Moreover, the veterans formed alliances with the Gay Shame movement, although this was probably not their intention.⁴⁷ In the film’s veteran/queer alliance, the rigid stance of the veterans softened, and their concept of the enemy progressively changed, thus marking the beginning of a transition.

The relationship between the three main religious institutions in region was also remarkable, since Croatia’s Catholic Church was the only one to reject the film; a bishop banned the screening organized in a church-owned Dubrovnik theatre. There were two reasons for the ban: the disapproval of the film’s gay theme, and the fact that Dragojević was known for not taking sides in his previous war-themed films (Pilsel 2012; Radosavljević 2012). Nevertheless, the Croatian Catholic Church employed anti-gay discourses and protested indirectly several times against the queer community.⁴⁸ It is also noteworthy that the film received the Ecumenical Jury Prize at the 1992 Berlin Film Festival.

⁴⁷ Gay Shame is a radical alternative movement within the queer community, which was created in opposition to the over-commercialization of gay pride events. It represents a grass-roots collective founded on the principle of resistance to normalization.

⁴⁸ For more on this, see their “In the Name of the Family” campaign addressed in Chapter 1.

Strange alliances formed within post-Yugoslavian media outlets as well. The film received mostly positive reviews in the Serbian and international media; one Serbian mainstream media outlet accused Dragojević of being a propagandist, although this was the only negative critique. The film was even promoted by the Ministry of Education.⁴⁹ Since no other film in the past four years had been recommended for public education purposes by the ministry, the media accused Dragojević of attempting to indoctrinate students; many teachers objected to using the film for educational purposes (van den Berg 2012). The main problem expressed in the media was that the film is not appropriate for pupils under sixteen years old. According to several outlets, the film was too controversial to be shown to young pupils and this restriction constructed a line between what is acceptable for young children and what is not. Since the film does not contain any nudity or sexual scenes, the gay theme is the only plausible target. These media outlets align themselves with the notion that young children should be forbidden to view films which fall outside the boundaries of the heterosexual matrix. Furthermore, film directors who deploy homosexual themes are accused of being propagandists. To the contrary, heterosexual propaganda in public institutions is never questioned.

The idea of veterans who have committed war crimes protecting the parade was unimaginable and morally problematic to the queer community. Activist Boban Stojanović from Queeria, a Belgrade-based organization asked, “Would people who have definitely committed such crimes defend minorities like the LGBT population? This is an issue for me” (qtd. in Canning 2011). The main objection was the fact that the veterans are portrayed as overly macho men and homophobic nationalists. Grujić argues that the film represents criminals who protect queers only for their publicity (2012: 183). Compared to other queer films from the region, *The Parade* is a comedy in which humor is used as a successful strategy to evoke unified-Yugoslavian nostalgia.

⁴⁹ Dragojević asked the government to organize screenings in public schools. The Ministry of Education then produced leaflets for hundreds of primary and secondary schools in Belgrade and Novi Sad, and offered discounts to teachers. The purpose was to offer them a starting point for a discussion on homophobia prevention (I. M. 2012a, 2012b, 2012c).

She draws parallels with the representation of bad men in the film *Pulp Fiction* (1994) who also fought for justice and became heroes, similar to bad men in new Serbian cinema. Grujić writes that:

The bad guys of the new Serbian cinema are not only violent towards other gangsters but also towards ethnic minorities, women, homosexuals, children, etc. Nevertheless, in the context of the Balkans, there is a significant effort in cinematic narrations to represent a bad guy as honorable and with a strong character. (183)

Grujić is critical of Dragojević's other films as well, for example *Lepa sela lepo gore* (*Pretty Villages Pretty Flames* 1996), *Rane* (*Wounds* 1998), and *Mi nismo anđeli II* (*We are not Angels II* 2005). They all suggest that only bad men – strong masculine Serbian men – are charismatic characters who can be successful role models in a Serbian environment. She claims that the role of queer characters in *The Parade* represents “efficient motive to glorify the moral values of war criminals” who protect them (184). By reminding viewers of historical and cultural bonds between the nations of the post-Yugoslavian region, namely the concept of brotherhood, and naming the main character Limun (Lemon) and his dog Sečer (Sugar), significantly downplays the negative characteristics of war criminals.

According to both Grujić and Koteska, the problem in this film is that a transgression of the Balkan masculinity fails and does not achieve its goal to send a message of tolerance. This is because the veterans present key characteristics of Balkan masculinity, while the queer perspective of this alliance is ignored and the film itself is less concerned with gay subjectivity. However, as I have argued, occasionally dubious tactics do indeed need to be adopted to successfully penetrate a heteronormative environment. The alliances forged in the film recall strong sentiments of Brotherhood and Unity and manages to infiltrate previously impenetrable homophobic fortifications. In this chapter, I have demonstrated that *The Parade* is an activist film that positions a

criminal war veteran at the center of the storyline and uses him as an activist tactic to access a wider audience.

CONCLUSION

My dissertation is situated at the intersection of the so-called Western, Anglo-Saxon queer discourses and their counterparts in Eastern Europe. More specifically, I focus on one geo-political area, which I have called the post-Yugoslavian geographic region, where the issue of sexual minority cannot be separated from religion and nationalism. My object of study, the development of gay and queer discourses in the post-Yugoslavian region, has been constructed through emergent complex geographical, historical, and cultural nodes, which are as multi-layered as the religious and political configurations of the various cultural and national contexts in the region. I have analyzed the concept of gay visibility as understood in the Western perspective and how it transforms when applied to my region of study, paying close attention to the fact that a direct application cannot be undertaken due to the specificities of the region.

During my analysis, I focus on films from the post-Yugoslavian geographic region due to their proliferation during a time of developing discourses on gay and queer visibility. While the films I chose often project heteronormative ideologies, at the same time, they present non-heterosexuals as active constituents. These cinematic portrayals of queers in the post-Yugoslavian region, I assert, can help classify these films as activist artworks or artistic activism in that they present a new kind of visibility of queer bodies that participate in the emergence of a specific queer discourse. The specificity of this discourse lies in the fact that it has not caused counterattacks like those that were seen, for example, in the organization of the first pride parades, which were imported from the West. Whereas Western queer strategies, including pride parades, tend to privilege forms of individual and collective visibility, local politics emerge more subtly in these films.

