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The fall of the pink curtain

Alliances between nationalists and queers in post-Yugoslavian cinema

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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 Paradu 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.