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The fall of the pink curtain

Alliances between nationalists and queers in post-Yugoslavian cinema

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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.