In a context where governments are not prepared to legislate on behalf of its queer citizens, queer artists are no likely to be afraid that their discourse will be re-appropriated by conservative

forces as is sometimes the case in the West.⁵⁰ Making films is a different kind of politicking. These films deliver (site) specific tactics and contribute to the fight against homophobia on both the cultural and political level. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the tactics used in the films and the proposals made in the stories are solidly anchored in a context that invites ambivalent, oblique, and sometime self-contradictory practices.

This study of both homophobic and counter-homophobic discourses in local films situates the specific kinds of homophobia, heteronormativity, and queer activism that occurs in the post-Yugoslavian region and thereby allows for an imagining of a de-centralized Western perspective on queer sexuality. My approach involved walking a fine line between global and local queer studies, and to observe the (often failed) dialogues, or at least the interaction between the two. The dialogue between emerging queer discourses in the East and their more established Anglo-Saxon counterparts also needed to be analyzed in the context of a specific historical moment: post-1989 Europe. During this period, Eastern countries were faced not only with a rise of nationalist and religious discourses, but also “an explosion of Western gay and queer discourses” (Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011: 16). The different temporality of the emergence of gay discourses in the East, compared to the Western linear progression – from homophile discourses in the 1950s to queer discourses in the 1990s – can be seen as an “all at once” explosion in countries including: Belarus, Bulgaria, the Baltic countries, the Czech Republic, East-Germany, Hungary, and Poland (Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011: 16-19). Cultural historians such as Kulpa and Mizielinska have noted that the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 led to what Kuhar and Takács call the fall of the Pink Curtain. Consequently, Eastern countries faced a proliferation of Western gay and queer discourses (Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011: 16-19). The main difference to be noted here is that the countries that constituted former Yugoslavia faced a war in the 1990s and it might be because of this, that ten years elapsed before the same moment occurred in the 2000s. While I do not focus on this delay, the

⁵⁰ For example, the “don’t ask don’t tell” policy and the mechanisms of censorship that made speaking about gay identity contagious (Butler 1997: 133) or even the fact that gay liberation is used as an anti-immigrant rhetoric (Butler 2008: 3).

same contradictory forces and strange coinages occurred then as well. For example, the emergence of local queer cinema on the one hand, and a violent backlash against pride parades, organized attacks from religious nationalists, and the consolidation of religious nationalism on the other.

I am not suggesting that the different context forecloses any comparison between what we think of as Western gay discourses and Eastern European ones. Some patterns within queer discourses are perfectly recognizable in the countries included in this study. For example, the fear that homosexuals in the East could infect the population, echoes the forms of paranoia that Sedgwick has analyzed as “homosexual panic,” driven by “intense male homosocial desire as at once the most compulsory and the most prohibited of social bonds” (1990: 187). It is partly for this reason that homosexuals need to be heterosexualized. As in Sedgwick’s analysis, the films represent and denounce a paranoid reading of gays as vectors of conceptual infection. This threat cannot be directly applied to the region since it is not only driven by homosexual desire but by Western, and particularly United States discourses that are seen to infiltrate the East partly thanks to the Eastern queer community. The West exists as a myth in the films and it is treated differently regardless of whether the characters are homophobic or not. Moreover, the West is portrayed simultaneously as the enemy (for homophobes), a dangerous ally (for some gay people), and a refuge. In short, a so-called ambivalent West. Homophobic voices treat the West as the place from which homosexuality emanates. As is often the case, nations accuse strangers – homosexuals – of being agents of destruction that involves disease, invasion, contamination, and violence. In *Take a Deep Breath*, for example, the film shows that the straight characters see the lesbians as mentally ill criminals. Their sexuality is diagnosed and explained as a corrupting influence from the West and the result threatens the heteronormative family.

There is no easy transfer of knowledge between gays, and in spite of globalization, no easy transfer of knowledge from one queer community to another. So-called Western queer theory cannot be transferred without being translated. While particular concepts cannot be simply applied, I am interested in specific concept transformations once they have arrived in the region and the

changes that have occurred. It is also useful to know what has successfully carried over and the reasons why. One concept in particular seems not to have traveled well. “Out and Proud,” a political tactic and normally a rallying cry for gay liberation, turned out to be an impossible liberating move. The visibility at the pride parades in the region, for example, when directly applied incited severe backlashes from homophobes. As I discussed in Chapter 1, this might appear to be similar to other places, in the context of Eastern anti-gay paranoia colliding with violent forms of nationalism that were exacerbated by the issues raised by the war and the emergence of religious nationalism in the 1990s. This kind of visibility was threatening to an endangered masculinity. As I pointed out, the casual flow of homophobic intolerance came from religious and nationalist elites and trickled down to everyday interactions. Strong alliances formed between right-wing parties and religious nationalists were responsible for organized attacks.

Local queer films did not trigger any organized attacks but instead worked to encourage dialogue and provided a reservoir of tactics. The films I analyze are a sort of emerging canon: they exemplify what it means to represent a new paradigm of re-creating new resistance movements and uncovering sometimes dubious tactics. It is in this context that I have chosen to analyze one specific form of resistance to the persistence and reinforcement of homophobia since the 1990s. I have chosen films that depict currently occurring changes, but we cannot really call this progress. It is also important to observe the limits of this evolution.

While the films can be seen as offering narratives of hope and forms of alliance, they also constitute problematic forms of new visibility that result in homophobia. Although the films underline that gays exist, create an audience, and point out that regardless of whether people are happy with that or not, they are there, they cannot be misconstrued as a copy of “we’re here, we’re queer, get used to it” sort of slogans in the West. In fact, as I point out, this is precisely not what is happening. Even as the films offer queer visibility, homophobia is taken for granted as their context, and therefore is represented in the story, also to the point of creating a feeling of ambivalence in the films.

My corpus constantly refers to the homophobic context and underscores that society punishes sexual deviants. As soon as queer people do not act or present themselves as heteronormative, they become victims of violence and may be raped, killed, or imprisoned. In *Fine Dead Girls*, a lesbian couple (Iva and Mare) is constantly surveilled, and a series of events leads to Iva's rape and Mare's murder. In *Take a Deep Breath* another lesbian couple (Saša and Lana) is surveilled and as a result of a misused justice system, Lana is imprisoned. In *Go West*, a story about a gay couple, Kenan is raped and castrated while his partner Milan is killed on the battlefield. Lastly, in *The Parade*, queer activist Mirko is killed in a fight with neo-Nazis at a pride parade. The films push against nationalistic and religious constraints and offer local solutions that may seem counter-intuitive and unproductive to Western viewers accustomed to projections of positive coming-out stories or stories of mainstreaming. That said, it is important to distinguish between the representation of homophobia and homophobia itself.

The films are disturbingly graphic in their description of anti-gay violence. Homophobic violence is present in all the films, sometimes to extreme physical or mental degrees, and sexuality is often inseparable from religious beliefs or ethnic identity. It is impossible to decide whether Kenan, in *Go West*, is raped as a woman, as a gay man, or as a Muslim, but clearly, he is a victim at the intersection between institutionalized sexism, homophobia, and Islamophobia. When the perpetrator castrates him and turns him into a mutilated trans woman, she also kills him symbolically since he has no option but to emigrate to the West. Similarly, the gay couple in *The Parade* is preparing to leave for the West, but before they depart, they organize a pride parade in Belgrade. Based on real-life events, the participants of the parade are attacked by neo-Nazis, who use the slogan "Kill the Faggot" ["Ubi pедера"]. In a bloody fight between the neo-Nazis and the parade participants, queer activist Mirko is killed. The lesbian couples portrayed in the films prove to be just as likely to be targeted as the men. Because the society is a surveillance state, there is no hope that the authorities will help. For example, the lesbian relationship between Saša and Lana in *Take a Deep Breath* brutally ends after Miloš' illegal intervention in which he accuses Lana of

being mentally ill and pulls strings to have her incarcerated. In these films homosexuality is portrayed as an assault against patriarchal norms of sexual expression and a danger to the integrity of family, tradition, religious sentiments, as well as the nation-state. Every homophobic attack is perpetrated in the name of nationalism or religion. And yet, I am not arguing that these films are homophobic, but rather that there is a risk of the audience reading them in that manner. While the representation can be seen as a denunciation, it still alludes to the patriarchal standards that continue to refuse minorities.

Similarly, the denouements of the films propose forms of closure that do not constitute hopeful and unambiguous happy endings. I argue that in so doing, the films are effective because they make us imagine ambivalent tactics, pyrrhic victories, and strange alliances. For example, *Go West* is the portrait of a gay man who decides not to come out but to cross-dress and attempt to pass as a straight woman. His punishment for not passing is so catastrophic that, in the end, escaping to the West is the only realistic possibility. While queer life has been destroyed and rejected, it is shown to exist and therefore cannot be denied. In the end, escape to the liberal West is presented as a solution for survival. A very different but comparable situation occurs in *The Parade*. Here, the gay characters also dream of escaping to the West, in this case Canada. But contrary to what happens in *Go West*, violence is also a means of opposing homophobia. Gay characters fight neo-Nazis while planning their escape. The film suggests that violence is the only way to protect queer lives and this is what makes them victims of homophobia. As one of the characters puts it, “Even a beating is better than the humiliation we endure our whole fucking lives” (Mirko in *The Parade*). Nevertheless, in both cases one of the partners is killed; Milan on the battlefield and Mirko in the fight with the neo-Nazis. In both films, queers are shown to have vulnerable lives that can be exterminated solely because of their gayness. Similarly, the West is also presented as a solution and a place of departure for the lesbian couple in *Take a Deep Breath*, yet with a slight reversal and a one-sided view of the West. The West is both a place Lana moves to and where she comes from, which positions the West as a place where Eastern failures go and

where successful Easterners come from. Since there is an illusion that lesbians do not exist in the East, and lesbianism is pathologized as a mental illness from a nationalist perspective; the logical conclusion is that Lana only became a lesbian once she migrated to the West and became ill. What is problematic with this assumption is the disregarded fact that Lana perhaps had to emigrate to Paris because she was gay. To liberate herself, she needed to emigrate to the West to live openly as a lesbian. This also disregards the fact that Paris is a place where homophobia exists as well.

Despite the negative portrayals and cinematic destruction of active and non-normative characters, I argue that these films are the beginning of an archive of anti-homophobic stories even if the message is never straightforward. While the films present violence, they also condemn it. *Fine Dead Girls* criticizes Croatian society for its negative approach towards lesbians by exposing homophobia with an excess of violence on the screen, condemning the police for not protecting lesbian victims, presenting the church as self-sabotaging, criticizing nationalist views, and criticizing the connection between violence, nationalism, and religion. All the film can do is teach us to condemn such violence against lesbians as a sort of stupidity, although it is still tolerated in reality and in a public discourse that postulates that lesbians (and gay men) should stay in the closet or, if they do come out, should be violently pushed back into a transparent closet.

Furthermore, the films present the ambivalent idea of leaving versus staying and fighting. Often, the issue is whether it is possible to stay and fight or flee and survive. For example, in *Go West* the only way out is to flee. In *The Parade*, however, a gay couple who dreams of leaving the country decides to stay to fight homophobia locally. The title of *Take a Deep Breath* encourages the characters (and perhaps us viewers) to breathe deeply and find a way to cope with repression. Even if Lana is put in jail and then goes back to Paris, we know that she had left and returned to Belgrade. An even more radical proposal is made in *Fine Dead Girls* which advocates staying in the country and challenging the historical roots and patriarchal system of the region. Also, the films present ambivalent narratives of hope in the fact that the victims of homophobia are worth grieving for, and that therefore their lives matter (Butler 2009). The title *Fine Dead Girls* suggests an

ambivalent reading of the story. One of the main characters is killed off, which some viewers may interpret as a pessimistic *no way out* similar to *Go West*, yet the lesbian couple is presented as grievable subjects, and as spectators we are invited to care. The combination of “fine” and “dead” troubles the homophobic violence of the reference to the expression “the only good gay person is a dead gay person.”

Similarly, in *Take a Deep Breath* we find a whole set of ambivalent tactics that involve representing and fighting the common regional stereotype that lesbians are medically ill. In this film, lesbians are indeed represented as posing a threat and it is not quite clear whether the storyline refutes this claim. The film also turns this stereotype around to show that lesbians are offered a way out of a repressive and diseased heterosexual matrix. It seems that the conflicting and incompatible concepts of lesbians being sick and liberating at the same time, are both cooperating with and challenging heteronormativity.

This may not be much of a consolation for gay people who view these films. It is perhaps the case, that in this moment in time, the intended audience is still violent homophobes who may be asked to consider the consequences of their actions. This hypothesis might help us come to terms with the fact that all the films were directed by straight directors – an admittedly problematic issue. Clearly, straight directors have taken it upon themselves to raise the question of homophobia in the post-Yugoslavian region. As a result, they are putting themselves in a delicate position, one where a dominant person speaks for a minority. The problem of speaking on behalf of a minority is indeed already a long-running debate in academia but has never stopped being addressed (Alcoff 1991; Foucault 1977; Gramsci 1926; Guha 1982-1989; Said 1978; Spivak 1978, 1988). This is often the mark of a subaltern that remains one; even if one refuses to align themselves with the director’s identity and political message. After all, one does not need to be gay to be repulsed by homophobic violence. The problem is that they did not contact or make alliances with existing queer communities who might have played a productive role in the scripting of the films. It is striking to note that none of the films – except to a certain extent *The Parade* – represent a queer community.

Instead, they focus on individual fates and represent gay characters as lonely agents fighting against homophobia. The refusal or inability to acknowledge the existence of the minority subject as already politically and culturally engaged is the manifestation of a form of power that the directors could have avoided. Queer communities are not given a voice, and even worse, treated as if they did not even exist. As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, many queer activist initiatives, organizations, and groups have been active in the region for many years.

Does this confirm that the addressed audience does not include gay people? That would be ironically strange. The films make us think of several possibilities for queer activists to embrace them. Besides forms of denunciation and the struggle against homophobia, the films present several fragile and ambivalent forms of alliances. Because the tactics proposed here are themselves homophobic; heteronormative discourses are attacked from what remains an extremely vulnerable position. The films deploy “tactics” that de Certeau would call the “art of the weak” (1984: 35). Several tactics in the films are responses to homophobia, for example, the framing of ambivalent gazes, the queerness of some forms of gendered solidarity, and the creation of alliances and misalliances between straight, gay, queer, nationalist, religious, and governmental discourses.

What is at stake in these films is a rough division between gay and lesbian alliances; whereas lesbian characters are forming alliances with feminine and liberal allies, gay characters are supposed to form solidarity with traditional masculine nationalists. For example, *Fine Dead Girls* offers a secret alliance formed between a lesbian couple and Blaž, the husband of the main perpetrator Olga. He passively resists throughout the film, and only acts when a child is taken away from a heterosexual family. In this regard, this is how I see the relationship between Olga and Blaž: while Olga controls the borders of sexuality and demands that her tenants stay within the limits of heterosexuality, Blaž passively obeys this control until the pressure becomes too high. His response is to exact a rather chaotic and individualized type of justice. When the violence reaches critical mass, he explodes and kills his wife. This is a vendetta rather than justice.

Uncharacteristically for films from this region, *Take a Deep Breath* mainly focuses on

women's relationships. As Baletić writes, there is much greater resistance from society towards male rather than female homosexuality, so it is easier to find alliances between women (Kupres 2004). In the film, such an alliance is found between Saša and her very open-minded mother Lila. But what is also at stake is the fact that a lesbian relationship is the only relationship based on love, while the heterosexual relationships are based on a corruption of love. The director uses this distinction in the plot to build the viewer's empathy for lesbians. They are oppressed and controlled, and thus victims of the nationalist society that operates within a heteronormative framework, and yet they are the only ones capable of loving each other. As such, they represent a way out of this miserable frame. Ultimately, they are the heroes of the story, as they are the only characters to change in a positive way. Thus, they create an alliance with the audience and thereby form alliances with queer viewers.

Alliances between gay characters and nationalists are more difficult to define, as they are often volatile and unexpected. A common connection is the threat to masculinity, and therefore any solidarity between gays and traditional masculine nationalists is rather unthinkable. Nevertheless, the background of these alliances lies in queer cultural history. The alliance between nationalists and gay people thus occurs as a result of a specific historical background: before the fall of the Pink Curtain, nationalists and the queer community in the post-Yugoslavian region were not such strange bedfellows as it might be presumed. During the 1980s they were united against a common enemy – the communist government. Only after the rise of religious nationalism in the region during the 1990s was homosexuality invoked and constructed as a political enemy, a tactic taken up by religious nationalists (Kuhar 2013: 29). Later, when entering the European Union, strong alliances were established between regional and Western anti-gay groups, and between the local queer community and Western pro-gay initiatives.

In the West, the equivalent might be the supposedly unexpected collaboration between, for example, working class communities and gay people, such as the alliance of the Welsh coal miners and queers in the 1980s, and gay veterans marching together with heterosexual veterans at

the 2014 St. Patrick's Day Parade in Boston (Pratt 2014).⁵¹ The difference is that in the West solidarity seems to represent a linear line, while in the post-Yugoslavian region these alliances have different backgrounds according to a different historical context.

The recruitment of homophobic nationalists into LGBTI rights activists in *The Parade* is historically accurate in the context – however, both queer community and homophobic nationalists among the spectators may have had their certainties troubled by the representation of this collaboration. This common homophobic front comes at a price: the heteronormative framework constantly tries to argue for the superhero position of the male macho who inferiorizes the queer by feminizing them. Yet the presence of nationalism alongside queer communities establishes new possibilities: queer subjects are seen to play an active role within their society. Just as problematic is the issue of cross-generational solidarities or incompatibilities, and perhaps even more so, since the region has a rapidly changing political history that is expanding the gap between generations. Portraying an alliance between the father figure and the gay figure in *Go West* constitutes a *détournement* of a constant conflict between male-dominated society and the queer community. The film suggests that for an alliance between straight men and the queer community to exist, it is necessary to question the dictates of religion and government. This alliance, however, is shown to be extremely fragile, schizoid, and self-destructive. While most of the stories show that queer subjects are violently destroyed, here the father cannot survive his own homophobia. His perceived feeling of self-contradiction, fed by the deep homophobic roots of his society, leads him to commit suicide. One form of queerness is therefore also eliminated: the symbolic killing of the older generation seems to be a high price to pay for the development of new communities.

As a final word, I will add that one of the hopes that I entertain is art's ability to transcend the political message of the creator. The director's or storyteller's agency can be productively betrayed or complemented by the artwork itself: the message that the film is meant to send cannot

⁵¹ Yet the comparison is not obvious. There are lingering stereotypes about working-class people being homophobic, about the military and the police being anti-gay. It is not that the situation described in the films is implausible in the West, but an Eastern European context changes the formulation of the stereotype.

be controlled once the film is released. Films, from this perspective, operate not so differently from images that W.J.T. Mitchell analyses. In his book *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005) he suggests:

Images are active players in the game of establishing and changing values. They are capable of introducing new values into the world and thus of threatening old ones. For better or for worse, human beings establish their collective, historical identity by creating around them a second nature composed of images, which do not merely reflect the values consciously intended by their makers, but radiate new forms of value formed in the collective, political unconscious of their beholders.

(105)

Like Mitchell's images, these films can be said to do something. The very fact that they address queer topics represents a breakthrough in post-Yugoslavian mainstream cinema. For queer activists in the region (and the rest of the world) the films interrogate and denounce local forms of homophobia and suggest forms of resistance to these particular manifestations of violence. Their very existence constitutes a form of activism, as they implicitly question homophobic views and seek to dismantle rigid views on sexuality and gender identities in general, and particularly minority sexual preferences. As I have demonstrated, by adopting ways of storytelling that assist viewers to imagine new situations and new alliances between groups or individuals – for example between veteran Limun and queer activist Radmilo in *The Parade*, between the husband of the perpetrator Olga and the lesbian couple in *Fine Dead Girls*, between the father Ljubo and his gay son in *Go West*, and between the wife of the corrupt homophobic judge and her lesbian daughter in *Take a Deep Breath* – film directors offer a social and political critique and act as indirect activists or activists.

The overall aim of this dissertation was to analyze the role of cinema in countering homophobic practices in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region. For this reason, I looked at art and activism jointly, and analyzed activist actions that challenge homophobia and evoke change through the use of art. My study reveals that beyond Western queer strategies – which were obviously problematic when transferred to the region – activism is one way of approaching and challenging homophobia in the region. This perspective helped me explore queer cultural history and how art is used to challenge homophobia in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region. The films I analyzed provide a solid foundation for illustrating how homophobia can be turned around and used as activist practices. I expect this research to contribute to debates on queer theory by adding an under-explored local dimension, while analyzing activist strategies in the non-Western world. An inclusion of queer discourses from the post-Yugoslavian geographic region will allow a more historically and culturally accurate view of homophobia, while providing another argument for decolonizing non-Western queer discourses.

SUMMARY

The Fall of the Pink Curtain: Alliances between Nationalists and Queers in Post-Yugoslavian Cinema

My dissertation is situated at the intersection of the so-called Western, Anglo-Saxon queer discourses and their counterparts in Eastern Europe. More specifically, I focus on one geo-political area, which I have called the post-Yugoslavian geographic region, where the issue of sexual minority cannot be separated from religion and nationalism. My object of study, the development of gay and queer discourses in the post-Yugoslavian region, has been constructed through emergent complex geographical, historical, and cultural nodes, which are as multi-layered as the religious and political configurations of the various cultural and national contexts in the region. I have analyzed the concept of gay visibility as understood in the Western perspective and how it transforms when applied to my region of study, paying close attention to the fact that a direct application cannot be undertaken due to the specificities of the region. For example, once transferred to an Eastern context, Gay Pride Parades that have been organized in the first decade of 21st century led to violence and organized attacks. Yet, the first mainstream queer films from the region emerged and the queer community did not face such attacks from homophobes. The corpus of my analysis are four films produced in the post-Yugoslavian geographic region: *Fine mrtve djevojke* (*Fine Dead Girls* 2002), *Diši duboko* (*Take a Deep Breath* 2004), *Go West* (2005), and *Parada* (*The Parade* 2011). I analyze these films from the perspective of a political critique of homophobia within the post-Yugoslavian region and further address the underexplored activist potential of exhibiting national and religious discourses in cinemas. While analyzing the queer activist tactics within these films, I view them with an eye for the local queer perspective.

The main point of my dissertation was to address how these tactics challenge homophobia through peculiar alliances, for example when queers and nationalists become strange or not so strange bedfellows. By doing this, I wanted to raise and explore two key issues in this study: the need to situate the issues concerning homophobia, heteronormativity, and queer activism in the

post-Yugoslavian region and, at the same time, the need to de-centralize Western perspectives on queer sexuality.

In the **first chapter** I map the queer cultural history of the post-Yugoslavian geographic region and analyze various homophobic events in the region, as well as offer examples of artistic responses and direct activist actions. I have demonstrated that before the fall of communism and the so-called fall of the Pink Curtain, nationalists and queer community members were actually not such strange bedfellows as one might presume. During the 1980s these two groups were united against a common enemy, namely the communist government. Only after the rise of religious nationalism was homosexuality invoked and constructed as a political enemy. Alliances between right-wing government officials and religious nationalists led to severe repercussions during the initial pride parades/festivals in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. Later, when entering the European Union, strong alliances were established between regional and Western anti-gay groups, and between the local queer community and Western pro-gay initiatives. This results in a constant re-creation of new resistance movements and strategies. One of these strategies is the use of various forms of art.

The **second chapter** that focuses Ahmed Imamović's film entitled *Go West* (2005). It portrays a love story between Bosniak Kenan and Bosnian-Serb Milan. Both xenophobic and homophobic tensions lead Kenan to dress as a woman and they pretend to live as a straight Serbian couple. Kenan is both being raped and used by a sex worker Ranka, to the extent that the price of the sexual act protects his homosexual closet. The only option, in the film at least, is for homosexuals to move (or escape) Westward. However, this is not my main notion, rather it illuminates the background of my concentration point: the relationships between the agents of various colliding groups. The film aids me in probing the encounters between homosexuality and the specificity of the Balkans' masculinist culture. I focus on the positive images of solidarity and alliances between male-dominated society and homosexuality – specifically, between a straight father and his gay son. Setting up such an alliance is only one rhetorical tactic of *détournement* of a

constant conflict between male-dominated society and queer community. In order for these alliances to succeed, heterosexual men need to question the dictates of religion and governmental bodies. The film proposes two images of a father: one that fits the patriarchal role and its counterpart, a liberal father, who opposes patriarchal structures. Only by the rejection of a traditionalist patriarchal heterosexual position, can one actually cooperate with the queer community.

In the **third chapter** I analyze the Croatian film *Fine mrtve djevojke* (*Fine Dead Girls*, 2002), directed by Dalibor Matanić. The film depicts a love story between a lesbian couple who do not actively disguise their identities like in *Go West*, nor have they publicly revealed its sexual orientation. Once the landlady Olga discovers the couple's secret this leads to abuse and violence. After their forced coming out, they are violently pushed back into the closet which results in Iva being raped and Mare being killed while fighting for her partner. Criminals, however, are actually protected by nationalistic and religious forces, while lesbians are relegated to silent subjects and often slain. But the film also suggests the possibilities of alliances between the lesbian characters and other figures who are also pressured by the norm and especially by the narrow definition of masculinity. A relationship between the lesbians and Olga's husband Blaž is a queer alliance that redraws the boundaries of what is understood as normal. His intervention is a rather chaotic and individualized reaction which leans towards severe violence. This is a vendetta, a sort of lynching, and not justice. I also argue that this film criticizes Croatian society for its negative approach towards lesbians by: exposing homophobia with an excess of violence on the screen, condemning the police for not protecting lesbian victims, presenting the church as self-sabotaging, criticizing nationalist views, and criticizing the connection between violence, nationalism, and religion.

The lesbian couple is presented as a threat as well in the Serbian film *Take a Deep Breath* (2004) that I focus on in the **fourth chapter**. The film centers on Saša, a student from Belgrade, who dreams of emigrating to Canada. At the beginning of the film she has a boyfriend, Stefan, but soon we find out that she is a closeted lesbian when she begins an affair with his sister Lana. The film tells a story that accuses lesbians of being sick which immediately leads to criminalization,

surveillance, and policing. Their relationship brutally ends when Miloš exerts his power in the court to have Lana incarcerated. The depiction of surveillance in this film is quite different from that of *Fine Dead Girls*. There, the landlady spied on the lesbian couple to heterosexualize them and punish them for being lesbians. In *Take a Deep Breath*, however, the way in which surveillance is portrayed questions the voyeur's powers. Miloš' delegating orders make us aware of the danger of the chain of command trickling down the social ladder, similar as fascist regimes deploy their administrative tentacles. At the same time, the film also provides us with another narrative regarding his position of power. He is more pathetic than powerful: his disease is to see the world as a pornographic scene. But the film also displays a way out, by proposing lesbianism as a liberation process and thus offering a critique of homophobia. While the heterosexual relationship is a site of conflict where both partners are miserable and collapsing under the weight of hiding and pretending – Saša and Lana's partnership is presented as being harmonious.

And finally, in the **fifth** and the last **chapter** of my dissertation, I examine Srđan Dragojević's 2011 film entitled *The Parade* in which the director addresses the paradoxical, even comical, challenge of recruiting war veterans to protect Belgrade's queer community during the parade. I examine the paradoxical nature of these alliances (the veterans are usually seen as homophobic nationalists) and demonstrate how are nationalistic and homophobic discourses actually counteracted and appropriated by queer activists to challenge homophobia that will trigger a political change. The film is a kind of Trojan horse that attempts to enter the homophobic environment which is protected by a thick wall of heteronormative rules and legislation. The tactic of uniting war veterans is used to communicate while deploying a positive message regarding protecting LGBTI rights. The stronger the nationalist force from the outside is, the stronger the resistance by the war veterans becomes. Their historical trans-national connection embedded within their Brotherhood and Unity ideals comes to light. Their close friendship and cultural bonds are stronger than homophobia and this becomes a recruiting force in the fight against homophobia.

Since the queer discourse is embedded within the discourse of cultural bonding between different countries, the homophobic viewer is challenged to accept the film as a whole.

In my analysis I have discovered, as I pointed out in the **conclusion**, that homophobic violence is present in all the films, sometimes to extreme physical or mental degrees, and sexuality is often inseparable from religious beliefs or ethnic identity. Similarly, the denouements of the films propose forms of closure that do not constitute hopeful and unambiguous happy endings. I argue that in so doing, the films are effective because they make us imagine ambivalent tactics, pyrrhic victories, and strange alliances. Despite the negative portrayals and cinematic destruction of active and non-normative characters, I argue that these films are the beginning of an archive of anti-homophobic stories even if the message is never straightforward. They all present ambivalent narratives of hope in the fact that the victims of homophobia are worth grieving for, and that therefore their lives matter (Butler 2009). What is at stake in these films is a rough division between gay and lesbian alliances; whereas lesbian characters are forming alliances with feminine and liberal allies, gay characters are supposed to form solidarity with traditional masculine nationalists. As I have demonstrated, by adopting ways of storytelling that assist viewers to imagine new situations and new alliances between groups or individuals – for example between veteran Limun and queer activist Radmilo in *The Parade*, between the husband of the perpetrator Olga and the lesbian couple in *Fine Dead Girls*, between the father Ljubo and his gay son in *Go West*, and between the wife of the corrupt homophobic judge and her lesbian daughter in *Take a Deep Breath* – film directors offer a social and political critique and act as indirect activists or activists.

I expect this research to contribute to debates on queer theory by adding an under-explored local dimension, while analyzing activist strategies in the non-Western world. An inclusion of queer discourses from the post-Yugoslavian geographic region will allow a more historically and culturally accurate view of homophobia, while providing another argument for decolonizing non-Western queer discourses.

SAMENVATTING

De val van het roze gordijn: allianties tussen nationalisten en queers in post-Joegoslavische cinema

Dit proefwerk is gesitueerd op het kruispunt tussen het zogeheten Westerse, Angelsaksische queer discours en haar Oost-Europese tegenhangers. Ik richt bij meer bepaald op een geopolitiek gebied, dat ik de post-Joegoslavische geografische regio genoemd heb, waarbinnen de kwestie van seksuele minderheid niet gescheiden kan worden van religie en nationalisme. Mijn onderzoeksobject, de ontwikkeling van het gay- en queer discours in de post-Joegoslavische regio, is tot stand gekomen door opkomende geografische, historische en culturele complexe knooppunten die even gelaagd zijn als de religieuze en politieke configuraties binnen de verschillende culturele en nationale contexten in de regio. Ik heb het concept *gay visibility* geanalyseerd zoals verstaan binnen het westerse perspectief, en de manier waarop het transformeert binnen mijn studiegebied, waarbij ik aandacht heb besteed aan het feit dat een directe toepassing ervan niet kan worden uitgevoerd gezien de specificiteit van de regio. Wanneer de Gay Pride Parades uit het eerste decennium van de 21^e eeuw, bijvoorbeeld, overgeheveld werden naar de Oost-Europese context, leidde dit tot geweld en georganiseerde aanslagen. Desalniettemin werd de queer gemeenschap niet geconfronteerd met soortgelijke homofobe aanvallen toen de eerste mainstream queer films uit de regio verschenen. Het corpus van mijn analyse omvat vier films uit de post-Joegoslavische geografische regio: *Fine mrtve djevojke* (*Fine Dead Girls* 2002), *Diši duboko* (*Take a Deep Breath* 2004), *Go West* (2005), en *Parada* (*The Parade* 2011). Ik analyseer deze films aan de hand van een politieke kritiek op de homofobie binnen de post-Joegoslavische regio, en benadruk vervolgens het onderbelichte activistische potentieel van de zichtbaarheid van het nationale en het religieuze discours in cinema's. In mijn analyses van de queer activistische tactieken in deze films hou ik telkens het lokale perspectief voor ogen.

De basisstelling van mijn proefschrift is het aankaarten van de manier waarop deze tactieken homofobie uitdagen middels bijzondere allianties, bijvoorbeeld wanneer queers en nationalist

vreemde of niet zo vreemde bedpartners worden. Hierdoor wil ik twee sleutelthema's in deze studie ter sprake brengen en onderzoeken: de noodzaak om de kwesties met betrekking tot homofobie, heteronormativiteit en queer activisme te situeren binnen de post-Joegoslavische regio en, tegelijkertijd, de noodzaak om de Westerse perspectieven omtrent queer seksualiteit te decentraliseren.

In het **eerste hoofdstuk** breng ik de queer-culturele geschiedenis van de post-Joegoslavische regio in kaart en analyseer ik verschillende homofobe gebeurtenissen binnen de regio; daarnaast geef ik voorbeelden van artistieke respons en directe activistische acties. Ik toon aan dat voor de val van het communisme en de zogenoemde val van het Roze Gordijn, nationalist en leden van de queer gemeenschap in feite niet zo'n vreemde bedpartners waren als men zou aannemen. Tijdens de jaren tachtig waren deze twee groepen herenigd tegen een gemeenschappelijke vijand, namelijk de communistische regering. Het is slechts na de opkomst van het religieuze nationalisme dat homoseksualiteit als politieke vijand ingeroepen en geconstrueerd werd. Allianties tussen de rechtse overheidsfunctionarissen en de religieuze nationalist leidden tot zware repercussies tijdens de eerste Pride parades en festivals in Bosnië-Herzegovina, Kroatië en Servië. Later, bij de toetreding van de Europese Unie, ontstonden sterke allianties tussen de regionale en Westerse anti-gay groeperingen, en tussen de lokale queer gemeenschap en de Westerse pro-gay initiatieven. Dit zorgde voor een voortdurend heruitvinden van nieuwe verzetsbewegingen en -initiatieven. Eén van deze strategieën is het inzetten van diverse kunstvormen.

In het **tweede hoofdstuk** richt ik me op Ahmed Imamović's film getiteld *Go West* (2005). Deze film vertelt het liefdesverhaal van de Bosnische Kenan en Bosnisch-Servische Milan. Zowel xenofobe en homofobe spanningen leiden Kenan ertoe zich als vrouw te kleden en het tweetal doet zich op die manier voor als heteroseksueel Servisch koppel. Kenan wordt verkracht en misbruikt door een sekswerker Ranka, in die mate dat de prijs van deze seksuele daad zijn verborgen homoseksualiteit beschermt. De enige optie die de film biedt, is dat homoseksuelen westwaarts vertrekken (of vluchten). Dit is niet het zwaartepunt van mijn analyse, maar het schetst

wel de context voor de verhoudingen tussen de actoren van verschillende botsende groeperingen. De film maakt het mogelijk de raakvlakken tussen homoseksualiteit en de specificiteit van de masculiene cultuur in de Balkan te onderzoeken. Ik richt me op de positieve beeldvorming van solidariteit en allianties tussen de door mannen gedomineerde samenleving en homoseksualiteit – meer specifiek, tussen een heteroseksuele vader en zijn homoseksuele zoon. De constructie van dit soort alliantie is slechts een van de tactieken van een *détournement* binnen een constant conflict tussen de door mannen gedomineerde samenleving en de queer community. Opdat deze allianties slagen, moeten heteroseksuele mannen de dictaten van religie en overheidsorganen in vraag stellen. De film suggereert twee vaderfiguren: een die past bij de patriarchale rol en zijn tegenhanger, de liberale vader, die zich tegen de patriarchale structuren keert. Een ware samenwerking met de queer community kan slechts plaatsvinden wanneer de traditionalistisch patriarchale en heteroseksuele positie verworpen wordt.

In het **derde hoofdstuk** analyseer ik de Kroatische film *Fine mrtve djevojke* (*Fine Dead Girls*, 2002), geregisseerd door Dalibor Matanić. Deze film vertelt het verhaal van een lesbisch koppel die, net zoals in *Go West*, hun identiteit niet actief verbergen, noch hun seksuele oriëntatie publiek kenbaar hebben gemaakt. Wanneer de hospita, Olga, het geheim van het stel ontdekt, leidt dit tot misbruik en geweld. Nadat ze onder druk uit de kast komen, worden ze met geweld teruggedrongen, hetgeen leidt tot de verkrachting van Iva en de moord op Mare, terwijl die vecht voor haar partner. Criminelen worden echter beschermd door nationalistische en religieuze instanties, terwijl lesbiennes worden gedegradeerd tot stille subjecten en veelal worden vermoord. Maar de film suggereert ook de mogelijkheid voor allianties tussen lesbische hoofdpersonages en andere personages die eveneens onder druk staan van de norm, en dan met name de enge definitie van mannelijkheid. Een verhouding tussen de lesbiennes en Olga's echtgenoot, Blaž, is een queer alliantie die de grenzen van wat normaal geacht wordt, verlegt. Zijn interventie is een nogal chaotische en individualistische reactie die neigt naar ernstig geweld. Dit is een wraakactie, een soort lynchen, maar geen rechtvaardigheid. Ik beargumenteer ook dat deze film de Kroatische

samenleving bekritiseert omwille van haar negatieve benadering van lesbiennes: door homofobie met een overdaad aan geweld in beeld te brengen, door de politie te veroordelen voor het niet beschermen van lesbische slachtoffers, door de kerk als zelf-saboterend te presenteren, door nationalistische opvattingen te bekritisieren, en door het verband tussen geweld, nationalisme en religie te bekritisieren.

In de film *Take a Deep Breath* (2004), waar ik in het **vierde hoofdstuk** de nadruk op leg, wordt het lesbische koppel gepresenteerd als een bedreiging. De film concentreert zich op Saša, een student uit Belgrado, die ervan droomt naar Canada te emigreren. Aan het begin van de film heeft zij een verhouding met een jongen, Stefan, maar al snel komen we erachter dat zij een verborgen lesbienne is wanneer ze een affaire begint met zijn zus, Lana. De film vertelt een verhaal waarin lesbiennes van ziekte beschuldigd worden, hetgeen meteen leidt tot criminalisering, surveillance en handhaving. Aan hun verhouding komt op brutale wijze een einde, wanneer Miloš zijn macht in de rechtbank uitoefent en Lana laat opsluiten. De representatie van surveillance in de film verschilt aanzienlijk van die van *Fine Dead Girls*. Daar bespioneert de hospita het lesbische koppel om hen te heteroseksualiseren en om hen voor hun seksuele geaardheid te straffen. In *Take a Deep Breath*, daarentegen, stelt de representatie van surveillance de macht van de voyeur in vraag. De door Miloš uitgevoerde bevelen maken ons bewust van het gevaar dat hiërarchie langs de sociale ladder stroomt, net zoals fascistische regimes hun bestuurlijke tentakels inzetten. Tegelijkertijd biedt de film ons ook een ander narratief omtrent zijn machtspositie, waarin Miloš eerder zielig dan machtig is: hij is ziek, omdat hij de wereld ziet als pornografische scene. Maar de film presenteert ook een uitweg, door de homoseksualiteit van vrouwen als een bevrijdingsproces voor te stellen en daardoor een kritiek te uiten op homofobie. Hoewel de heteroseksuele relatie een grond voor conflict vormt waarin beide partners ellendig zijn en zwichten onder de druk van het verbergen en doen alsof, wordt Saša en Lana's verhouding als harmonieus gepresenteerd.

Tot slot, in het **vijfde en laatste hoofdstuk** van mijn proefschrift, onderzoek ik Srđan Dragojević's film uit 2011, getiteld *The Parade*. Hierin richt de regisseur zich op de paradoxale,

zelfs komische stimulans om oorlogsveteranen te werven voor de bescherming van de queer gemeenschap van Belgrado tijdens de parade. Ik onderzoek de paradoxale aard van deze allianties (veteranen worden meestal gezien als homofobe nationalisten) en toon aan dat het nationalistische en homofobe discours in feite tegengewerkt en toegeëigend wordt door queer activisten om homofobie in vraag te stellen wat betreft politieke verandering. De film is een soort Trojaans paard dat binnendringt binnen de homofobe context, die beschermd wordt door een dikke muur van hetero-normatieve regels en wetgeving. De tactiek die oorlogsveteranen samenbrengt, wordt als communicatiemiddel ingezet, terwijl de boodschap zelf positief is wat betreft de bescherming van LGBTI-rechten. Hoe sterker de nationalistische kracht van buitenaf is, des te sterker wordt het verzet van de oorlogsveteranen. Hun historische transnationale verbond dat ingebed is in hun idealen van Broederschap en Eenheid komt aan het licht. Hun hechte vriendschaps- en culturele banden zijn sterker dan homofobie en dit wordt de wervingskracht in de strijd tegen homofobie. Aangezien het queer discours is ingebed in het discours omtrent de culturele verbintenis tussen verschillende landen, wordt de homofobe kijker uitgedaagd om de film als geheel te accepteren.

Zoals in de **conclusie** vermeld staat, heb ik aangetoond dat homofob geweld aanwezig is in al deze films, soms zelfs in extreme fysieke of mentale mate, en seksualiteit is vaak onafscheidelijk van religieuze overtuigingen of etnische identiteit. De narratieve ontknopingen van deze films vertonen bovendien geen hoopvolle of ondubbelzinnige *happy endings*. Ik beargumenteer dat juist daardoor deze films effectief zijn, omdat zij ons ambivalente tactieken, pyrrusoverwinningen en vreemde allianties doen verbeelden. Ondanks de negatieve beeldvorming en afbreuk van actieve en non-conformistische personages in film, betoog ik dat deze films het begin zijn van een archief met anti-homofobe verhalen – al is de boodschap nooit eenduidig. Alle films vertonen ambivalente verhaalstructuren omtrent hoop door het feit dat de slachtoffers van homofobie ons verdriet waard zijn, en dat daardoor hun leven ertoe doet (Butler 2009). Wat in deze films op het spel staat, is een grove scheiding tussen homoseksuele en lesbische personages; daar waar lesbische personages allianties vormen met vrouwelijke en liberale bondgenoten, wordt van homoseksuele personages

verwacht dat ze solidariteit zoeken met traditionele mannelijke nationalist. Ik heb aangetoond dat door het toepassen van verhaalstructuren die de kijker helpen bij het verbeelden van nieuwe situaties en nieuwe allianties tussen groepen of individuen – bijvoorbeeld tussen de veteraan Limun en de queer activist Radmilo in *The Parade*, tussen de echtgenoot van de schuldige Olga en het lesbische koppel in *Fine Dead Girls*, tussen de vader Ljubo en zijn homoseksuele zoon in *Go West*, en tussen de vrouw van de corrupte homofobe rechter en haar lesbische dochter in *Take a Deep Breath* – de regisseurs een sociale en politieke kritiek aanreiken, en daardoor indirect als activisten of *artivisten* optreden.

Ik verwacht dat dit onderzoek zal bijdragen aan de debatten omtrent queer theory door een onderbelichte lokale dimensie toe te voegen en de activistische strategieën in de niet-westerse wereld te analyseren. De toevoeging van het queer discours binnen de post-Joegoslavische geografische regio zal een meer historisch en cultureel accuraat beeld schetsen van homofobie, en dient nogmaals als argument voor de dekolonisatie van het niet-Westerse queer discours.

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